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GOLD AND IRON

BOOKS BY
JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

GOLD AND IRON

THE THREE BLACK PENNYS

MOUNTAIN BLOOD

THE LAY ANTHONY

GOLD AND IRON

By

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER



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WILD ORANGES

THE ketch drifted into the serene inclosure of the bay as silently as the reflections moving over the mirrorlike surface of the water. Beyond a low arm of land that hid the sea the western sky was a single, clear yellow; farther on the left the pale, incalculably old limbs of cypress, their roots bare, were hung with gathering shadows as delicate as their own faint foliage. The stillness was emphasized by the ceaseless murmur of the waves breaking on the far, seaward bars.

John Woolfolk brought the ketch up where he intended to anchor and called to the stooping, white-clad figure in the bow: "Let go!" There was an answering splash, a sudden rasp of hawser, the booms swung idle, and the yacht imperceptibly settled into her berth. The wheel turned impotently; and, absent-minded, John Woolfolk locked it. He dropped his long form on a near-by, carpet-covered folding chair. He was tired. His sailor, Poul Halvard, moved about with a noiseless and swift efficiency; he rolled and cased the jib, and then, with a handful of canvas stops, secured and covered the mainsail and pro-

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ceeded aft to the jigger. Unlike Woolfolk, Halvard was short—a square figure with a smooth, deep-tanned countenance, colorless and steady, pale blue eyes. His mouth closed so tightly that it appeared immovable, as if it had been carved from some obdurate material that opened for the necessities of neither speech nor sustenance.

Tall John Woolfolk was darkly tanned, too, and had a grey gaze, by turns sharply focused with bright black pupils and blankly introspective. He was garbed in white flannels, with bare ankles and sandals, and an old, collarless silk shirt, with sleeves rolled back on virile arms incongruously tattooed with gauzy green cicadas.

He stayed motionless while Halvard put the yacht in order for the night. The day's passage through twisting inland waterways, the hazard of the tides on shifting flats, the continual concentration on details at once trivial and highly necessary, had been more wearing than the cyclone the ketch had weathered off Barbuda the year before. They had been landbound since dawn; and all day John Woolfolk's instinct had revolted against the fields and wooded points, turning toward the open sea.

Halvard disappeared into the cabin; and, soon after, a faint, hot air, the smell of scorched metal, announced the lighting of the vapor stove, the preparations for supper. Not a breath stirred the surface of the bay. The water, as clear and hardly darker than the darkening air, lay like a great amethyst clasped by its dim corals and the arm of the land. The glossy foliage that, with the exception of a small silver beach, choked the shore might have been stamped from metal. It was, John Woolfolk suddenly thought, amazingly still. The atmosphere, too,

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was peculiarly heavy, languorous. It was laden with the scents of exotic, flowering trees; he recognized the smooth, heavy odor of oleanders and the clearer, higher breath of orange blossoms.

He was idly surprised at the latter; he had not known that orange groves had been planted and survived in Georgia. Woolfolk gazed more attentively at the shore, and made out, back of the luxuriant tangle, the broad white façade of a dwelling. A pair of marine glasses lay on the deck at his hand; and, adjusting them, he surveyed the face of a distinguished ruin. The windows on the stained wall were broken in — they resembled the blank eyes of the dead; storms had battered loose the neglected roof, leaving a corner open to sun and rain; he could see through the foliage lower down great columns fallen about a sweeping portico.

The house was deserted, he was certain of that — the melancholy wreckage of a vanished and resplendent time. Its small principality, flourishing when commerce and communication had gone by water, was one of the innumerable victims of progress and of the concentration of effort into huge impersonalities. He thought he could trace other even more complete ruins, but his interest waned. He laid the glasses back upon the deck. The choked bubble of boiling water sounded from the cabin, mingled with the irregular sputter of cooking fat and the clinking of plates and silver as Halvard set the table. Without, the light was fading swiftly; the wavering cry of an owl quivered from the cypress across the water, and the western sky changed from paler yellow to green. Woolfolk moved abruptly, and, securing a bucket to the handle of which a

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short rope had been spliced and finished with an ornamental Turk's-head, he swung it overboard and brought it up half full. In the darkness of the bucket the water shone with a faint phosphorescence. Then from a basin he lathered his hands with a thick, pinkish paste, washed his face, and started toward the cabin.

He was already in the companionway when, glancing across the still surface of the bay, he saw a swirl moving into view about a small point. He thought at first that it was a fish, but the next moment saw the white, graceful silhouette of an arm. It was a woman swimming. John Woolfolk could now plainly make out the free, solid mass of her hair, the round, smoothly turning shoulder. She was swimming with deliberate ease, with a long, single overarm stroke; and it was evident that she had not seen the ketch. Woolfolk stood, his gaze level with the cabin top, watching her assured progress. She turned again, moving out from the shore, then suddenly stopped. Now, he realized, she saw him.

The swimmer hung motionless for a breath; then, with a strong, sinuous drive, she whirled about and made swiftly for the point of land. She was visible for a short space, low in the water, her hair wavering in the clear flood, and then disappeared abruptly behind the point, leaving behind — a last, vanishing trace of her silent passage — a smooth, subsiding wake on the surface of the bay.

John Woolfolk mechanically descended the three short steps to the cabin. There had been something extraordinary in the woman's brief appearance out of the odorous tangle of the shore, with its ruined habitation. It had caught him unprepared, in a moment of half weary relaxa-

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tion, and his imagination responded with a faint question to which it had been long unaccustomed. But Halvard, in crisp white, standing back of the steaming supper viands, brought his thoughts again to the day's familiar routine.

The cabin was divided through its forward half by the centerboard casing, and against it a swinging table had been elevated, an immaculate cover laid, and the yacht's china, marked in cobalt with the name "Gar," placed in a polished and formal order. Halvard's service from the stove to the table was as silent and skillful as his housing of the sails; he replaced the hot dishes with cold, and provided a glass bowl of translucent preserved figs.

Supper at an end, Woolfolk rolled a cigarette from shag that resembled coarse black tea and returned to the deck. Night had fallen on the shore, but the water still held a pale light; in the east the sky was filled with an increasing, cold radiance. It was the moon, rising swiftly above the flat land. The moonlight grew in intensity, casting inky shadows of the spars and cordage across the deck, making the light in the cabin a reddish blur by contrast. The icy flood swept over the land, bringing out with a new emphasis the close, glossy foliage and broken façade—it appeared unreal, portentous. The odors of the flowers, of the orange blossoms, uncoiled in heavy, palpable waves across the water, accompanied by the owl's fluctuating cry. The sense of imminence increased, of a *genius loci* unguessed and troublous, vaguely threatening in the perfumed dark.

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II

John Woolfolk had said nothing to Halvard of the woman he had seen swimming in the bay. He was conscious of no particular reason for remaining silent about her; but the thing had become invested with a glamour that, he felt, would be destroyed by commonplace discussion. He had no personal interest in the episode, he was careful to add. Interests of that sort, serving to connect him with the world, with society, with women, had totally disappeared from his life. He rolled and lighted a fresh cigarette, and in the minute orange spurt of the match his mouth was set, forbidding, his gaze somber.

The unexpected appearance on the glassy water had merely started into being a slight, fanciful curiosity. The women of that coast did not commonly swim at dusk in their bays; such simplicity obtained now only in the reaches of the highest civilization. There were, he knew, no hunting camps here, and the local inhabitants were mere sodden squatters. A chart lay in its flat canvas case by the wheel; and, in the crystal flood of the moon, he easily reaffirmed from it his knowledge of the yacht's position. Nothing could be close by but scattered huts and such wreckage as that looming palely above the oleanders.

Yet a woman had unquestionably appeared swimming from behind the point of land off the bow of the *Gar*. The women native to the locality, and the men, too, were fanatical in the avoidance of any unnecessary exterior application of water. His thoughts moved in a monotonous circle, while the enveloping radiance constantly increased. It became as light as a species of unnatural day,

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where every leaf was clearly revealed but robbed of all color and familiar meaning.

He grew restless, and rose, making his way forward about the narrow deck-space outside the cabin. Halvard was seated on a coil of rope beside the windlass and stood erect as Woolfolk approached. The sailor was smoking a short pipe, and the bowl made a crimson spark in his thick, powerful hand. John Woolfolk fingered the wood surface of the windlass bitts and found it rough and gummy. Halvard said instinctively:

“I'd better start scraping the mahogany tomorrow, it's getting white.”

Woolfolk nodded. Halvard was a good man. He had the valuable quality of commonly anticipating spoken desires. He was a Norwegian, out of the Lofoden Islands, where sailors are surpassingly schooled in the Arctic seas. Poul Halvard, so far as Woolfolk could discover, was impervious to cold, to fatigue, to the insidious whispering of mere flesh. He was a man without temptation, with an untroubled allegiance to a duty that involved an endless, exacting labor; and for those reasons he was austere, withdrawn from the community of more fragile and sympathetic natures. At times his inflexible integrity oppressed John Woolfolk. Halvard, he thought, was a difficult man to live up to.

He turned and absently surveyed the land. His restlessness increased. He felt a strong desire for a larger freedom of space than that offered by the *Gar*, and it occurred to him that he might go ashore in the tender. He moved aft with this idea growing to a determination. In the cabin, on the shelf above the berths built against

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the sides of the ketch, he found an old blue flannel coat, with crossed squash rackets and a monogram embroidered in yellow on the breast pocket. Slipping it on he dropped over the stern of the tender.

Halvard came instantly aft, but Woolfolk declined the mutely offered service. The oars made a silken swish in the still bay as he pulled away from the yacht. The latter's riding light, swung on the forestay, hung without a quiver, like a fixed yellow star. He looked once over his shoulder, and then the bow of the tender ran with a soft shock upon the beach. Woolfolk bedded the anchor in the sand and then stood gazing curiously before him.

On his right a thicket of oleanders drenched the air with the perfume of their heavy poisonous flowering, and behind them a rough clearing of saw grass swept up to the débris of the fallen portico. To the left, beyond the black hole of a decaying well, rose the walls of a second brick building, smaller than the dwelling. A few shreds of rotten porch clung to its face, while the moonlight, pouring through a break above, fell in a livid bar across the obscurity of a high, single chamber.

Between the crumbling piles there was the faint trace of a footway, and Woolfolk advanced to where, inside a dilapidated, sheltering fence, he came upon a dark, compact mass of trees and smelled the increasing sweetness of orange blossoms. He struck the remains of a board path, and progressed with the cold, waxy leaves of the orange trees brushing his face. There was, he saw in the grey brightness, ripe fruit among the branches, and he mechanically picked an orange and then another. They were small but heavy, and had fine skins.

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He tore one open and put a section in his mouth. It was at first surprisingly bitter, and he involuntarily flung away what remained in his hand. But after a moment he found that the oranges possessed a pungency and zestful flavor that he had tasted in no others. Then he saw, directly before him, a pale, rectangular light which he recognized as the opened door of a habitation.

III

He advanced more slowly, and a low, irregular house detached itself from the tangled growth pressing upon it from all sides. The doorway, dimly lighted by an invisible lamp from within, was now near by; and John Woolfolk saw a shape cross it so swiftly furtive that it was gone before he realized that a man had vanished into the hall. There was a second stir on the small, covered portico, and the slender, white-clad figure of a woman moved uncertainly forward. He stopped just at the moment in which a low, clear voice queried: "What do you want?"

The question was directly put, and yet the tone held an inexplicably acute apprehension. The woman's voice bore a delicate, bell-like shiver of fear.

"Nothing," he hastened to assure her. "When I came ashore I thought no one was living here."

"You're from the white boat that sailed in at sunset?"

"Yes," he replied, "and I am returning immediately."

"It was like magic!" she continued. "Suddenly, without a sound, you were in the bay, like a great gull."

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Even this quiet statement bore the shadowy alarm. John Woolfolk realized that it had not been caused by his abrupt appearance; the faint accent of dread was fixed in the illusive form before him.

"I have robbed you too," he continued in a lighter tone. "Your oranges are in my pocket."

"You won't like them," she returned indirectly; "they've run wild. We can't sell them."

"They have a distinct appeal of their own," he assured her. "I should be glad to have some on the *Gar*."

"All you want."

"My man will get them and pay you."

"Please don't ——" She stopped abruptly, as if a sudden consideration had interrupted a liberal courtesy. When she spoke again the apprehension, Woolfolk thought, had increased to palpable fright. "We would charge you very little," she said finally. "Nicholas attends to that."

Silence fell upon them. She stood with her hand resting lightly against an upright support, coldly revealed by the moon. John Woolfolk saw that, although slight, her body was delicately full, and that her shoulders held a droop which somehow resembled the shadow on her voice. She bore an unmistakable refinement of being strange in that locality of meager humanity. Her speech totally lacked the half-intelligible, loose slurring of the natives.

"Won't you sit down," she at last broke the silence. "My father was here when you came up, but he went in. Strangers disturb him."

Woolfolk moved to the portico, elevated above the ground, where he found a momentary place. The woman sank back into a low chair. The stillness gathered about

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them once more, and he mechanically rolled a cigarette. Her white dress, although simply and rudely made, gained distinction from her free, graceful lines; her feet, in black, heelless slippers, were narrow and sharply cut. He saw that her countenance bore an even pallor on which her eyes made shadows like those on marble.

These details, unremarkable in themselves, were charged with a peculiar intensity. John Woolfolk, who long ago had put such considerations from his existence, was yet clearly conscious of the disturbing quality of her person. She possessed the indefinable property of charm. Such women, he knew, stirred life profoundly, reanimating it with extraordinary efforts and desires. Their mere passage, the pressure of their fingers, were more imperative than the life-service of others; the flutter of their breath could be more tyrannical than the most poignant memories and vows.

John Woolfolk thought these things in a manner absolutely detached. They touched him at no point. Nevertheless, the faint curiosity stirred within him remained. The house unexpectedly inhabited behind the ruined façade on the water, the magnetic woman with the echo of apprehension in her cultivated voice, the parent, so easily disturbed, even the mere name "Nicholas," all held a marked potentiality of emotion; they were set in an almost hysterical key.

He was suddenly conscious of the odorous pressure of the flowering trees, of the orange blossoms and the oleanders. It was stifling. He felt that he must escape at once, from all the cloying and insidious scents of the earth, to the open and sterile sea. The thick tangle in

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the colorless light of the moon, the dimmer portico with its enigmatic figure, were a cunning essence of the existence he had fled. Life's traps were set with just such treacheries — perfume and mystery and the veiled lure of sex.

He rose with an uncouth abruptness, a meager commonplace, and almost fled over the path to the beach, toward the refuge, the release, of the *Gar*.

John Woolfolk woke at dawn. A thin, bluish light filled the cabin; above, Halvard was washing the deck. The latter was vigorously swabbing the cockpit when Woolfolk appeared, but he paused.

"Perhaps," the sailor said, "you will stay here for a day or two. I'd like to unship the propeller, and there's the scraping. It's a good anchorage."

"We're moving on south," Woolfolk replied, stating the determination with which he had retired. Then the full sense of Halvard's words penetrated his waking mind. The propeller, he knew, had not opened properly for the week gone; and the anchorage was undoubtedly good. This was the last place, before entering the Florida passes, for whatever minor adjustments were necessary.

The matted shore, flushed with the rising sun, was starred with white and deep pink blooms; a ray gilded the blank wall of the deserted mansion. The scent of the orange blossoms was not as insistent as it had been on the previous evening. The land appeared normal; it exhibited none of the disturbing influence of which he had been first conscious. Last night's mood seemed inflated.

"You are quite right," he altered his pronouncement; "we'll put the *Gar* in order here. People are living behind the grove, and there'll be water."

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He had, for breakfast, oranges brought down the coast, and he was surprised at their sudden insipidity. They were little better than faintly sweetened water. He turned and in the pocket of his flannel coat found one of those he had picked the night before. It was as keen as a knife; the peculiar aroma had, without doubt, robbed him of all desire for the cultivated oranges of commerce.

Halvard was in the tender, under the stern of the ketch, when it occurred to John Woolfolk that it would be wise to go ashore and establish his assertion of an adequate water supply. He explained this briefly to the sailor, who put him on the small shingle of sand. There he turned to the right, moving idly in a direction away from that he had taken before.

He crossed the corner of the demolished abode, made his way through a press of sere cabbage palmettos and emerged suddenly on the blinding expanse of the sea. The limpid water lay in a bright rim over corrugated and pitted rock, where shallow ultramarine pools were gardens of sulphur-yellow and rose anemones. The land curved in upon the left; a ruined landing extended over the placid tide, and, seated there with her back toward him, a woman was fishing.

It was, he saw immediately, the woman of the portico. At the moment of recognition she turned, and after a brief inspection, slowly waved her hand. He approached, crossing the openings in the precarious boarding of the landing, until he stood over her. She said:

“There’s an old sheephead under here I’ve been after for a year. If you’ll be very still you can see him.”

She turned her face up to him, and he saw that her

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cheeks were without trace of color. At the same time he reaffirmed all that he felt before with regard to the potent quality of her being. She had a lustrous mass of warm brown hair twisted into a loose knot that had slid forward over a broad, low brow; a pointed chin; and pale, disturbing lips. But her eyes were her most notable feature—they were widely opened and extraordinary in color; the only similitude that occurred to John Woolfolk was the grey greenness of olive leaves. In them he felt the same boding that had shadowed her voice. The fleet passage of her gaze left an indelible impression of an expectancy that was at once a dread and a strangely youthful candor. She was, he thought, about thirty.

She wore now a russet skirt of thin, coarse texture that, like the dress of the evening, took a slim grace from her fine body, and a white waist, frayed from many washings, open upon her smooth, round throat.

“He’s usually by this post,” she continued, pointing down through the clear gloom of the water.

Woolfolk lowered himself to a position at her side, his gaze following her direction. There, after a moment, he distinguished the black and white barred sheephead wavering about the piling. His companion was fishing with a short, heavy rod from which time had dissolved the varnish, a crazy brass reel that complained shrilly whenever the lead was raised or lowered, and a thick, freely knotted line.

“You should have a leader,” he told her. “The old gentleman can see your line too plainly.”

There was a sharp pull, she rapidly turned the handle

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of the protesting reel, and drew up a gasping, bony fish with extended red wings.

"Another robin!" she cried tragically. "This is getting serious. Dinner," she informed him, "and not sport, is my object."

He looked out to where a channel made a deep blue stain through the paler cerulean of the sea. The tide, he saw from the piling, was low.

"There should be a rockfish in the pass," he pronounced.

"What good if there is?" she returned. "I couldn't possibly throw out there. And if I could, why disturb a rock with this?" She shook the short awkward rod, the knotted line.

He privately acknowledged the palpable truth of her objections, and rose.

"I've some fishing things on the ketch," he said, moving away. He blew shrilly on a whistle from the beach, and Halvard dropped over the *Gar's* side into the tender.

Woolfolk was soon back on the wharf, stripping the canvas cover from the long cane tip of a fishing rod brilliantly wound with green and vermilion, and fitting it into a dark, silver-capped butt. He locked a capacious reel into place, and, drawing a thin line through agate guides, attached a glistening steel leader and chained hook. Then, adding a freely swinging lead, he picked up the small mullet that lay by his companion.

"Does that have to go?" she demanded. "It's such a slim chance and it is my only mullet."

He ruthlessly sliced a piece from the silvery side; and,

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rising and switching his reel's gear, he cast. The lead swung far out across the water and fell on the farther side of the channel.

"But that's dazzling!" she exclaimed; "as though you had shot it out of a gun."

He tightened the line, and sat with the rod resting in a leather socket fastened to his belt.

"Now," she stated, "we will watch at the vain sacrifice of an only mullet."

The day was superb, the sky sparkled like a great blue sun; schools of young mangrove snappers swept through the pellucid water. The woman said:

"Where did you come from and where are you going?"

"Cape Cod," he replied; "and I am going to the Guianas."

"Isn't that South America?" she queried. "I've traveled far — on maps. Guiana," she repeated the name softly. For a moment the faint dread in her voice changed to longing. "I think I know all the beautiful names of places on the earth," she continued: "Tarragona and Seriphos and Cambodia."

"Some of them you have seen?"

"None," she answered simply. "I was born here, in the house you know, and I have never been fifty miles away."

This, he told himself, was incredible. The mystery that surrounded her deepened, stirring more strongly his impersonal curiosity.

"You are surprised," she added; "it's mad, but true. There — there is a reason." She stopped abruptly, and, neglecting her fishing rod, sat with her hands clasped

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about slim knees. She gazed at him slowly, and he was impressed once more by the remarkable quality of her eyes, grey green like olive leaves and strangely young. The momentary interest created in her by romantic and far names faded, gave place to the familiar trace of fear. In the long past he would have responded immediately to the appeal of her pale, magnetic countenance. . . . He had broken all connection with society, with —

There was a sudden, impressive jerk at his line, the rod instantly assumed the shape of a bent bow, and, as he rose, the reel handle was lost in a grey blur and the line streaked out through the dipping tip. His companion hung breathless at his shoulder.

“He’ll take all your line,” she lamented as the fish continued his straight, outward course, while Woolfolk kept an even pressure on the rod.

“A hundred yards,” he announced as he felt a threaded mark wheel from under his thumb. Then: “A hundred and fifty. I’m afraid it’s a shark.” As he spoke the fish leaped clear of the water, a spot of molten silver, and fell back in a sparkling blue spray. “It’s a rock,” he added. He stopped the run momentarily; the rod bent perilously double, but the fish halted. Woolfolk reeled in smoothly, but another rush followed as strong as the first. A long, equal struggle ensued, the thin line was drawn as rigid as metal, the rod quivered and arched. Once the rockfish was close enough to be clearly distinguishable — strongly built, heavy-shouldered, with black stripes drawn from gills to tail. But he was off again, with a short, blundering rush.

“If you will hold the rod,” Woolfolk directed his com-

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panion, "I'll gaff him." She took the rod while he bent over the wharf's side. The fish, on the surface of the water, half turned; and, striking the gaff through the jaw, Woolfolk swung him up on the boarding.

"There," he pronounced, "are several dinners. I'll carry him to your kitchen."

"Nicholas would do it, but he's away," she told him; "and my father is not strong enough. That's a leviathan."

John Woolfolk placed a handle through the rockfish's gills, and, carrying it with an obvious effort, he followed her over a narrow, trampled path through the rasped palmettos. They approached the dwelling from behind the orange grove; and, coming suddenly to the porch, surprised an incredibly thin, grey man in the act of lighting a small stone pipe with a reed stem. The latter was sitting, but when he saw Woolfolk he started sharply to his feet, and the pipe fell, shattering the bowl.

"My father," the woman pronounced: "Lichfield Stope."

"Millie," he stuttered painfully, "you know — I — strangers ——"

John Woolfolk thought, as he presented himself, that he had never before seen such an immaterial living figure. Lichfield Stope was like the shadow of a man draped with unsubstantial, dusty linen. Into his waxen face beat a pale infusion of blood, as if a diluted wine had been poured into a semi-opaque goblet; his sunken lips puffed out and collapsed; his fingers, dust-colored like his garb, opened and shut with a rapid, mechanical rigidity.

"Father," Millie Stope remonstrated, "you must manage yourself better. You know I wouldn't bring any one

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to the house who would hurt us. And see — we are fetching you a splendid rockfish.”

The older man made a convulsive effort to regain his composure.

“Ah, yes,” he muttered; “just so.”

The flush receded from his indeterminate countenance. Woolfolk saw that he had a goatee laid like a wasted yellow finger on his chin, and that his hands hung on wrists like twisted copper wires from circular cuffs fastened with large mosaic buttons.

“We are alone here,” he proceeded in a fluctuating voice, the voice of a shadow; “the man is away. My daughter — I ——” He grew inaudible, although his lips maintained a faint movement.

The fear that lurked illusively in the daughter was in the parent magnified to an appalling panic, an instinctive, acute agony that had crushed everything but a thin, tormented spark of life. He passed his hand over a brow as dry as the spongy limbs of the cypress, brushing a scant lock like dead, bleached moss.

“The fish,” he pronounced; “yes . . . acceptable.”

“If you will carry it back for me,” Millie Stope requested; “we have no ice; I must put it in water.” He followed her about a bay window with ornamental fretting that bore the shreds of old, variegated paint. He could see, amid an incongruous wreckage within, a dismantled billiard table, its torn cloth faintly green beneath a film of dust. They turned and arrived at the kitchen door. “There, please.” She indicated a bench on the outside wall, and he deposited his burden.

“You have been very nice,” she told him, rendering

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her phrase less commonplace by a glance of her wide, appealing eyes. "Now, I suppose, you will go on across the world?"

"Not tonight," he replied distantly.

"Perhaps, then, you will come ashore again. We see so few people. My father would benefit. It was only at first — so suddenly; he was startled."

"There is a great deal to do on the ketch," he replied indirectly, maintaining his retreat from the slightest advance of life. "I came ashore to discover if you had a large water supply and if I might fill my casks."

"Rain water," she informed him; "the cistern is full."

"Then I'll send Halvard to you." He withdrew a step, but paused at the incivility of his leaving.

A sudden weariness had settled over the shoulders of Millie Stope; she appeared young and very white. Woolfolk was acutely conscious of her utter isolation with the shivering figure on the porch, the unmaterialized Nicholas. She had delicate hands.

"Good-by," he said, bowing formally. "And thank you for the fishing."

He whistled sharply for the tender.

IV

Throughout the afternoon, with a triangular scraping iron, he assisted Halvard in removing the whitened varnish from the yacht's mahogany. They worked silently, with only the shrill note of the edges drawing across the wood, while the westering sun plunged its diagonal rays far into the transparent depths of the bay. The *Gar* floated

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motionless on water like a pale evening over purple and silver flowers threaded by fish painted vermilion and green like parrakeets. Inshore the pallid cypresses seemed, as John Woolfolk watched them, to twist in febrile pain. With the waning of day the land took on its air of unhealthy mystery; the mingled, heavy scents floated out in a sickly tide; the ruined façade glimmered in the half light.

Woolfolk's thoughts turned back to the woman living in the miasma of perfume and secret fear. He heard again her wistful voice pronounce the names of far places, of Tarragona and Seriphos, investing them with the accent of an intense hopeless desire. He thought of the inexplicable place of her birth and of the riven, unsubstantial figure of the man with the blood pulsing into his ochereous face. Some old, profound error or calamity had laid its blight upon the latter, he was certain; but the most lamentable inheritance was not sufficient to account for the acute apprehension in his daughter's tones. This was different in kind from the spiritual collapse of the aging man. It was actual, he realized that, proceeding — in part at least — from without.

He wondered, scraping with difficulty the underturning of a cathead, if whatever dark tide was centered above her would, perhaps, descend through the oleander-scented night and stifle her in the stagnant dwelling. He had a swift, vividly complete vision of the old man face down upon the floor in a flickering, reddish light.

He smiled in self-contempt at this neurotic fancy; and, straightening his cramped muscles, rolled a cigarette. It might be that the years he had spent virtually alone on

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the silence of various waters had affected his brain. Halvard's broad, concentrated countenance, the steady, grave gaze and determined mouth, cleared Woolfolk's mind of its phantoms. He moved to the cockpit and from there said:

“That will do for today.”

Halvard followed, and commenced once more the familiar, ordered preparations for supper. John Woolfolk, smoking while the sky turned to malachite, became sharply aware of the unthinkable monotony of the universal course, of the centuries wheeling in dull succession into infinity. Life seemed to him no more varied than the wire drum in which squirrels raced nowhere. His own lot, he told himself grimly, was no worse than another. Existence was all of the same drab piece. It had seemed gay enough when he was young, worked with gold and crimson threads, and then ——

His thoughts were broken by Halvard's appearance in the companionway, and he descended to his solitary supper in the contracted, still cabin.

Again on deck his sense of the monotony of life trebled. He had been cruising now about the edges of continents for twelve years. For twelve years he had taken no part in the existence of the cities he had passed — as often as possible without stopping — and of the villages gathered invitingly under their canopies of trees. He was — yes, he must be — forty-six. Life was passing away; well, let it — worthless.

The growing radiance of the moon glimmered across the water and folded the land in a gossamer veil. The same uneasiness, the inchoate desire to go ashore that had seized

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upon him the night before, reasserted its influence. The face of Millie Stope floated about him like a magic gardenia in the night of the matted trees. He resisted the pressure longer than before; but in the end he was seated in the tender, pulling toward the beach.

He entered the orange grove and slowly approached the house beyond. Millie Stope advanced with a quick welcome.

"I'm glad," she said simply. "Nicholas is back. The fish weighed ——"

"I think I'd better not know," he interrupted. "I might be tempted to mention it in the future, when it would take on the historic suspicion of the fish story."

"But it was imposing," she protested. "Let's go to the sea; it's so limitless in the moonlight."

He followed her over the path to where the remains of the wharf projected into a sea as black, and as solid apparently, as ebony, and across which the moon flung a narrow way like a chalk mark. Millie Stope seated herself on the boarding and he found a place near by. She leaned forward, with her arms propped up and her chin couched on her palms. Her potency increased rather than diminished with association; her skin had a rare texture; her movements, the turn of the wrists, were distinguished. He wondered again at the strangeness of her situation.

She looked about suddenly and surprised his palpable questioning.

"You are puzzled," she pronounced. "Perhaps you are setting me in the middle of romance. Please don't! Nothing you might guess ——" She broke off abruptly, returned to her former pose. "And yet," she added pres-

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ently, "I have a perverse desire to talk about myself. It's perverse because, although you are a little curious, you have no real interest in what I might say. There is something about you like — yes, like the cast-iron dog that used to stand in our lawn. It rusted away, cold to the last and indifferent, although I talked to it by the hour. But I did get a little comfort from its stolid painted eye. Perhaps you'd act in the same way.

"And then," she went on when Woolfolk had somberly failed to comment, "you are going away, you will forget, it can't possibly matter. I must talk, now that I have urged myself this far. After all, you needn't have come back. But where shall I begin? You should know something of the very first. That happened in Virginia. . . . My father didn't go to war," she said, sudden and clear. She turned her face toward him, and he saw that it had lost its flower-like quality, it looked as if it had been carved in stone.

"He lived in a small, intensely loyal town," she continued; "and when Virginia seceded it burned with a single high flame of sacrifice. My father had been always a diffident man; he collected mezzotints and avoided people. So, when the enlistment began, he shrank away from the crowds and hot speeches, and the men went off without him. He lived in complete retirement then, with his prints, in a town of women. It wasn't impossible at first; he discussed the situation with the few old tradesmen that remained, and exchanged bows with the wives and daughters of his friends. But when the dead commenced to be brought in from the front it got worse. Belle Semple —

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he had always thought her unusually nice and pretty — mocked at him on the street. Then one morning he found an apron tied to the knob of the front door.

“After that he went out only at night. His servants had deserted him, and he lived by himself in a biggish, solemn house. Sometimes the news of losses and deaths would be shouted through his windows; once stones were thrown in, but mostly he was let alone. It must have been frightful in his empty rooms when the South went from bad to worse.” She paused, and John Woolfolk could see, even in the obscurity, the slow shudder that passed over her.

“When the war was over and what men were left returned — one with hands gone at the wrists, another without legs in a shabby wheelchair — the life of the town started once more, but my father was forever outside of it. Little subscriptions for burials were made up, small schemes for getting the necessities, but he was never asked. Men spoke to him again, even some of the women. That was all.

“I think it was then that a curious, perpetual dread fastened on his mind — a fear of the wind in the night, of breaking twigs or sudden voices. He ordered things to be left on the steps, and he would peer out from under the blind to make sure that the walk was empty before he opened the door.

“You must realize,” she said in a sharper voice, “that my father was not a pure coward at first. He was an extremely sensitive man who hated the rude stir of living and who simply asked to be left undisturbed with his port-

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folios. But life's not like that. The war hunted him out and ruined him; it destroyed his being, just as it destroyed the fortunes of others.

"Then he began to think — it was absolute fancy — that there was a conspiracy in the town to kill him. He sent some of his things away, got together what money he had, and one night left his home secretly on foot. He tramped south for weeks, living for a while in small place after place, until he reached Georgia, and then a town about fifty miles from here ——"

She broke off, sitting rigidly erect, looking out over the level black sea with its shifting, chalky line of light, and a long silence followed. The antiphonal crying of the owls sounded over the bubbling swamp, the mephitic perfume hung like a vapor on the shore. John Woolfolk shifted his position.

"My mother told me this," his companion said suddenly. "Father repeated it over and over through the nights after they were married. He slept only in snatches, and would wake with a gasp and his heart almost bursting. I know almost nothing about her, except that she had a brave heart — or she would have gone mad. She was English and had been a governess. They met in the little hotel where they were married. Then father bought this place, and they came here to live."

Woolfolk had a vision of the tenuous figure of Lichfield Stope; he was surprised that such acute agony had left the slightest trace of humanity; yet the other, after forty years of torment, still survived to shudder at a chance footfall, the advent of a casual and harmless stranger.

This, then, was by implication the history of the woman

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at his side; it disposed of the mystery that had veiled her situation here. It was surprisingly clear, even to the subtle influence that, inherited from her father, had set the shadow of his own obsession upon her voice and eyes. Yet, in the moment that she had been made explicable, he recalled the conviction that the knowledge of an actual menace lurked in her mind; he had seen it in the tension of her body, in the anxiety of fleet, backward glances.

The latter, he told himself, might be merely a symptom of mental sickness, a condition natural to the influences under which she had been formed. He tested and rejected that possibility — there could be no doubt of her absolute sanity. It was patent in a hundred details of her carriage, in her mentality as it had been revealed in her restrained, balanced narrative.

There was, too, the element of her mother to be considered. Millie Stope had known very little about her, principally the self-evident fact of the latter's "brave heart." It would have needed that to remain steadfast through the racking recitals of the long, waking darks; to accompany to this desolate and lonely refuge the man who had had an apron tied to his doorknob. In the degree that the daughter had been a prey to the man's fear she would have benefited from the stiffer qualities of the English governess. Life once more assumed its enigmatic mask.

His companion said:

"All that — and I haven't said a word about myself, the real end of the soliloquy. I'm permanently discouraged; I have qualms about boring you. No, I shall never find another listener as satisfactory as the iron dog."

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A light glimmered far at sea. "I sit here a great deal," she informed him, "and watch the ships, a thumbprint of blue smoke at day and a spark at night, going up and down their water roads. You are enviable — getting up your anchor, sailing where you like, safe and free." Her voice took on a passionate intensity that surprised him; it was sick with weariness and longing, with sudden revolt from the pervasive apprehension.

"Safe and free," he repeated thinly, as if satirizing the condition implied by those commonplace, assuaging words. He had, in his flight from society, sought simply peace. John Woolfolk now questioned all his implied success. He had found the elemental hush of the sea, the iron aloofness of rocky and uninhabited coasts, but he had never been able to still the dull rebellion within, the legacy of the past. A feeling of complete failure settled over him. His safety and freedom amounted to this — that life had broken him and cast him aside.

A long, hollow wail rose from the land, and Millie Stope moved sharply.

"There's Nicholas," she exclaimed, "blowing on the conch! They don't know where I am; I'd better go in."

A small, evident panic took possession of her; the shiver in her voice swelled.

"No, don't come," she added. "I'll be quicker without you." She made her way over the wharf to the shore, but there paused. "I suppose you'll be going soon?"

"Tomorrow probably," he answered.

On the ketch Halvard had gone below for the night. The yacht swayed slightly to an unseen swell; the riding light moved backward and forward, its ray flickering over

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the glassy water. John Woolfolk brought his bedding from the cabin, and, disposing it on deck, lay with his wakeful dark face set against the far, multitudinous worlds.

V

In the morning Halvard proposed a repainting of the engine.

"The Florida air," he said, "eats metal overnight." And the ketch remained anchored.

Later in the day Woolfolk sounded the water casks cradled in the cockpit, and, when they answered hollow, directed his man with regard to their refilling. They drained a cask, Halvard put it on the tender and pulled in to the beach. There Woolfolk saw him shoulder the empty container and disappear among the trees.

He was forward, preparing a chain hawser for coral anchorages, when he saw Halvard tramping shortly back over the sand. He entered the tender, and, with a vicious shove, rowed with a powerful, vindictive sweep toward the ketch. The cask evidently had been left behind. He made the tender fast and swung aboard with his notable agility.

"There's a damn idiot in that house," he declared, in a surprising departure from his customary detached manner.

"Explain yourself," Woolfolk demanded shortly.

"But I'm going back after him," the sailor stubbornly proceeded. "I'll turn any knife out of his hand." It was evident that he was laboring under an intense growing excitement and anger.

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"The only idiot's not on land," Woolfolk told him.
"Where's the water cask you took ashore?"

"Broken."

"How?"

"I'll tell you fast enough. There was nobody about when I went up to the house, although there was a chair rocking on the porch as if a person had just left. I knocked at the door; it was open, and I was certain that I heard someone inside, but nobody answered. Then after a bit I went around back. The kitchen was open, too, and no one in sight. I saw the water cistern and thought I'd fill up, when you could say something afterward. I did, and was rolling the cask about the house when this — this loggerhead came out of the bushes. He wanted to know what I was getting away with, and I explained, but it didn't suit him. He said I might be telling facts and again I mightn't. I saw there was no use talking, and started rolling the cask again; but he put his foot on it, and I pushed one way and he the other ——"

"And between you, you stove in the cask," Woolfolk interrupted.

"That's it," Poul Halvard answered concisely. "Then I got mad, and offered to beat in his face, but he had a knife. I could have broken it out of his grip — I've done it before in a place or two — but I thought I'd better come aboard and report before anything general began."

John Woolfolk was momentarily at a loss to establish the identity of Halvard's assailant.

Then he realized that it must be Nicholas, whom he had never seen, and who had blown such an imperative

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summons on the conch the night before. Halvard's temper was communicated to him; he moved abruptly to where the tender was fastened.

"Put me ashore," he directed. He would make it clear that his man was not to be interrupted in the execution of his orders, and that his property could not be arbitrarily destroyed.

When the tender ran upon the beach and had been secured, Halvard started to follow him, but Woolfolk waved him back. There was a stir on the portico as he approached, the flitting of an unsubstantial form; but, hastening, John Woolfolk arrested Lichfield Stope in the doorway.

"Morning," he nodded abruptly. "I came to speak to you about a water cask of mine.

The other swayed like a thin, grey column of smoke.

"Ah, yes," he pronounced with difficulty. "Water cask ——"

"It was broken here a little while back."

At the suggestion of violence such a pitiable panic fell upon the older man that Woolfolk halted. Lichfield Stope raised his hands as if to ward off the mere impact of the words themselves; his face was stained with the thin red tide of congestion.

"You have a man named Nicholas," Woolfolk proceeded. "I should like to see him."

The other made a gesture as tremulous and indeterminate as his speech and appeared to dissolve into the hall. John Woolfolk stood for a moment undecided and then moved about the house toward the kitchen. There, he thought, he might obtain an explanation of the breaking

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of the cask. A man was moving about within and came to the door as Woolfolk approached.

The latter told himself that he had never seen a blanker countenance. In profile it showed a narrow brow, a huge, drooping nose, a pinched mouth and insignificant chin. From the front the face of the man in the doorway held the round, unscored cheeks of a fat and sleepy boy. The eyes were mere long glimmers of vision in thick folds of flesh; the mouth, upturned at the corners, lent a fixed, mechanical smile to the whole. It was a countenance on which the passage of time and thoughts had left no mark; its stolidity had been moved by no feeling. His body was heavy and sagging. It possessed, Woolfolk recognized, a considerable, unwieldy strength, and was completely covered by a variously spotted and streaked apron.

“Are you Nicholas?” John Woolfolk demanded.

The other nodded.

“Then, I take it, you are the man who broke my water cask.”

“It was full of our water,” Nicholas replied in a thick voice.

“That,” said Woolfolk, “I am not going to argue with you. I came ashore to instruct you to let my man and my property alone.”

“Then leave our water be.”

John Woolfolk’s temper, the instinctive arrogance of men living apart from the necessary submissions of communal life, in positions — however small — of supreme command, flared through his body.

“I told you,” he repeated shortly, “that I would not discuss the question of the water. I have no intention

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of justifying myself to you. Remember — your hands off.”

The other said surprisingly: “Don’t get me started!” A spasm of emotion made a faint, passing shade on his sodden countenance, his voice held almost a note of appeal.

“Whether you ‘start’ or not is without the slightest significance,” Woolfolk coldly responded.

“Mind,” the man went on, “I spoke first.”

A steady twitching commenced in a muscle at the flange of his nose. Woolfolk was aware of an increasing tension in the other that gained a peculiar oppressiveness from the lack of any corresponding outward expression. His heavy, blunt hand fumbled under the maculate apron; his chest heaved with a sudden, tempestuous breathing. “Don’t start me,” he repeated in a voice so blurred that the words were hardly recognizable. He swallowed convulsively, his emotion mounting to an inchoate passion, when suddenly a change was evident. He made a short, violent effort to regain his self-control, his gaze fastened on a point behind Woolfolk.

The latter turned and saw Millie Stope approaching, her countenance haggard with fear. “What has happened?” she cried breathlessly while yet a little distance away. “Tell me at once ——”

“Nothing,” Woolfolk promptly replied, appalled by the agony in her voice. “Nicholas and I had a small misunderstanding. A triviality,” he added, thinking of the other’s hand groping beneath the apron.

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VI

On the morning following the breaking of his water cask John Woolfolk saw the slender figure of Millie on the beach. She waved and called, her voice coming thin and clear across the water:

“Are visitors — encouraged?”

He sent Halvard in with the tender, and as they approached, dropped a gangway over the *Gar's* side. She stepped lightly down into the cockpit with a naïve expression of surprise at the yacht's immaculate order. The sails lay precisely housed, the stays, freshly tarred, glistened in the sun, the brasswork and newly varnished mahogany shone, while the mathematically coiled ropes rested on a deck as spotless as wood could be scraped.

“Why,” she exclaimed, “it couldn't be neater if you were two nice old ladies!”

“I warn you,” Woolfolk replied, “Halvard will not regard that as particularly complimentary. He will assure you that the order of a proper yacht is beyond the most ambitious dream of a mere housekeeper.”

She laughed as Halvard placed a chair for her. She was, Woolfolk thought, lighter in spirit on the ketch than she had been on shore; there was the faintest imaginable stain on her petal-like cheeks; her eyes, like olive leaves, were almost gay. She sat with her slender knees crossed, her fine arms held with hands clasped behind her head, and clad in a crisply ironed, crude white dress, into the band of which she had thrust a spray of orange blossoms.

John Woolfolk was increasingly conscious of her pe-

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cular charm. Millie Stope, he suddenly realized, was like the wild oranges in the neglected grove at her door. A man brought in contact with her magnetic being, charged with appealing and mysterious emotions, in a setting of exotic night and black sea, would find other women, the ordinary concourse of society, insipid — like faintly sweetened water.

She was entirely at home on the ketch, sitting against the immaculate rim of deck and the sea. He resented that familiarity as an unwarranted intrusion of the world he had fled. Other people, women among them, had unavoidably crossed his deck, but they had been patently alien, momentary; while Millie, with her still delight at the yacht's compact comfort, her intuitive comprehension of its various details — the lamps set in gimbals, the china racks and chart cases slung overhead — entered at once into the spirit of the craft that was John Woolfolk's sole place of home.

He was now disturbed by the ease with which she had established herself both in the yacht and in his imagination. He had thought, after so many years, to have destroyed all the bonds which ordinarily connect men with life, when a mere curiosity had grown into a tangible interest, and the interest showed unmistakable signs of becoming sympathy.

She smiled at him from her position by the wheel; and his being responded with such an unaccustomed, ready warmth that he said abruptly, seeking refuge in occupation:

“Why not reach out to sea? The conditions are perfect.”

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“ Ah, please! ” she cried. “ Just to take up the anchor would thrill me for months.”

A light west wind was blowing; and deliberate, exactly spaced rollers, their tops laced with iridescent spray, were sweeping in from a sea like a glassy, blue pavement. Woolfolk issued a short order, and the sailor moved forward with his customary smooth swiftness. The sails were shaken loose, the mainsail slowly spread its dazzling expanse to the sun, the jib and jigger were trimmed and the anchor came up with a short rush.

Millie rose with her arms outspread, her chin high and eyes closed.

“ Free! ” she proclaimed with a slow, deep breath.

The sails filled and the ketch forged ahead. John Woolfolk, at the wheel, glanced at the chart section beside him.

“ There’s four feet on the bar at low water,” he told Halvard. “ The tide’s at half flood now.”

The *Gar* increased her speed, slipping easily out of the bay, gladly, it seemed to Woolfolk, turning toward the sea. The bow rose, and the ketch dipped forward over a spent roller. Millie Stope grasped the wheelbox. “ Free! ” she said again with shining eyes.

The yacht rose more sharply, hung on a wave’s crest and slid lightly downward. Woolfolk, with a sinewy, dark hand directing their course, was intent upon the swelling sails. Once he stopped, tightening a halyard, and the sailor said:

“ The main peak won’t flatten, sir.”

The waves grew larger. The *Gar* climbed their smooth heights and coasted like a feather beyond. Directly be-

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fore the yacht they were unbroken, but on either side they foamed into a silver quickly reabsorbed in the deeper water within the bar.

Woolfolk turned from his scrutiny of the ketch to his companion, and was surprised to see her, with all the joy evaporated from her countenance, clinging rigidly to the rail. He said to himself, "Seasick." Then he realized that it was not a physical illness that possessed her, but a profound, increasing terror. She endeavored to smile back at his questioning gaze, and said in a small, uncertain voice:

"It's so — so big!"

For a moment he saw in her a clear resemblance to the shrinking figure of Lichfield Stope. It was as though suddenly she had lost her fine profile and become indeterminate, shadowy. The grey web of the old deflection in Virginia extended over her out of the past — of the past that, Woolfolk thought, would not die.

The *Gar* rose higher still, dropped into the deep, watery valley, and the woman's face was drawn and wet, the back of her straining hand was dead white. Without further delay John Woolfolk put the wheel sharply over and told his man, "We're going about." Halvard busied himself with the shaking sails.

"Really — I'd rather you didn't," Millie gasped. "I must learn — no longer a child."

But Woolfolk held the ketch on her return course; his companion's panic was growing beyond her control. They passed once more between the broken waves and entered the still bay with its border of flowering earth. There, when the yacht had been anchored, Millie sat gazing

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silently at the open sea whose bigness had so unexpectedly distressed her. Her face was pinched, her mouth set in a straight, hard line. Something about the latter feature suggested to Woolfolk the enigmatic governess; it was in contradiction to the rest.

"How strange," she said at last in an insuperably weary voice, "to be forced back to this place that I loathe, by myself, by my own cowardice. It's exactly as if my spirit were chained — then the body could never be free. What is it," she demanded of John Woolfolk, "that lives in our own hearts and betrays our utmost convictions and efforts, and destroys us against all knowledge and desire?"

"It may be called heredity," he replied; "that is its simplest phase. The others extend into the realms of the fantastic."

"It's unjust," she cried bitterly, "to be condemned to die in a pit with all one's instinct in the sky!"

The old plea of injustice quivered for a moment over the water and then died away. John Woolfolk had made the same passionate protest, he had cried it with clenched hands at the withdrawn stars, and the profound inattention of Nature had appalled his agony. A thrill of pity moved him for the suffering woman beside him. Her mouth was still unrelaxed. There was in her the material for a struggle against the invidious past.

In her slender frame the rebellion took on an accent of the heroic. Woolfolk recalled how utterly he had gone down before mischance. But his case had been extreme, he had suffered an unendurable wrong at the hand of Fate. Halvard diverted his thoughts by placing before them a tray of sugared pineapple and symmetrical cakes. Millie,

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too, lost her tension, she showed a feminine pleasure at the yacht's fine napkins, approved the polish of the glass.

"It's all quite wonderful," she said.

"I have nothing else to care for," Woolfolk told her.

"No place nor people on land?"

"None."

"And you are satisfied?"

"Absolutely," he replied with an unnecessary emphasis. He was, he told himself aggressively; he wanted nothing more from living and had nothing to give. Yet his pity for Millie Stope mounted obscurely, bringing with it thoughts, half-sensed desires, dim obligations, to which he had declared himself dead.

"I wonder if you are to be envied?" she queried.

A sudden astounding willingness to speak of himself, even of the past, swept over him.

"Hardly," he replied. "All the things that men value were killed for me in an instant, in the flutter of a white skirt."

"Can you talk about it?"

"There's almost nothing to tell; it was so unrelated, so senseless, blind. It can't be dressed into a story, it has no moral — no meaning. Well — it was twelve years ago. I had just been married, and we had gone to a property in the country. After two days I had to go into town, and when I came back Ellen met me in a breaking cart. It was a flag station, buried in maples, with a white road winding back to where we were staying.

"Ellen had trouble in holding the horse when the train left, and the beast shied going from the station. It was Monday, clothes hung from a line in a side yard and a

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skirt fluttered in a little breeze. The horse reared, the strapped back of the seat broke, and Ellen was thrown — on her head. It killed her.”

He fell silent. Millie breathed sharply, and a ripple struck with a faint slap on the yacht's side. Then: “One can't sanction that,” he continued in a lower voice, as if arguing with himself; “arbitrary, wanton; impossible to accept such conditions —

“She was young,” he once more took up the narrative; “a girl in a tennis skirt with a gay scarf about her waist — quite dead in a second. The clothes still fluttered on the line. You see,” he ended, “nothing instructive, tragic — only a crude dissonance.”

“Then you left everything?”

He failed to answer, and she gazed with a new understanding and interest over the *Gar*. Her attention was attracted to the beach, and, following her gaze, John Woolfolk saw the bulky figure of Nicholas gazing at them from under his palm. A palpable change, a swift shadow enveloped Millie Stope.

“I must go back,” she said uneasily; “there will be dinner, and my father has been alone all morning.”

But Woolfolk was certain that, however convincing the reasons she put forward, it was none of these that was taking her so hurriedly ashore. The dread that for the past few hours had almost vanished from her tones, her gaze, had returned multiplied. It was, he realized, the objective fear; her entire being was shrinking as if in anticipation of an imminent calamity, a physical blow.

Woolfolk himself put her on the beach; and, with the tender canted on the sand, steadied her spring. As her

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hand rested on his arm it gripped him with a sharp force; a response pulsed through his body; and an involuntary color rose in her pale, fine cheeks.

Nicholas, stolidly set with his shoes half buried in the sand, surveyed them without a shade of feeling on his thick countenance. But Woolfolk saw that the other's fingers were crawling toward his pocket. He realized that the man's dully smiling mask concealed sultry, un-governed emotions, blind springs of gall.

VII

Again on the ketch the inevitable reaction overtook him. He had spoken of Ellen's death to no one until now, through all the years when he had been a wanderer on the edge of his world, and he bitterly regretted mentioning it. In speaking he had betrayed his resolve of solitude. Life, against all his instinct, his wishes, had reached out and caught him, however lightly, in its tentacles.

The least surrender, he realized, the slightest opening of his interest, would bind him with a multitude of attachments; the octopus that he dreaded, uncoiling arm after arm, would soon hold him again, a helpless victim for the fury Chance.

He had made a disastrous error in following his curiosity, the insistent scent of the wild oranges, to the house where Millie had advanced on the dim portico. His return there had been the inevitable result of the first mistake, and the rest had followed with a fatal ease. Whatever had been the deficiencies of the past twelve years he had been free from new complications, fresh treacheries.

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Now, with hardly a struggle, he was falling back into the trap.

The wind died away absolutely, and a haze gathered delicately over the sea, thickening through the afternoon and turned rosy by the declining sun. The shore had faded from sight.

A sudden energy leaped through John Woolfolk, rang out in an abrupt summons to Halvard. "Get up anchor," he commanded.

Poul Halvard, at the mainstay, remarked tentatively: "There's not a capful of wind."

The wide calm, Woolfolk thought, was but a part of a general conspiracy against his liberty, his memories. "Get the anchor up," he repeated harshly. "We'll go under the engine." The sudden jarring of the *Gar's* engine sounded muffled in a shut space like the flushed heart of a shell. The yacht moved forward, with a wake like folded gauze, into a shimmer of formless and pure color.

John Woolfolk sat at the wheel, motionless except for an occasional, scant shifting of his hands. He was sailing by compass; the patent log, trailing behind on its long cord, maintained a constant, jerking register on its dial. He had resolutely banished all thought save that of navigation. Halvard was occupied forward, clearing the deck of the accumulations of the anchorage. When he came aft Woolfolk said shortly: "No mess."

The haze deepened and night fell, and the sailor lighted and placed the port and starboard lights. The binnacle lamp threw up a dim, orange radiance on Woolfolk's somber countenance. He continued for three and four and then five hours at the wheel, while the smooth clamor

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of the engine, a slight quiver of the hull, alone marked their progress through an invisible element.

Once more he had left life behind. This had more the aspect of a flight than at any time previous. It was, obscurely, an unpleasant thought, and he endeavored — unsuccessfully — to put it from him. He was but pursuing the course he had laid out, following his necessary, inflexible determination.

His mind for a moment turned independently back to Millie, with her double burden of fear. He had left her without a word, isolated with Nicholas, concealing with a blank smile his enigmatic being, and with her impotent parent.

Well, he was not responsible for her, he had paid for the privilege of immunity; he had but listened to her story, volunteering nothing. John Woolfolk wished, however, that he had said some final, useful word to her before going. He was certain that, looking for the ketch and unexpectedly finding the bay empty, she would suffer a pang, if only of loneliness. In the short while that he had been there she had come to depend on him for companionship, for relief from the insuperable monotony of her surroundings; for, perhaps, still more. He wondered what that more might contain. He thought of Millie at the present moment, probably lying awake, steeped in dread. His flight now assumed the aspect of an act of cowardice, of desertion. He rehearsed wearily the extenuations of his position, but without any palpable relief.

An even more disturbing possibility lodged in his thoughts — he was not certain that he did not wish to be actually back with Millie again. He felt the quick pres-

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sure of her fingers on his arm as she jumped from the tender; her magnetic personality hung about him like an aroma. Cloaked in mystery, pale and irresistible, she appealed to him from the edge of the wild oranges.

This, he told himself again, was but the manner in which a ruthless Nature set her lures; it was the deceptive vestment of romance. He held the ketch relentlessly on her course, with — now — all this thoughts, his inclinations, returning to Millie Stope. In a final, desperate rally of his scattering resolution he told himself that he was unfaithful to the tragic memory of Ellen. This last stay broke abruptly, and left him defenseless against the tyranny of his mounting desires. Strangely he felt the sudden pressure of a stirring wind upon his face; and, almost with an oath, he put the wheel sharply over and the *Gar* swung about.

Poul Halvard had been below, by inference asleep; but when the yacht changed her course he immediately appeared on deck. He moved aft, but Woolfolk made no explanation, the sailor put no questions. The wind freshened, grew sustained. Woolfolk said:

“Make sail.”

Soon after the mainsail rose, a ghostly white expanse on the night. John Woolfolk trimmed the jigger, shut off the engine; and, moving through a sudden, vast hush, they retraced their course. The bay was ablaze with sunlight, the morning well advanced, when the ketch floated back to her anchorage under the oleanders.

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VIII

Whether he returned or fled, Woolfolk thought, he was enveloped in an atmosphere of defeat. He relinquished the wheel, but remained seated, drooping at his post. The indefatigable Halvard proceeded with the efficient discharge of his narrow, exacting duties. After a short space John Woolfolk descended to the cabin, where, on an unmade berth, he fell immediately asleep.

He woke to a dim interior and twilight gathering outside. He shaved—without conscious purpose—with meticulous care, and put on the blue flannel coat. Later he rowed himself ashore and proceeded directly through the orange grove to the house beyond.

Millie Stope was seated on the portico, and laid a restraining hand on her father's arm as he rose, attempting to retreat at Woolfolk's approach. The latter, with a commonplace greeting, resumed his place.

Millie's face was dim and potent in the gloom, and Lichfield Stope more than ever resembled an uneasy ghost. He muttered an indistinct response to a period directed at him by Woolfolk and turned with a low, urgent appeal to his daughter. The latter, with a hopeless gesture, relinquished his arm, and the other disappeared as if by magic.

"You were sailing this morning," Millie commented listlessly.

"I had gone," he said without explanation. Then he added: "But I came back."

A silence threatened them which he resolutely broke: "Do you remember, when you told me about your father,

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that you wanted really to talk about yourself? Will you do that now?"

"Tonight I haven't the courage."

"I am not idly curious," he persisted.

"Just what are you?"

"I don't know," he admitted frankly. "At the present moment I'm lost, fogged. But, meanwhile, I'd like to give you any assistance in my power. You seem, in a mysterious way, needful of help."

She turned her head sharply in the direction of the open hall and said in a high, clear voice, that yet rang strangely false: "I am quite well cared for by my father and Nicholas." She moved closer to him, dragging her chair across the uneven porch, in the rasp of which she added, quick and low:

"Don't — please."

A mounting exasperation seized him at the secrecy that veiled her, hid her from him, and he answered stiffly: "I am merely intrusive."

She was seated above him, and she leaned forward and swiftly pressed his fingers, loosely clasped about a knee. Her hand was as cold as salt. His irritation vanished before a welling pity. He got now a sharp, recognized happiness from her nearness; his feeling for her increased with the accumulating seconds. After the surrender, the admission, of his return he had grown elemental, sensitized to emotions rather than to processes of intellect. His ardor had the poignancy of the period beyond youth. It had a trace of the consciousness of the fatal waning of life which gave it a depth denied to younger passions. He wished to take Millie Stope at once from all memory

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of the troublous past, to have her alone in a totally different and thrilling existence.

It was a personal and blind desire, born in the unaccustomed tumult of his newly released feelings.

They sat for a long while, silent or speaking in trivialities, when he proposed a walk to the sea; but she declined in that curiously loud and false tone. It seemed to Woolfolk that, for the moment, she had addressed someone not immediately present; and involuntarily he looked around. The light of the hidden lamp in the hall fell in a pale, unbroken rectangle on the irregular porch. There was not the shifting of a pound's weight audible in the stillness.

Millie breathed unevenly; at times he saw she shivered uncontrollably. At this his feeling mounted beyond all restraint. He said, taking her cold hand: "I didn't tell you why I went last night — it was because I was afraid to stay where you were; I was afraid of the change you were bringing about in my life. That's all over now, I ——"

"Isn't it quite late?" she interrupted him uncomfortably. She rose and her agitation visibly increased.

He was about to force her to hear all that he must say, but he stopped at the mute wretchedness of her pallid face. He stood gazing up at her from the rough sod. She clenched her hands, her breast heaved sharply, and she spoke in a level, strained voice:

"It would have been better if you had gone — without coming back. My father is unhappy with anyone about except myself and — and Nicholas. You see — he will not stay on the porch nor walk about his grounds. I am

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not in need of assistance, as you seem to think. And — thank you. Good night.”

He stood without moving, his head thrown back, regarding her with a searching frown. He listened again, unconsciously, and thought he heard the low creaking of a board from within. It could be nothing but the uneasy peregrination of Lichfield Stope. The sound was repeated, grew louder, and the sagging bulk of Nicholas appeared in the doorway.

The latter stood for a moment, a dark, magnified shape; and then, moving across the portico to the farthest window, closed the shutters. The hinges gave out a rasping grind, as if they had not been turned for months, and there was a faint rattle of falling particles of rusted iron. The man forced shut a second set of shutters with a sudden violence and went slowly back into the house. Millie Stope said once more:

“ Good night.”

It was evident to Woolfolk that he could gain nothing more at present; and stifling an angry protest, an impatient troop of questions, he turned and strode back to the tender. However, he hadn't the slightest intention of following Millie's indirectly expressed wish for him to leave. He had the odd conviction that at heart she did not want him to go; the evening, he elaborated this feeling, had been all a strange piece of acting. Tomorrow he would tear apart the veil that hid her from him; he would ignore her every protest and force the truth from her.

He lifted the tender's anchor from the sand and pulled sharply across the water to the *Gar*. A reddish, misshapen moon hung in the east, and when he had mounted to

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his deck it was suddenly obscured by a high, racing scud of cloud; the air had a damper, thicker feel. He instinctively moved to the barometer, which he found depressed. The wind, that had continued steadily since the night before, increased, and there was a corresponding stir among the branches ashore, a slapping of the yacht's cordage against the spars. He turned forward and half absently noted the increasing strain on the hawser disappearing into the dark tide. The anchor was firmly bedded. The pervasive, far murmur of the waves on the outer bars grew louder.

The yacht swung lightly over the choppy water, and a strong affection for the ketch that had been his home, his occupation, his solace through the past dreary years expanded his heart. He knew the *Gar's* every capability and mood, and they were all good. She was an exceptional boat. His feeling was acute, for he knew that the yacht had been superseded. It was already an element of the past, of that past in which Ellen lay dead in a tennis skirt, with a bright scarf about her young waist.

He placed his hand on the mainmast, in the manner in which another might drop a palm on the shoulder of a departing, faithful companion, and the wind in the rigging vibrated through the wood like a sentient and affectionate response. Then he went resolutely down into the cabin, facing the future.

John Woolfolk woke in the night, listened for a moment to the straining hull and wind shrilling aloft, and then rose and went forward again to examine the mooring. A second hawser now reached into the darkness. Halvard

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had been on deck and put out another anchor. The wind beat salt and stinging from the sea, utterly dissipating the languorous breath of the land, the odors of the exotic, flowering trees.

IX

In the morning a storm, driving out of the east, enveloped the coast in a frigid, lashing rain. The wind mounted steadily through the middle of the day with an increasing pitch accompanied by the basso of the racing seas. The bay grew opaque and seamed with white scars. After the meridian the rain ceased, but the wind maintained its volume, clamoring beneath a leaden pall.

John Woolfolk, in dripping yellow oilskins, occasionally circled the deck of his ketch. Halvard had everything in a perfection of order. When the rain stopped, the sailor dropped into the tender and with a boat sponge bailed vigorously. Soon after, Woolfolk stepped out upon the beach. He was without any plan but the determination to put aside whatever obstacles held Millie from him. This rapidly crystallized into the resolve to take her with him before another day ended. His feeling for her, increasing to a passionate need, had destroyed the suspension, the deliberate calm of his life, as the storm had dissipated the sunny peace of the coast.

He paused before the ruined façade, weighing her statement that it would have been better if he had not returned; and he wondered how that would affect her willingness, her ability to see him today. He added

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the word "ability" instinctively and without explanation. And he decided that, in order to have any satisfactory speech with her, he must come upon her alone, away from the house. Then he could force her to hear to the finish what he wanted to say; in the open they might escape from the inexplicable inhibition that lay upon her expression of feeling, of desire. It would be necessary, at the same time, to avoid the notice of anyone who would warn her of his presence. This precluded his waiting at the familiar place on the rotting wharf.

Three marble steps, awry and moldy, descended to the lawn from a French window in the side of the desolate mansion. They were screened by a tangle of rose-mallow, and there John Woolfolk seated himself — waiting.

The wind shrilled about the corner of the house, there was a mournful clatter of shingles from above and the frenzied lashing of boughs. The noise was so great that he failed to hear the slightest indication of the approach of Nicholas until that individual passed directly before him. Nicholas stopped at the inner fringe of the beach and, from a point where he could not be seen from the ketch, stood gazing out at the *Gar* pounding on her long anchor chains. The man remained for an oppressively extended period; Woolfolk could see his heavy, drooping shoulders and sunken head; and then the other moved to the left, crossing the rough open behind the oleanders. Woolfolk had a momentary glimpse of a huge nose and rapidly moving lips above an impotent chin.

Nicholas, he realized, remained a complete enigma to him; beyond the conviction that the man was, in some minor way, leaden-witted, he knew nothing.

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A brief, watery ray of sunlight fell through a rift in the flying clouds and stained the tossing foliage pale gold; it was followed by a sudden drift of rain, then once more the naked wind. Woolfolk was fast determining to go up to the house and insist upon Millie's hearing him, when unexpectedly she appeared in a somber, fluttering cloak, with her head uncovered and hair blown back from her pale brow. He waited until she had passed him, and then rose, softly calling her name.

She stopped and turned, with a hand pressed to her heart. "I was afraid you'd gone out," she told him. "The sea is like a pack of wolves." Her voice was a low complexity of relief and fear.

"Not alone," he replied; "not without you."

"Madness," she murmured, gathering her wavering cloak about her breast. She swayed, graceful as a reed in the wind, charged with potency. He made an involuntary gesture toward her with his arms; but in a sudden access of fear she eluded him.

"We must talk," he told her. "There is a great deal that needs explaining, that — I think — I have a right to know, the right of your dependence on something to save you from yourself. There is another right, but only you can give that —"

"Indeed," she interrupted tensely, "you mustn't stand here talking to me."

"I shall allow nothing to interrupt us," he returned decidedly. "I have been long enough in the dark."

"But you don't understand what you will, perhaps, bring on yourself — on me."

"I'm forced to ignore even that last."

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She glanced hurriedly about. "Not here then, if you must."

She walked from him, toward the second ruined pile that fronted the bay. The steps to the gaping entrance had rotted away and they were forced to mount an insecure side piece. The interior, as Woolfolk had seen, was composed of one high room, while, above, a narrow, open second story hung like a ledge. On both sides were long counters with mounting sets of shelves behind them.

"This was the store," Millie told him. "It was a great estate."

A dim and moldering fragment of cotton stuff was hanging from a forgotten bolt; above, some tinware was eaten with rust; a scale had crushed in the floor and lay broken on the earth beneath; and a ledger, its leaves a single, sodden film of grey, was still open on a counter. A precarious stair mounted to the flooring above, and Millie Stope made her way upward, followed by Woolfolk.

There, in the double gloom of the clouds and a small dormer window obscured by cobwebs, she sank on a broken box. The insane building shook perilously in the blasts of the wind. Below they could see the empty floor, and through the doorway the somber, gleaming greenery without.

All the patient expostulation that John Woolfolk had prepared disappeared in a sudden tyranny of emotion, of hunger for the slender, weary figure before him. Seating himself at her side, he burst into a torrential expression of passionate desire that mounted with the tide of his eager words. He caught her hands, held them in

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a painful grip, and gazed down into her still, frightened face. He stopped abruptly, was silent for a tempestuous moment, and then baldly repeated the fact of his love.

Millie Stope said:

"I know so little about the love you mean." Her voice trailed to silence; and in a lull of the storm they heard the thin patter of rats on the floor below, the stir of bats among the rafters.

"It's quickly learned," he assured her. "Millie, do you feel any response at all in your heart — the slightest return of my longing?"

"I don't know," she answered, turning toward him a troubled scrutiny. "Perhaps in another surrounding, with things different, I might care for you very much ——"

"I am going to take you into that other surrounding," he announced.

She ignored his interruption. "But we shall never have a chance to learn." She silenced his attempted protest with a cool, flexible palm against his mouth. "Life," she continued, "is so dreadfully in the dark. One is lost at the beginning. There are maps to take you safely to the Guianas, but none for souls. Perhaps religions are —— Again I don't know. I have found nothing secure — only a whirlpool into which I will not drag others."

"I will drag you out," he asserted.

She smiled at him, in a momentary tenderness, and continued: "When I was young I never doubted that I would conquer life. I pictured myself rising in triumph over circumstance, as a gull leaves the sea. . . . When I

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was young . . . If I was afraid of the dark then I thought, of course, I would outgrow it; but it has grown deeper than my courage. The night is terrible now." A shiver passed over her.

"You are ill," he insisted, "but you shall be cured."

"Perhaps, a year ago, something might have been done, with assistance; yes — with you. Then, whatever is, hadn't materialized. Why did you delay?" she cried in a sudden suffering.

"You'll go with me tonight," he declared stoutly.

"In this?" She indicated the wind beating with the blows of a great fist against the swaying walls of the demolished store. "Have you seen the sea? Do you remember what happened on the day I went with you when it was so beautiful and still?"

John Woolfolk realized, wakened to a renewed mental clearness by the threatening of all that he desired, that — as Millie had intimated — life was too complicated to be solved by a simple longing; love was not the all-powerful magician of conventional acceptance; there were other, no less profound, depths.

He resolutely abandoned his mere inchoate wanting, and considered the elements of the position that were known to him. There was, in the first place, that old, lamentable dereliction of Lichfield Stope's, and its aftermath in his daughter. Millie had just recalled to Woolfolk the duration, the activity, of its poison. Here there was no possibility of escape by mere removal; the stain was within; and it must be thoroughly cleansed before she could cope successfully, happily, with life. In this, he was forced to acknowledge, he could help her but little;

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it was an affair of spirit; and spiritual values — though they might be supported from without — had their growth and decrease strictly in the individual they animated.

Still, he argued, a normal existence, a sense of security, would accomplish much; and they hung upon the elimination of the second, unknown element — the reason for her backward glances, her sudden, loud banalities, yesterday's mechanical repudiation of his offered assistance and the implied wish for him to go. He said gravely:

“I have been impatient, but you came so sharply into my empty existence that I was upset. If you are ill you can cure yourself. Never forget your mother's ‘brave heart.’ But there is something objective, immediate, threatening you. Tell me what it is, Millie, and together we will overcome and put it away from you forever.”

She gazed panic-stricken into the empty gloom below. “No! no!” she exclaimed, rising. “You don't know. I won't drag you down. You must go away at once, tonight, even in the storm.”

“What is it?” he demanded.

She stood rigidly erect with her eyes shut and hands clasped at her sides. Then she slid down upon the box, lifting to him a white mask of fright.

“It's Nicholas,” she said, hardly above her breath.

A sudden relief swept over John Woolfolk. In his mind he dismissed as negligible the heavy man fumbling beneath his soiled apron. He wondered how the other could have got such a grip on Millie Stope's imagination.

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The mystery that had enveloped her was fast disappearing, leaving them without an obstacle to the happiness he proposed. Woolfolk said curtly:

“Has Nicholas been annoying you?”

She shivered, with clasped, straining hands.

“He says he’s crazy about me,” she told him in a shuddering voice that contracted his heart. “He says that I must—must marry him, or——” Her period trailed abruptly out to silence.

Woolfolk grew animated with determination, an immediate purpose.

“Where would Nicholas be at this hour?” he asked.

She rose hastily, clinging to his arm. “You mustn’t,” she exclaimed, yet not loudly. “You don’t know! He is watching—something frightful would happen.”

“Nothing ‘frightful,’” he returned tolerantly, preparing to descend. “Only unfortunate for Nicholas.”

“You mustn’t,” she repeated desperately, her sheer weight hanging from her hands clasped about his neck. “Nicholas is not—not human. There’s something funny about him. I don’t mean funny, I——”

He unclasped her fingers and quietly forced her back to the seat on the box. Then he took a place at her side.

“Now,” he asked reasonably, “what is this about Nicholas?”

She glanced down into the desolate cavern of the store; the ghostly remnant of cotton goods fluttered in a draft like a torn and grimy cobweb; the lower floor was palpably bare.

“He came in April,” she commenced in a voice without any life. “The woman we had had for years was

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dead; and when Nicholas asked for work we were glad to take him. He wanted the smallest possible wages and was willing to do everything; he even cooked quite nicely. At first he was jumpy — he had asked if many strangers went by; but then when no one appeared he got easier . . . He got easier and began to do extra things for me. I thanked him — until I understood. Then I asked father to send him away, but he was afraid; and, before I could get up my courage to do it, Nicholas spoke —

“He said he was crazy about me, and would I please try and be good to him. He had always wanted to marry, he went on, and live right, but things had gone against him. I told him that he was impertinent and that he would have to go at once; but he cried and begged me not to say that, not to get him ‘started.’”

That, John Woolfolk recalled, was precisely what the man had said to him.

“I went back to father and told him why he must send Nicholas off, but father nearly suffocated. He turned almost black. Then I got frightened and locked myself in my room, while Nicholas sat out on the stair and sobbed all night. It was ghastly! In the morning I had to go down, and he went about his duties as usual. That evening he spoke again, on the porch, twisting his hands exactly as if he were making bread. He repeated that he wanted me to be nice to him. He said something wrong would happen if I pushed him to it.

“I think if he had threatened to kill me it would have been more possible than his hints and sobs. The thing drew out to a month, then six weeks, and nothing more happened. I started again and again to tell them

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at the store, two miles back in the pines, but I could never get away from Nicholas; he was always at my shoulder, muttering and twisting his hands.

"Then I found something." She hesitated, glancing once more down through the empty gloom, while her fingers swiftly fumbled in the band of her waist.

"I was cleaning his room — it simply had to be done — and had out a bureau drawer, when I saw this underneath. He was not in the house, and I took one look at it, then put the things back as near as possible as they were. I was so frightened that I slipped it in my dress — had no chance to return it."

He took from her unresisting hand a folded rectangle of coarse grey paper; and, opening it, found a small hand-bill with the crudely reproduced photograph of a man's head with a long, drooping nose, sleepy eyes in thick folds of flesh, and a lax underlip with a fixed, dull smile:

WANTED FOR MURDER!

The authorities of Coweta offer THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the apprehension of the below, Iscah Nicholas, convicted of the murder of Elizabeth Slakto, an aged woman.

General description: Age about forty-eight. Head receding, with large nose and stupid expression. Body corpulent but strong. Nicholas has no trade and works at general utility. He is a homicidal maniac.

WANTED FOR MURDER!

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“He told me that his name was Nicholas Brandt,” Millie noted in her dull voice.

A new gravity possessed John Woolfolk.

“You must not go back to the house,” he decided.

“Wait,” she replied. “I was terribly frightened when he went up to his room. When he came down he thanked me for cleaning it. I told him he was mistaken, that I hadn’t been in there, but I could see he was suspicious. He cried all the time he was cooking dinner, in a queer, choked way; and afterward touched me — on the arm. I swam, but all the water in the bay wouldn’t take away the feel of his fingers. Then I saw the boat — you came ashore.

“Nicholas was dreadfully upset, and hid in the pines for a day or more. He told me if I spoke of him it would happen, and if I left it would happen — to father. Then he came back. He said that you were — were in love with me, and that I must send you away. He added that you must go away today, for he couldn’t stand waiting any more. He said that he wanted to be right, but that things were against him. This morning he got dreadful — if I fooled him he’d get you, and me, too, and then there was always father for something special extra. That, he warned me, would happen if I stayed away for more than an hour.” She rose, trembling violently. “Perhaps it’s been an hour now. I must go back.”

John Woolfolk thought rapidly; his face was grim. If he had brought a pistol from the ketch he would have shot Iscah Nicholas without hesitation. Unarmed, he was reluctant to precipitate a crisis with such serious possibili-

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ties. He could secure one from the *Gar*, but even that short lapse of time might prove fatal — to Millie or Lichfield Stope. Millie's story was patently fact in every detail. He thought more rapidly still — desperately.

“I must go back,” she repeated, her words lost in a sudden blast of wind under the dilapidated roof.

He saw that she was right.

“Very well,” he acquiesced. “Tell him that you saw me, and that I promised to go tonight. Act quietly; say that you have been upset, but that you will give him an answer tomorrow. Then at eight o'clock — it will be dark early tonight — walk out to the wharf. That is all. But it must be done without any hesitation; you must be even cheerful, kinder to him.”

He was thinking: she must be out of the way when I meet Nicholas. She must not be subjected to the ordeal that will release her from the dread fast crushing her spirit.

She swayed, and he caught her, held her upright, circled in his steady arms.

“Don't let him hurt us,” she gasped. “Oh, don't!”

“Not now,” he reassured her. “Nicholas is finished. But you must help by doing exactly as I have told you. You'd better go on. It won't be long, hardly three hours, until freedom.”

She laid her cold cheek against his face, while her arms crept round his neck. She said nothing; and he held her to him with a sudden throb of feeling. They stood for a moment in the deepening gloom, bound in a straining embrace, while the rats gnawed in the crazy walls of

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the store and the storm thrashed without. Then she reluctantly descended the stair, crossed the broken floor and disappeared through the gap of the door.

A sudden unwillingness to have her return alone to the sobbing menace of Iscah Nicholas, the impotent wraith that had been Lichfield Stope, carried him in an impetuous stride to the stair. But there he halted. The plan he had evolved held, in its simplicity, a larger measure of safety than any immediate, unconsidered course.

John Woolfolk waited until she had had time to enter the orange grove, then he followed, turning toward the beach.

He found Halvard already at the sand's edge, waiting uneasily with the tender, and they crossed the broken water to where the *Gar's* cabin flung out a remote, peaceful light.

X

The sailor immediately set about his familiar, homely tasks, while Woolfolk made a minute inspection of the ketch's rigging. He descended to supper with an expression of abstraction, and ate mechanically whatever was placed before him. Afterward he rolled a cigarette, which he neglected to light, and sat motionless, chin on breast, in the warm stillness.

Halvard cleared the table and John Woolfolk roused himself. He turned to the shelf that ran above the berths and secured a small, locked tin box. For an hour or more he was engaged alternately writing and carefully reading various papers sealed with vermilion wafers. Then he called Halvard.

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"I'll get you to witness these signatures," he said, rising. Poul Halvard hesitated; then, with a furrowed brow, clumsily grasped the pen. "Here," Woolfolk indicated. The man wrote slowly, linking fortuitously the unsteady letters of his name. This arduous task accomplished, he immediately rose. John Woolfolk again took his place, turning to address the other, when he saw that one side of Halvard's face was bluish and rapidly swelling.

"What's the matter with your jaw?" he promptly inquired.

Halvard avoided his gaze, obviously reluctant to speak, but Woolfolk's silent interrogation was insistent. Then:

"I met that Nicholas," Halvard admitted; "without a knife."

"Well?" Woolfolk insisted.

"There's something wrong with this cursed place," Halvard said defiantly. "You can laugh, but there's a matter in the air that's not natural. My grandmother could have named it. She heard the ravens that called Tollfsen's death, and read Linga's eyes before she strangulated herself. Anyhow, when you didn't come back I got doubtful and took the tender in. Then I saw Nicholas beating up through the bushes, hiding here and there, and doubling through the grass; so I came on him from the back and — and kicked him, quite sudden.

"He went on his hands, but got up quick for a hulk like himself. Sir, this is hard to believe, but it's Biblical — he didn't take any more notice of the kick than if it had been a flag halyard brushed against him. He said 'Go away,' and waved his foolish hands.

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“ I closed in, still careful of the knife, with a remark, and got onto his heart. He only coughed and kept telling me in a crying whisper to go away. Nicholas pushed me back — that’s how I got this face. What was the use? I might as well have hit a pudding. Even talk didn’t move him. In a little it sent me cold.” He stopped abruptly, grew sullen; it was evident that he would say no more in that direction. Woolfolk opened another subject:

“ Life, Halvard,” he said, “ is uncertain; perhaps tonight I shall find it absolutely unreliable. What I am getting at is this: if anything happens to me — death, to be accurate — the *Gar* is yours, the ketch and a sum of money. It is secured to you in this box, which you will deliver to my address in Boston. There is another provision that I’ll mention merely to give you the opportunity to repeat it verbally from my lips: the bulk of anything I have, in the possibility we are considering, will go to a Miss Stope, the daughter of Lichfield Stope, formerly of Virginia.” He stood up. “ Halvard,” Woolfolk said abruptly, extending his hand, expressing for the first time his repeated thought, “ you are a good man. You are the only steady quantity I have ever known. I have paid you for a part of this, but the most is beyond dollars. That I am now acknowledging.”

Halvard was cruelly embarrassed. He waited, obviously desiring a chance to retreat, and Woolfolk continued in a different vein:

“ I want the canvas division rigged across the cabin and three berths made. Then get the yacht ready to go out at any time.”

One thing more remained; and, going deeper into the

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tin box, John Woolfolk brought out a packet of square envelopes addressed to him in a faded, angular hand. They were all that remained now of his youth, of the past. Not a ghost, not a remembered fragrance nor accent, rose from the delicate paper. They had been the property of a man dead twelve years ago, slain by incomprehensible mischance; and the man in the contracted cabin, vibrating from the elemental and violent forces without, forebore to open them. He burned the packet to a blackish ash on a plate.

It was, he saw from the chronometer, seven o'clock; and he rose charged with tense energy, engaged in activities of a far different order. He unwrapped from many folds of oiled silk a flat, amorphous pistol, uglier in its bleak outline than the familiar weapons of more graceful days; and, sliding into place a filled cartridge clip, he threw a load into the barrel. This he deposited in the pocket of a black wool jacket, closely buttoned about his long, hard body, and went up on deck.

Halvard, in a glistening, yellow coat, came close up to him, speaking with the wind whipping the words from his lips. He said: "She's ready, sir."

For a moment Woolfolk made no answer; he stood gazing anxiously into the dark that enveloped and hid Millie Stope from him. There was another darkness about her, thicker than the mere night, like a black celerment dropping over her soul. His eyes narrowed as he replied to the sailor:

"Good!"

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XI

John Woolfolk peered through the night toward the land.

"Put me ashore beyond the point," he told Halvard; "at a half-sunk wharf on the sea."

The sailor secured the tender; and, dropping into it, held the small boat steady while Woolfolk followed. With a vigorous push they fell away from the *Gar*. Halvard's oars struck the water smartly and forced the tender forward into the beating wind. They made a choppy passage to the rim of the bay, where, turning, they followed the thin, pale glimmer of the broken water on the land's edge. Halvard pulled with short, telling strokes, his oarblades stirring into momentary being livid blurs of phosphorescence.

John Woolfolk guided the boat about the point where he had first seen Millie swimming. He recalled how strange her unexpected appearance had seemed. It had, however, been no stranger than the actuality which had driven her into the bay in the effort to cleanse the stain of Iscah Nicholas' touch. Woolfolk's face hardened; he was suddenly conscious of the cold weight in his pocket. He realized that he would kill Nicholas at the first opportunity and without the slightest hesitation.

The tender passed about the point, and he could hear more clearly the sullen clamor of the waves on the seaward bars. The patches of green sky had grown larger, the clouds swept by with the apparent menace of solid, flying objects. The land lay in a low, formless mass on

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the left. It appeared secretive, a masked place of evil. Its influence reached out and subtly touched John Woolfolk's heart with the premonition of base treacheries. The tormented trees had the sound of Iscah Nicholas sobbing. He must take Millie away immediately; banish its last memory from her mind, its influence from her soul. It was the latter he always feared, which formed his greatest hazard — to tear from her the invidious tendrils of the blighting past.

The vague outline of the ruined wharf swam forward, and the tender slid into the comparative quiet of its partial protection.

“Make fast,” Woolfolk directed. “I shall be out of the boat for a while.” He hesitated; then: “Miss Stope will be here; and if, after an hour, you hear nothing from me, take her out to the ketch for the night. Insist on her going. If you hear nothing from me still, make the first town and report.”

He mounted by a cross pinning to the insecure surface above; and, picking his way to solid earth, waited. He struck a match and, covering the light with his palm, saw that it was ten minutes before eight. Millie, he had thought, would reach the wharf before the hour he had indicated. She would not at any cost be late.

The night was impenetrable. Halvard was as absolutely lost as if he had dropped, with all the world save the bare, wet spot where Woolfolk stood, into a nether region from which floated up great, shuddering gasps of agony. He followed this idea more minutely, picturing the details of such a terrestrial calamity, then he put it from him with an oath. Black thoughts crept insidiously

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into his mind like rats in a cellar. He had ordinarily a rigidly disciplined brain, an incisive logic, and he was disturbed by the distorted visions that came to him unbidden. He wished, in a momentary panic, instantly suppressed, that he was safely away with Millie in the ketch.

He was becoming hysterical, he told himself with compressed lips — no better than Lichfield Stope. The latter rose greyly in his memory, and fled across the sea, a phantom body pulsing with a veined fire like that stirred from the nocturnal bay. He again consulted his watch, and said aloud, incredulously: "Five minutes past eight." The inchoate crawling of his thoughts changed to an acute, tangible doubt, a mounting dread.

He rehearsed the details of his plan, tried it at every turning. It had seemed to him at the moment of its evolving the best — no, the only — thing to do, and it was still without obvious fault. Some trivial happening, an unforeseen need of her father's, had delayed Millie for a minute or two. But the minutes increased and she did not appear. All his conflicting emotions merged into a cold passion of anger. He would kill Nicholas without a word's preliminary. The time drew out, Millie did not materialize, and his anger sank to the realization of appalling possibilities.

He decided that he would wait no longer. In the act of moving forward he thought he heard, rising thinly against the fluctuating wind, a sudden cry. He stopped automatically, listening with every nerve, but there was no repetition of the uncertain sound. As Woolfolk swiftly considered it he was possessed by the feeling that he had not heard the cry with his actual ear but with a deeper,

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more unaccountable sense. He went forward in a blind rush, feeling with extended hands for the opening in the tangle, groping a stumbling way through the close dark of the matted trees. He fell over an exposed root, blundered into a chill, wet trunk, and finally emerged at the side of the desolate mansion. Here his way led through saw grass, waist high, and the blades cut at him like lithe, vindictive knives. No light showed from the face of the house toward him, and he came abruptly against the bay window of the dismantled billiard room.

A sudden caution arrested him—the sound of his approach might precipitate a catastrophe, and he cautiously felt his passage about the house to the portico. The steps creaked beneath his careful tread, but the noise was lost in the wind. At first he could see no light; the hall door, he discovered, was closed; then he was aware of a faint glimmer seeping through a drawn window shade on one side. From without he could distinguish nothing. He listened, but not a sound rose. The stillness was more ominous than cries.

John Woolfolk took the pistol from his pocket and, automatically releasing the safety, moved to the door, opening it with his left hand. The hall was unlighted; he could feel the pressure of the darkness above. The dank silence flowed over him like chill water rising above his heart. He turned, and a dim thread of light, showing through the chink of a partly closed doorway, led him swiftly forward. He paused a moment before entering, shrinking from what might be revealed beyond, and then flung the door sharply open.

His pistol was directed at a low-trimmed lamp in a

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chamber empty of all life. He saw a row of large, black portfolios on low supports, a sewing bag spilled its contents from a chair, a table bore a tin tobacco jar and the empty skin of a plantain. Then his gaze rested upon the floor, on a thin, inanimate body in crumpled alpaca trousers and dark jacket, with a peaked, congested face upturned toward the pale light. It was Lichfield Stope — dead.

Woolfolk bent over him, searching for a mark of violence, for the cause of the other's death. At first he found nothing; then, as he moved the body — its lightness came to him as a shock — he saw that one fragile arm had been twisted and broken; the hand hung like a withered autumn leaf from its circular cuff fastened with the mosaic button. That was all.

He straightened up sharply, with his pistol levelled at the door. But there had been no sound other than that of the wind plucking at the old tin roof, rattling the shrunken frames of the windows. Lichfield Stope had fallen back with his countenance lying on a doubled arm, as if he were attempting to hide from his extinguished gaze the horror of his end. The lamp was of the common, glass variety, without shade; and, in a sudden eddy of air, it flickered, threatened to go out, and a thin ribbon of smoke swept up against the chimney and vanished.

On the wall was a wide, stipple print of the early nineteenth century — the smooth sward of a village glebe surrounded by the low, stone walls of ancient dwellings, with a timbered inn behind broad oaks and a swinging sign. It was — in the print — serenely evening, and long

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shadows slipped out through an ambient glow. Woolfolk, with pistol elevated, became suddenly conscious of the withdrawn scene, and for a moment its utter peace held him spellbound. It was another world, for the security, the unattainable repose of which, he longed with a passionate bitterness.

The wind shifted its direction and beat upon the front of the house; a different set of windows rattled, and the blast swept compact and cold up through the blank hall. John Woolfolk cursed his inertia of mind, and once more addressed the profound, tragic mystery that surrounded him.

He thought: Nicholas has gone — with Millie. Or perhaps he has left her — in some dark, upper space. A maddening sense of impotence settled upon him. If the man had taken Millie out into the night he had no chance of following, finding them. Impenetrable screens of bushes lay on every hand, with, behind them, mile after mile of shrouded pine woods.

His plan had gone terribly amiss, with possibilities which he could not bring himself to face. All that had happened before in his life, and which had seemed so insupportable at the time, faded to insignificance. Shuddering waves of horror swept over him. He raised his hand unsteadily, drew it across his brow, and it came away dripping wet. He was oppressed by the feeling familiar in evil dreams — of gazing with leaden limbs at deliberate, unspeakable acts.

He shook off the numbness of dread. He must act — at once! How? A thousand men could not find Iscah

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Nicholas in the confused darkness without. To raise the scattered and meager neighborhood would consume an entire day.

The wind agitated a rocking chair in the hall, an erratic creaking responded, and Woolfolk started forward, and stopped as he heard and then identified the noise. This, he told himself, would not do; the hysteria was creeping over him again. He shook his shoulders, wiped his palm and took a fresh grip on the pistol.

Then from above came the heavy, unmistakable fall of a foot. It was not repeated; the silence spread once more, broken only from without. But there was no possibility of mistake, there had been no subtlety in the sound — a slow foot had moved, a heavy body had shifted.

At this actuality a new determination seized him; he was conscious of a feeling that almost resembled joy, an immeasurable relief at the prospect of action and retaliation. He took up the lamp, held it elevated while he advanced to the door with ready pistol. There, however, he stopped, realizing the mark he would present moving, conveniently illuminated, up the stair. The floor above was totally unknown to him; at any turning he might be surprised, overcome, rendered useless. He had a supreme purpose to perform. He had already, perhaps fatally, erred, and there must be no further misstep.

John Woolfolk realized that he must go upstairs in the dark, or with, at most, in extreme necessity, a fleeting and guarded matchlight. This, too, since he would be entirely without knowledge of his surroundings, would be inconvenient, perhaps impossible. He must try. He put the lamp back upon the table, moving it farther out of the

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eddy from the door, where it would stay lighted against a possible, pressing need. Then he moved from the wan radiance into the night of the hall.

XII

He formed in his mind the general aspect of the house: its width faced the orange grove, the stair mounted on the hall's right, back of which a door gave to the billiard room; on the left was the chamber of the lamp, and that, he had seen, opened into a room behind, while the kitchen wing, carried to a chamber above, had been obviously added. It was probable that he would find the same general arrangement on the second floor. The hall would be smaller, a space inclosed for a bath, and a means of ascent to the roof.

John Woolfolk mounted the stair quickly and as silently as possible, placing his feet squarely on the body of the steps. At the top the handrail disappeared; and, with his back to a plaster wall, he moved until he encountered a closed door. That interior was above the billiard room; it was on the opposite floor he had heard the footfall, and he was certain that no one had crossed the hall or closed a door. He continued, following the dank wall. At places the plaster had fallen, and his fingers encountered the bare skeleton of the house. Farther on he narrowly escaped knocking down a heavily framed picture — another, he thought, of Lichfield Stope's mezzotints — but he caught it, left it hanging crazily awry.

He passed an open door, recognized the bathroom from the flat odor of chlorides, reached an angle of the wall

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and proceeded with renewed caution. Next he encountered the cold panes of a window and then found the entrance to the room above the kitchen.

He stopped — it was barely possible that the sound he heard had echoed from here. He revolved the wisdom of a match, but — he had progressed very well so far — decided in the negative. One aspect of the situation troubled him greatly — the absence of any sound or warning from Millie. It was highly improbable that his entrance to the house had been unnoticed. The contrary was likely — that his sudden appearance had driven Nicholas above.

Woolfolk started forward more hurriedly, urged by his increasing apprehension, when his foot went into the opening of a depressed step and flung him sharply forward. In his instinctive effort to avoid falling the pistol dropped clattering into the darkness. A sudden, choked cry sounded beside him, and a heavy, enveloping body fell on his back. This sent him reeling against the wall, where he felt the muscles of an unwieldy arm tighten about his neck.

John Woolfolk threw himself back, when a wrist heavily struck his shoulder and a jarring blow fell upon the wall. The hand, he knew, had held a knife, for he could feel it groping desperately over the plaster, and he put all his strength into an effort to drag his assailant into the middle of the floor.

It was impossible now to recover his pistol, but he would make it difficult for Nicholas to get the knife. The struggle in that way was equalized. He turned in the gripping arms about him and the men were chest to chest.

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Neither spoke; each fought solely to get the other prostrate, while Nicholas developed a secondary pressure toward the blade buried in the wall. This Woolfolk successfully blocked. In the supreme effort to bring the struggle to a decisive end neither dealt the other minor injuries. There were no blows — nothing but the straining pull of arms, the sudden weight of bodies, the cunning twisting of legs. They fought swiftly, whirling and staggering from place to place.

The hot breath of an invisible, gaping mouth beat upon Woolfolk's cheek. He was an exceptionally powerful man. His spare body had been hardened by its years of exposure to the elements, in the constant labor he had expended on the ketch, the long contests with adverse winds and seas, and he had little doubt of his issuing successful from the present crisis. Iscah Nicholas, though his strength was beyond question, was heavy and slow. Yet the latter was struggling with surprising agility. He was animated by a convulsive energy, a volcanic outburst characteristic of the obsession of monomania.

The strife continued for an astonishing, an absurd length of time. Woolfolk became infuriated at his inability to bring it to an end, and he expended an even increasing effort. Nicholas' arms were about his chest; he was endeavoring by sheer compression to crush Woolfolk's opposition, when the latter injected his mounting wrath into the conflict. They spun in the open like a grotesque human top, and fell. Woolfolk was momentarily underneath, but he twisted lithely uppermost. He felt a heavy, blunt hand leave his arm and feel, in the dark, for his face. Its purpose was to spoil, and he

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caught it and savagely bent it down and back, but a cruel forcing of his leg defeated his purpose.

This, he realized, could not go on indefinitely; one or the other would soon weaken. An insidious doubt of his ultimate victory lodged like a burr in his brain. Nicholas' strength was inhuman; it increased rather than waned. He was growing vindictive in a petty way — he tore at Woolfolk's throat, dug the flesh from his lower arm. Thereafter warm and gummy blood made John Woolfolk's grip insecure.

The doubt of his success grew; he fought more desperately. His thoughts, which till now had been clear, logically aloof, were blurred in blind spurts of passion. His mentality gradually deserted him; he reverted to lower and lower types of the human animal; during the accumulating seconds of the strife he swung back through countless centuries to the primitive, snarling brute. His shirt was torn from a shoulder, and he felt the sweating, bare skin of his opponent pressed against him.

The conflict continued without diminishing. He struggled once more to his feet, with Nicholas, and they exchanged battering blows, dealt necessarily at random. Sometimes his arm swept violently through mere space, at others his fist landed with a satisfying shock on the body of his antagonist. The dark was occasionally crossed by flashes before Woolfolk's smitten eyes, but no actual light pierced the profound night of the upper hall. At times their struggle grew audible, smacking blows fell sharply, but there was no other sound except that of the wind tearing at the sashes, thundering dully in the loose tin roof, rocking the dwelling.

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They fell again, and equally their efforts slackened, their grips became more feeble. Finally, as if by common consent, they rolled apart. A leaden tide of apathy crept over Woolfolk's battered body, folded his aching brain. He listened in a sort of indifferent attention to the tempestuous breathing of Iscah Nicholas. John Woolfolk wondered dully were Millie was. There had been no sign of her since he had fallen into the step and she had cried out. Perhaps she was dead from fright. He considered this possibility in a hazy, detached manner. She would be better dead — if he failed.

He heard, with little interest, a stirring on the floor beside him, and thought with an overwhelming weariness and distaste that the strife was to commence once more. But, curiously, Nicholas moved away from him. Woolfolk was glad; and then he was puzzled for a moment by the sliding of hands over an invisible wall. He slowly realized that the other was groping for the knife he had buried in the plaster. John Woolfolk considered a similar search for the pistol he had dropped; he might even light a match. It was a rather wonderful weapon and would spray lead like a hose of water. He would like exceedingly well to have it in his hand with Nicholas before him.

Then in a sudden mental illumination he realized the extreme peril of the moment; and, lurching to his feet, he again threw himself on the other.

The struggle went on, apparently to infinity; it was less vigorous now; the blows, for the most part, were impotent. Iscah Nicholas never said a word; and fantastic thoughts wheeled through Woolfolk's brain. He

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lost all sense of the identity of his opponent and became convinced that he was combating an impersonal hulk — the thing that gasped and smeared his face, that strove to end him, was the embodied and evil spirit of the place, a place that even Halvard had seen was damnably wrong. He questioned if such a force could be killed, if a being materialized from the outer dark could be stopped by a pistol of even the latest, most ingenious mechanism.

They fell and rose, and fell. Woolfolk's fingers were twisted in a damp lock of hair; they came away — with the hair. He moved to his knees, and the other followed. For a moment they rested face to face, with arms limply clasped about the opposite shoulders. Then they turned over on the floor; they turned once more, and suddenly the darkness was empty beneath John Woolfolk. He fell down and down, beating his head on a series of sharp edges; while a second, heavy body fell with him, by turns under and above.

XIII

He rose with the ludicrous alacrity of a man who had taken a public and awkward misstep. The wan lamp-light, diffused from within, made just visible the bulk that had descended with him. It lay without motion, sprawling upon a lower step and the floor. John Woolfolk moved backward from it, his hand behind him, feeling for the entrance to the lighted room. He shifted his feet carefully, for the darkness was wheeling about him in visible black rings streaked with palest orange as he passed into the room.

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Here objects, dimensions became normally placed, recognizable. He saw the mezzotint with its sere and sunny peace, the portfolios on their stands, like grotesque and flattened quadrupeds, and Lichfield Stope on the floor, still hiding his dead face in the crook of his arm.

He saw these things, remembered them, and yet now they had new significance — they oozed a sort of vital horror, they seemed to crawl with a malignant and repulsive life. The entire room was charged with this palpable, sentient evil. John Woolfolk defiantly faced the still, cold inclosure; he was conscious of an unseen scrutiny, of a menace that lived in pictures, moved the fingers of the dead, and that could take actual bulk and pound his heart sore.

He was not afraid of the wrongness that inhabited this muck of house and grove and matted bush. He said this loudly to the prostrate form; then, waiting a little, repeated it. He would smash the print with its fallacious expanse of peace. The broken glass of the smitten picture jingled thinly on the floor. Woolfolk turned suddenly and defeated the purpose of whatever had been stealthily behind him; anyway it had disappeared. He stood in a strained attitude, listening to the aberrations of the wind without, when an actual presence slipped by him, stopping in the middle of the floor.

It was Millie Stope. Her eyes were opened to their widest extent, but they had the peculiar blank fixity of the eyes of the blind. Above them her hair slipped and slid in a loosened knot.

“I had to walk round him,” she protested in a low, fluctuating voice, “there was no other way . . . Right

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by his head. My skirt ——” She broke off and, shuddering, came close to John Woolfolk. “I think we’d better go away,” she told him, nodding. “It’s quite impossible here, with him in the hall, where you have to pass so close.”

Woolfolk drew back from her. She too was a part of the house; she had led him there — a white flame that he had followed into the swamp. And this was no ordinary marsh. It was, he added aloud, “A swamp of souls.”

“Then,” she replied, “we must leave at once.”

A dragging sound rose from the hall. Millie Stope cowered in a voiceless access of terror; but John Woolfolk, lamp in hand, moved to the door. He was curious to see exactly what was happening. The bulk had risen, a broad back swayed like a pendulum and a swollen hand gripped the stair rail. The form heaved itself up a step, paused, tottering, and then mounted again. Woolfolk saw at once that the other was going for the knife buried in the wall above. He watched with an impersonal interest the dragging ascent. At the seventh step it ceased, the figure crumpled, slid halfway back to the floor.

“You can’t do it,” Woolfolk observed critically.

The other sat bowed, with one leg extended stiffly downward, on the stair that mounted from the pale radiance of the lamp into impenetrable darkness. Woolfolk moved back into the room and replaced the lamp on its table. Millie Stope still stood with open, hanging hands, a countenance of expectant dread. Her eyes did not shift from the door as he entered and passed her; her gaze hung starkly on what might emerge from the hall.

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A deep loathing of his surroundings swept over John Woolfolk, a sudden revulsion from the dead man on the floor, from the ponderous menace on the stair, the white figure that had brought it all upon him. A mounting horror of the place possessed him, and he turned and incontinently fled. A complete panic enveloped him at his flight, a blind necessity to get away, and he ran heedlessly through the night, with head up and arms extended. His feet struck upon a rotten fragment of board that broke beneath him, he pushed through a tangle of grass, and then his progress was held by soft and dragging sand. A moment later he was halted by a chill flood rising abruptly to his knees. He drew back sharply and fell on the beach, with his heels in the water of the bay.

An insuperable weariness pinned him down, a complete exhaustion of brain and body. A heavy wind struck like a wet cloth on his face. The sky had been swept clear of clouds and stars sparkled in the pure depths of the night. The latter were white, with the exception of one that burned with an unsteady, yellow ray and seemed close by. This, John Woolfolk thought, was strange. He concentrated a frowning gaze upon it—perhaps in falling into the soiled atmosphere of the earth it had lost its crystal gleam and burned with a turgid light. It was very, very probable.

He continued to watch it, facing the tonic wind, until with a clearing of his mind, a gasp of joyful recognition, he knew that it was the riding light of the *Gar*.

Woolfolk sat very still under the pressure of his renewed sanity. Fact upon fact, memory on memory,

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returned, and in proper perspective built up again his mentality, his logic, his scattered powers of being. The *Gar* rode uneasily on her anchor chains; the wind was shifting. They must get away! — Halvard, waiting at the wharf — Millie —

He rose hurriedly to his feet — he had cravenly deserted Millie; left her, in all her anguish, with her dead parent and Iscah Nicholas. His love for her swept back, infinitely heightened by the knowledge of her suffering. At the same time there returned the familiar fear of a permanent disarrangement in her of chords that were unresponsive to the clumsy expedients of affection and science. She had been subjected to a strain that might well unsettle a relatively strong will; and she had been fragile in the beginning.

She must be a part of no more scenes of violence, he told himself, moving hurriedly through the orange grove; she must be led quietly to the tender — that is, if it were not already too late. His entire effort to preserve her had been a series of blunders, each one of which might well have proved fatal, and now, in their entirety, perhaps had.

He mounted to the porch and entered the hall. The light flowed undisturbed from the room on the left; and, in its thin wash, he saw that Iscah Nicholas had disappeared from the lower steps. Immediately, however, and from higher up, he heard a shuffling, and could just make out a form heaving obscurely in the gloom. Nicholas patently was making progress toward the consummation of his one, fixed idea; but Woolfolk decided that at present he could best afford to ignore him.

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He entered the lighted room, and found Millie seated and gazing in dull wonderment at the figure on the floor.

“I must tell you about my father,” she said conversationally. “You know, in Virginia, the women tied an apron to his door because he would not go to war, and for years that preyed on his mind, until he was afraid of the slightest thing. He was without a particle of strength — just to watch the sun cross the sky wearied him, and the smallest disagreement upset him for a week.”

She stopped, lost in amazement at what she contemplated, what was to follow.

“Then Nicholas — But that isn’t important. I was to meet a man — we were going away together, to some place where it would be peaceful. We were to sail there. He said at eight o’clock. Well, at seven Nicholas was in the kitchen. I got father into his very heaviest coat, and laid out a muffler and his gloves, then sat and waited. I didn’t need anything extra, my heart was quite warm. Then father asked why I had changed his coat — if I’d told him, he would have died of fright — he said he was too hot, and he fretted and worried. Nicholas heard him, and he wanted to know why I had put on father’s winter coat. He found the muffler and gloves ready and got suspicious.

“He stayed in the hall, crying a little — Nicholas cried right often — while I sat with father and tried to think of some excuse to get away. At last I had to go — for an orange, I said — but Nicholas wouldn’t believe it. He pushed me back and told me I was going out to the other.

“‘Nicholas,’ I said, ‘don’t be silly; nobody would come away from a boat on a night like this. Besides, he’s

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gone away.' We had that last made up. But he pushed me back again. Then I heard father move behind us, and I thought — he's going to die of fright right now. But father's footsteps came on across the floor and up to my side.

" 'Don't do that, Nicholas,' he told him; 'take your hand from my daughter.' He swayed a little, his lips shook, but he stood facing him. It was father!" Her voice died away, and she was silent for a moment, gazing at the vision of that unsuspected and surprising courage. "Of course Nicholas killed him," she added. "He twisted him away and father died. That didn't matter," she told Woolfolk; "but the other was terribly important, anyone can see that."

John Woolfolk listened intently, but there was no sound from without. Then, with every appearance of leisure, he rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"Splendid!" he said of her recital; "and I don't doubt you're right about the important thing." He moved toward her, holding out his hand. "Splendid! But we must go on — the man is waiting for you."

"It's too late," she responded indifferently. She redirected her thoughts to her parent's enthralling end. "Do you think a man as brave as that should lie on the floor?" she demanded. "A flag," she added obscurely, considering an appropriate covering for the still form.

"No, not on the floor," Woolfolk instantly responded. He bent and, lifting the body of Lichfield Stope, carried it into the hall, where, relieved at the opportunity to dispose of his burden, he left it in an obscure corner.

Iscah Nicholas was stirring again. John Woolfolk

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waited, gazing up the stair, but the other progressed no more than a step. Then he returned to Millie.

"Come," he said. "No time to lose." He took her arm and exerted a gentle pressure toward the door.

"I explained that it was too late," she reiterated, evading him. "Father really lived, but I died. 'Swamp of souls,'" she added in a lower voice. "Someone said that, and it's true; it happened to me."

"The man waiting for you will be worried," he suggested. "He depends absolutely on your coming."

"Nice man. Something had happened to him too. He caught a rockfish and Nicholas boiled it in milk for our breakfast." At the mention of Iscah Nicholas a slight shiver passed over her. This was what Woolfolk hoped for — a return of her normal revulsion from her surroundings, from the past.

"Nicholas," he said sharply, contradicted by a faint dragging from the stair, "is dead."

"If you could only assure me of that," she replied wistfully. "If I could be certain that he wasn't in the next shadow I'd go gladly. Any other way it would be useless." She laid her hand over her heart. "I must get him out of here — My father did. His lips trembled a little, but he said quite clearly: 'Don't do that. Don't touch my daughter.'"

"Your father was a singularly brave man," he assured her, rebelling against the leaden monotony of speech that had fallen upon them. "Your mother too was brave," he temporized. He could, he decided, wait no longer. She must, if necessary, be carried away forcibly. It was a desperate chance — the least pressure

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might result in a permanent, jangling discord. Her waist, torn, he saw, upon her pallid shoulder, was insufficient covering against the wind and night. Looking about he discovered the muffler, laid out for her father, crumpled on the floor; and, with an arm about her, folded it over her throat and breast.

“Now we’re away,” he declared in a forced lightness.

She resisted him for a moment, and then collapsed into his support.

John Woolfolk half led, half carried her into the hall. His gaze searched the obscurity of the stair; it was empty; but from above came the sound of a heavy, dragging step.

XIV

Outside she cowered pitifully from the violent blast of the wind, the boundless, stirred space. They made their way about the corner of the house, leaving behind the pale, glimmering rectangle of the lighted window. In the thicket Woolfolk was forced to proceed more slowly. Millie stumbled weakly over the rough way, apparently at the point of slipping to the ground. He felt a supreme relief when the cool sweep of the sea opened before him and Halvard emerged from the gloom.

He halted for a moment, with his arm about Millie’s shoulders, facing his man. Even in the dark he was conscious of Poul Halvard’s stalwart being, of his rock-like integrity.

“I was delayed,” he said finally, amazed at the inadequacy of his words to express the pressure of the past hours. Had they been two or four? He had been

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totally unconscious of the passage of actual time. In the dark house behind the orange grove he had lived through tormented ages, descended into depths beyond the measured standard of Greenwich. Halvard said:

“ Yes, sir.”

The sound of a blundering progress rose from the path behind them, the breaking of branches and the slipping of a heavy tread on the water-soaked ground. John Woolfolk, with an oath, realized that it was Nicholas, still animated by his fixed, maniacal idea. Millie Stope recognized the sound, too, for she trembled abjectly on his arm. He knew that she could support no more violence, and he turned to the dim, square-set figure before him.

“ Halvard, it's that fellow Nicholas. He's insane — has a knife. Will you stop him while I get Miss Stope into the tender? She's pretty well done.” He laid his hand on the other's shoulder as he started immediately forward. “ I shall have to go on, Halvard, if anything unfortunate occurs,” he said in a different voice.

The sailor made no reply; but as Woolfolk urged Millie out over the wharf he saw Halvard throw himself upon a dark bulk that broke from the wood.

The tender was made fast fore and aft; and, getting down into the uneasy boat, Woolfolk reached up and lifted Millie bodily to his side. She dropped in a still, white heap on the bottom. He unfastened the painter and stood holding the tender close to the wharf, with his head above its platform, straining his gaze in the direction of the obscure struggle on land.

He could see nothing, and heard only an occasional

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trampling of the underbrush. It was difficult to remain detached, give no assistance, while Halvard encountered Iscah Nicholas. Yet with Millie in a semi-collapse, and the bare possibility of Nicholas' knifing them both, he felt that this was his only course. Halvard was an unusually powerful, active man, and the other must have suffered from the stress of his long conflict in the hall.

The thing terminated speedily. There was the sound of a heavy fall, a diminishing thrashing in the saw grass, and silence. An indistinguishable form advanced over the wharf, and Woolfolk prepared to shove the tender free. But it was Poul Halvard. He got down, Woolfolk thought, clumsily, and mechanically assumed his place at the oars. Woolfolk sat aft, with an arm about Millie Stope. The sailor said fretfully:

"I stopped him. He was all pumped out. Missed his hand at first — the dark — a scratch."

He rested on the oars, fingering his shoulder. The tender swung dangerously near the corrugated rock of the shore, and Woolfolk sharply directed: "Keep way on her."

"Yes, sir," Halvard replied, once more swinging into his short, efficient stroke. It was, however, less sure than usual; an oar missed its hold and skittered impotently over the water, drenching Woolfolk with a brief, cold spray. Again the bow of the tender dipped into the point of land they were rounding, and John Woolfolk spoke more abruptly than before.

He was seriously alarmed about Millie. Her face was apathetic, almost blank, and her arms hung across his

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knees with no more response than a doll's. He wondered desperately if, as she had said, her spirit had perished; if the Millie Stope that had moved him so swiftly and tragically from his long indifference, his aversion to life, had gone, leaving him more hopelessly bereaved than before. The sudden extinction of Ellen's life had been more supportable than Millie's crouching dumbly at his feet. His arm unconsciously tightened about her, and she gazed up with a momentary, questioning flicker of her wide-opened eyes. He repeated her name in a deep whisper, but her head fell forward loosely, and left him in racking doubt.

Now he could see the shortly swaying riding light of the *Gar*. Halvard was propelling them vigorously but erratically forward. At times he remuttered his declarations about the encounter with Nicholas. The stray words reached Woolfolk:

“Stopped him — the cursed dark — a scratch.”

He brought the tender awkwardly alongside the ketch, with a grinding shock, and held the boats together while John Woolfolk shifted Millie to the deck. Woolfolk took her immediately into the cabin; where, lighting a swinging lamp, he placed her on one of the prepared berths and endeavored to wrap her in a blanket. But, in a shuddering access of fear, she rose with outheld palms.

“Nicholas!” she cried shrilly. “There — at the door!”

He sat beside her, restraining her convulsive effort to cower in a far, dark angle of the cabin.

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"Nonsense!" he told her brusquely. "You are on the *Gar*. You are safe. In an hour you will be in a new world."

"With John Woolfolk?"

"I am John Woolfolk."

"But he — you — left me."

"I am here," he insisted with a tightening of the heart. He rose, animated by an overwhelming necessity to get the ketch under way, to leave at once, forever, the invisible shore of the bay. He gently folded her again in the blanket, but she resisted him. "I'd rather stay up," she said with a sudden lucidity. "It's nice here; I wanted to come before, but he wouldn't let me."

A glimmer of hope swept over him as he mounted swiftly to the deck. "Get up the anchors," he called; "reef down the jigger and put on a handful of jib."

There was no immediate response, and he peered over the obscured deck in search of Halvard. The man rose slowly from a sitting posture by the main boom. "Very good, sir," he replied in a forced tone.

He disappeared forward, while Woolfolk, shutting the cabin door on the confusing illumination within, lighted the binnacle lamp, bent over the engine, swiftly making connections and adjustments, and cranked the wheel with a sharp, expert turn. The explosions settled into a dull, regular succession, and he coupled the propeller and slowly maneuvered the ketch up over the anchors, reducing the strain on the hawsers and allowing Halvard to get in the slack. He waited impatiently for the sailor's cry of all clear, and demanded the cause of the delay.

"The light slipped," the other called in a muffled,

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angry voice. "One's clear now," he added. "Bring her up again." The ketch forged ahead, but the wait was longer than before. "Caught," Halvard's voice drifted thinly aft; "coral ledge." Woolfolk held the *Gar* stationary until the sailor cried weakly: "Anchor's apeak."

They moved imperceptibly through the dark, into the greater force of the wind beyond the point. The dull roar of the breaking surf ahead grew louder. Halvard should have had the jib up and been aft at the jigger, but he failed to appear. John Woolfolk wondered, in a mounting impatience, what was the matter with the man. Finally an obscure form passed him and hung over the housed sail, stripping its cover and removing the stops. The sudden thought of a disconcerting possibility banished Woolfolk's annoyance. "Halvard," he demanded, "did Nicholas knife you?"

"A scratch," the other stubbornly reiterated. "I'll tie it up later. No time now — I stopped him permanent."

The jigger, reefed to a mere irregular patch, rose with a jerk, and the ketch rapidly left the protection of the shore. She dipped sharply and, flattened over by a violent ball of wind, buried her rail in the black, swinging water, and there was a small crash of breaking china from within. The wind appeared to sweep high up in empty space and occasionally descend to deal the yacht a staggering blow. The bar, directly ahead — as Halvard had earlier pointed out — was now covered with the smother of a lowering tide. The pass, the other had discovered, too, had filled. It was charted at four feet, the *Gar* drew a full three, and

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Woolfolk knew that there must be no error, no uncertainty, in running out.

Halvard was so long in stowing away the jigger shears that Woolfolk turned to make sure that the sailor had not been swept from the deck. The "scratch," he was certain, was deeper than the other admitted. When they were safely at sea he would insist upon an examination.

The subject of this consideration fell rather than stepped into the cockpit, and stood rocked by the motion of the swells, clinging to the cabin's edge. Woolfolk shifted the engine to its highest speed, and they were driving through the tempestuous dark onto the bar. He was now confronted by the necessity for an immediate decision. Halvard or himself would have to stand forward, clinging precariously to a stay, and repeatedly sound the depth of the shallowing water as they felt their way out to sea. He gazed anxiously at the dark bulk before him, and saw that the sailor had lost his staunchness of outline, his aspect of invincible determination.

"Halvard," he demanded again sharply, "this is no time for pretense. How are you?"

"All right," the other repeated desperately, through clenched teeth. "I've — I've taken knives from men before — on the docks at Stockholm. I missed his hand at first — it was the night."

The cabin door swung open, and a sudden lurch flung Millie Stope against the wheel. Woolfolk caught and held her until the wave rolled by. She was ridden by terror, and held abjectly to the rail while the next swell lifted them upward. He attempted to urge her back to the protection of the cabin, but she resisted with such a con-

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vulsive determination that he relinquished the effort and enveloped her in his glistening oilskin.

This had consumed a perilous amount of time; and, swiftly decisive, he commanded Halvard to take the wheel. He swung himself to the deck and secured the long sounding pole. He could see ahead on either side the dim white bars forming and dissolving, and called to the man at the wheel:

“Mark the breakers! Fetch her between.”

On the bow, leaning out over the surging tide, he drove the sounding pole forward and down, but it floated back free. They were not yet on the bar. The ketch heeled until the black plain of water rose above his knees, driving at him with a deceitful force, sinking back slowly as the yacht straightened buoyantly. He again sounded, the pole struck bottom, and he cried:

“Five.”

The infuriated beating of the waves on the obstruction drawn across their path drowned his voice, and he shouted the mark once more. Then after another sounding:

“Four and three.”

The yacht fell away dangerously before a heavy, diagonal blow; she hung for a moment, rolling like a log, and then slowly regained her way. Woolfolk's apprehension increased. It would, perhaps, have been better if they had delayed, to examine Halvard's injury. The man had insisted that it was of no moment, and John Woolfolk had been driven by a consuming desire to leave the miasmatic shore. He swung the pole forward and cried:

“Four and a half.”

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The water was shoaling rapidly. The breaking waves on the port and starboard hissed by with lightning rapidity. The ketch veered again, shipped a crushing weight of water, and responded more slowly than before to a tardy pressure of the rudder. The greatest peril, John Woolfolk knew, lay directly before them. He realized from the action of the ketch that Halvard was steering uncertainly, and that at any moment the *Gar* might strike and fall off too far for recovery, when she could not live in the pounding surf.

"Four and one," he cried hoarsely. And then immediately after: "Four."

Chance had been against him from the first, he thought, and there flashed through his mind the dark panorama, the accumulating disasters of the night. A negation lay upon his existence that would not be lifted. It had followed him like a sinister shadow for years to this obscure, black smother of water, to the *Gar* reeling crazily forward under an impotent hand. The yacht was behaving heroically; no other ketch could have lived so long, responded so gallantly to a wavering wheel.

"Three and three," he shouted above the combined stridor of wind and sea.

The next minute would witness their safe passage or a helpless hulk beating to pieces on the bar, with three human fragments whirling under the crushing masses of water, floating, perhaps, with the dawn into the tranquillity of the bay.

"Three and a half," he cried monotonously.

The *Gar* trembled like a wounded and dull animal. The solid seas were reaching hungrily over Woolfolk's

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legs. A sudden stolidity possessed him. He thrust the pole out deliberately, skillfully:

“Three and a quarter.”

A lower sounding would mean the end. He paused for a moment, his dripping face turned to the far stars, his lips moved in silent, unformulated aspirations — Halvard and himself, in the sea that had been their home; but Millie was so fragile! He made the sounding precisely, between the heaving swells, and marked the pole instantly driven backward by their swinging flight.

“Three and a half.” His voice held a new, uncontrollable quiver. He sounded again immediately: “And three-quarters.”

They had passed the bar.

XV

A gladness like the white flare of burning powder swept over him, and then he became conscious of other, minor sensations — his head ached intolerably from the fall down the stair, and a grinding pain shot through his shoulder, lodging in his torn lower arm at the slightest movement. He slipped the sounding pole into its loops on the cabin and hastily made his way aft to the relief of Poul Halvard.

The sailor was nowhere visible; but, in an intermittent, reddish light that faded and swelled as the cabin door swung open and shut, Woolfolk saw a white figure clinging to the wheel — Millie.

Instantly his hands replaced hers on the spokes and, as if with a palpable sigh of relief, the *Gar* steadied to

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her course. Millie Stope clung to the deck rail, sobbing with exhaustion.

“He’s — he’s dead!” she exclaimed, between her racking inspirations. She pointed to the floor of the cockpit, and there, sliding grotesquely with the motion of the sea-way, was Poul Halvard. An arm was flung out, as if in ward against the ketch’s side, but it crumpled, the body hit heavily, a hand seemed to clutch at the boards it had so often and thoroughly swabbed, but without avail. The face momentarily turned upward; it was haggard beyond expression, and bore stamped upon it, in lines that resembled those of old age, the agonized struggle against the inevitable last treachery of life.

“When ——” John Woolfolk stopped in sheer, leaden amazement.

“Just when you called ‘Three and a quarter.’ Before that he had fallen on his knees. He begged me to help him hold the wheel. He said you’d be lost if I didn’t. He talked all the time about keeping her head up and up. I helped him. Your voice came back years apart. At the last he was on the floor, holding the bottom of the wheel. He told me to keep it steady, dead ahead. His voice grew so weak that I couldn’t hear; and then all at once he slipped away. I — I held on — called to you. But against the wind ——”

He braced his knee against the wheel and, leaning out, found the jigger sheet and flattened the reefed sail; he turned to where the jib sheet led after, and then swung the ketch about. The yacht rode smoothly, slipping forward over the long, even ground swell, and he turned with immeasurable emotion to the woman beside him.

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The light from the cabin flooded out over her face, and he saw that, miraculously, the fear had gone. Her countenance was drawn with weariness and the hideous strain of the past minutes, but her gaze squarely met the night and sea. Her chin was lifted, its graceful line firm, and her mouth was in repose. She had, as he had recognized she alone must, conquered the legacy of Lichfield Stope; while he, John Woolfolk, and Halvard, had put Nicholas out of her life. She was free.

“If you could go below ——” he suggested. “In the morning, with this wind, we’ll be at anchor under a fringe of palms, in water like a blue-silk counterpane.”

“I think I could now, with you,” she replied. She pressed her lips, salt and enthralling, against his face, and made her way into the cabin. He locked the wheel momentarily and, following, wrapped her in the blankets, on the new sheets prepared for her coming. Then, putting out the light, he shut the cabin door and returned to the wheel.

The body of Poul Halvard struck his feet and rested there. A good man, born by the sea, who had known its every expression; with a faithful and simple heart, as such men occasionally had.

The diminished wind swept in a clear diapason through the pellucid sky; the resplendent sea reached vast and magnetic to its invisible horizon. A sudden distaste seized John Woolfolk for the dragging death ceremonials of land. Halvard had known the shore mostly as a turbulent and unclean strip that had finally brought about his end.

He leaned forward and found beyond any last doubt

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that the other was dead; a black, clotted surface adhered to the wound which his pride, his invincible determination, had driven him to deny.

In the space beneath the afterdeck Woolfolk found a spare folded anchor for the tender, a length of rope, and he slowly completed the preparations for his purpose. He lifted the body to the narrow deck outside the rail, and, in a long dip, the waves carried it smoothly and soundlessly away. John Woolfolk said:

“ . . . Commit his body to the deep, looking for the general resurrection . . . through . . . Christ.’ ”

Then, upright and motionless at the wheel, with the wan radiance of the binnacle lamp floating up over his hollow cheeks and set gaze, he held the ketch southward through the night.

TUBAL CAIN

I

ALEXANDER HULINGS sat at the dingy, green-baize covered table, with one slight knee hung loosely over the other, and his tenuous fingers lightly gripping the time-polished wooden arms of a hickory chair. He was staring somberly, with an immobile, thin, dark countenance, at the white plaster wall before him. Close by his right shoulder a window opened on a tranquil street, where the vermilion maple buds were splitting; and beyond the window a door was ajar on a plank sidewalk. Some shelves held crumbling yellow calf-bound volumes, a few new, with glazed black labels; at the back was a small cannon stove, with an elbow of pipe let into the plaster; a large steel engraving of Chief Justice Marshall hung on the wall; and in a farther corner a careless pile of paper, folded in docketts or tied with casual string, was collecting a grey film of neglect. A small banjo clock, with a brass-railed pediment and an elongated picture in color of the Exchange at Manchester, traced the regular, monotonous passage of minutes into hour.

The hour extended, doubled; but Alexander Hulings barely shifted a knee, a hand. At times a slight convulsive shudder passed through his shoulders, but without

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affecting his position or the concentrated gloom. Occasionally he swallowed dryly; his grip momentarily tightened on the chair, but his gaze was level. The afternoon waned; a sweet breath of flowering magnolia drifted in at the door; the light grew tender; and footfalls without sounded far away. Suddenly Hulings moved; his chair scraped harshly over the bare floor and he strode abruptly outside, where he stood facing a small tin sign nailed near the door. It read:

ALEXANDER HULINGS
COUNSELOR AT LAW

With a violent gesture, unpremeditated even by himself, he forced his hand under an edge of the sign and ripped it from its place. Then he went back and flung it bitterly, with a crumpling impact, away from him, and resumed his place at the table.

It was the end of that! He had practiced law seven, nine, years, detesting its circuitous trivialities, uniformly failing to establish a professional success, without realizing his utter legal unfitness. Before him on a scrap of paper were the figures of his past year's activities. He had made something over nine hundred dollars. And he was thirty-four years old! Those facts, seen together, dinned failure in his brain. There were absolutely no indications of a brighter future. Two other actualities added to the gloom of his thoughts — one was Hallie Flower, that would have to be encountered at once, this evening; and the other was — his health.

He was reluctant to admit any question of the latter;

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he had the feeling, almost a superstition, that such an admission increased whatever, if anything, was the matter with him. It was vague, but increasingly disturbing; he had described it with difficulty to Doctor Veneada, his only intimate among the Eastlake men, as a sensation like that a fiddlestring might experience when tightened remorselessly by a blundering hand.

“At any minute,” he had said, “the damned thing must go!”

Veneada had frowned out of his whiskers.

“What you need,” the doctor had decided, “is a complete change. You are strung up. Go away; forget the law for two or three months. The Mineral is the place for you.”

Alexander Hulings couldn't afford a month or more at the Mineral Spring; and he had said so with the sharpness that was one of the disturbing symptoms of his condition. He had had several letters, though, throughout a number of years, from James Claypole, a cousin of his mother, asking him out to Tubal Cain, the iron forge which barely kept Claypole alive; and he might manage that — if it were not for Hallie Flower. There the conversation had come to an inevitable conclusion.

Now, in a flurry of violence that was, nevertheless, the expression of complete purpose, he had ended his practice, his only livelihood; and that would — must — end Hallie.

He had been engaged to her from the day when, together, they had, with a pretense of formality, opened his office in Eastlake. He had determined not to marry until he made a thousand dollars in a year; and, as year after

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year slipped by without his achieving that amount, their engagement had come to resemble the unemotional contact of a union without sex. Lately Hallie had seemed almost content with duties in her parental home and the three evenings weekly that Alexander spent with her in the formal propriety of a front room.

His own feelings defied analysis; but it seemed to him that, frankly surveyed, even his love for Hallie Flower had been swallowed up in the tide of irritability rising about him. He felt no active sorrow at the knowledge that he was about to relinquish all claim upon her; his pride stirred resentfully; the evening promised to be uncomfortable — but that was all.

The room swam about him in a manner that had grown hatefully familiar; he swayed in his chair; and his hands were first numb with cold and then wet by perspiration. A sinking fear fastened on him, an inchoate dread that he fought bitterly. It wasn't death from which Alexander Hulings shuddered, but a crawling sensation that turned his knees to dust. He was a slight man, with narrow shoulders and close-swinging arms, but as rigidly erect as an iron bar; his mentality was like that too, and he particularly detested the variety of nerves that had settled on him.

A form blocked the doorway, accentuating the dusk that had swiftly gathered in the office, and Veneada entered. His neckcloth was, as always, carelessly folded, and his collar hid in rolls of fat; a cloak was thrown back from a wide girth and he wore an incongruous pair of buff linen trousers.

“What's this — mooning in the dark?” he demanded.

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“Thought you hadn’t locked the office door. Come out; fill your lungs with the spring and your stomach with supper.”

Without reply, Alexander Hulings followed the other into the street.

“I am going to Hallie’s,” he said in response to Veneada’s unspoken query.

Suddenly he felt that he must conclude everything at once and get away; where and from what he didn’t know. It was not his evening to see Hallie and she would be surprised when he came up on the step. The Flowers had supper at five; it would be over now, and Hallie finished with the dishes and free. Alexander briefly told Veneada his double decision.

“In a way,” the other said, “I’m glad. You must get away for a little anyway; and you are accomplishing nothing here in Eastlake. You are a rotten lawyer, Alexander; any other man would have quit long ago; but your infernal stubbornness held you to it. You are not a small-town man. You see life in a different, a wider way. And if you could only come on something where your pig-headedness counted there’s no saying where you’d reach. I’m sorry for Hallie; she’s a nice woman, and you could get along well enough on nine hundred ——”

“I said I’d never marry until I made a thousand in a year,” Hulings broke in, exasperated.

“Good heavens! Don’t I know that?” Veneada replied. “And you won’t, you — you mule! I guess I’ve suffered enough from your confounded character to know what it means when you say a thing. I think you’re

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right about this. Go up to that fellow Claypole and show him what brittle stuff iron is compared to yourself. Seriously, Alex, get out and work like the devil at a heavy job; go to bed with your back ruined and your hands raw. You know I'll miss you — means a lot to me, best friend."

A deep embarrassment was visible on Veneada; it was communicated to Alexander Hulings, and he was relieved when they drew opposite the Flowers' dwelling.

It was a narrow, high, brick structure, with a portico cap, supported by cast-iron grilling, and shallow iron-railed balconies on the second story. A gravel path divided a small lawn beyond a gate guarded by two stone greyhounds. Hallie emerged from the house with an expression of mild inquiry at his unexpected appearance. She was a year older than himself, an erect, thin woman, with a pale coloring and unstirred blue eyes.

"Why, Alex," she remarked, "whatever brought you here on a Saturday?" They sat, without further immediate speech, from long habit, in familiar chairs.

He wondered how he was going to tell her? And the question, the difficulty, roused in him an astonishing amount of exasperation. He regarded her almost vindictively, with covertly shut hands. He must get hold of himself. Hallie, to whom he was about to do irreparable harm, the kindest woman in existence! But he realized that whatever feeling he had had for her was gone forever; she had become merged indistinguishably into the thought of Eastlake; and every nerve in him demanded a total separation from the slumberous town that had witnessed his legal failure.

TUBAL CAIN

He wasn't, he knew, normal; his intention here was reprehensible, but he was without will to defeat it. Alexander Hulings felt the clumsy hand drawing tighter the string he had pictured himself as being; an overwhelming impulse overtook him to rush away — anywhere, immediately. He said in a rapid blurred voice:

“Hallie, this — our plans are a failure — that is, I am. The law's been no good; I mean, I haven't. Can't get the hang of the — the damned ——”

“Alex!” she interrupted, astonished at the expletive.

“I'm going away,” he gabbled on, only half conscious of his words in waves of giddy insecurity. “Yes; for good. . . . I'm no use here! Shot to pieces, somehow. Forgive me. Never get a thousand.”

Hallie Flower said in a tone of unpremeditated surprise:

“Then I'll never be married!”

She sat with her hands open in her lap, a wistfulness on her countenance that he found only silly. He cursed himself, his impotence, bitterly. Now he wanted to get away; but there remained an almost more impossible consummation — Hallie's parents. They were old; she was an only child.

“Your father ——” he muttered.

On his feet he swayed like a pendulum. Viselike fingers gripped at the back of his neck. The hand of death? Incredibly he lived through a stammering, racking period, in the midst of which a cuckoo ejaculated seven idiotic notes from the fretted face of a clock.

He was on the street again; the cruel pressure was relaxed; he drew a deep breath. In his room, a select chamber with a “private” family, he packed and strapped

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his small leather trunk. There was nowhere among his belongings a suggestion of any souvenir of the past, anything sentimental or charged with memory. A daguerreotype of Hallie Flower, in an embossed black case lined with red plush, he ground into a shapeless fragment. Afterward he was shocked by what he had done and was forced to seek the support of a chair. He clenched his jaw, gazed with stony eyes against the formless dread about him.

He had forgotten that the next day was Sunday, with a corresponding dislocation of the train and packet service which was to take him West. A further wait until Monday was necessary. Alexander Hulings got through that too; and was finally seated with Veneada in his light wagon, behind a clattering pair of young Hambletonians, with the trunk secured in the rear. Veneada was taking him to a station on the Columbus Railroad. Though the morning had hardly advanced, and Hulings had wrapped himself in a heavy cape, the doctor had only a duster, unbuttoned, on his casual clothing.

“You know, Alex,” the latter said — “and let me finish before you start to object — that I have more money than I can use. And, though I know you wouldn’t just borrow any for cigars, if there ever comes a time when you need a few thousands, if you happen on something that looks good for both of us, don’t fail to let me know. You’ll pull out of this depression; I think you’re a great man, Alex — because you are so unpleasant, if for nothing else.”

The doctor’s weighty hand fell affectionately on Hulings’ shoulder.

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Hulings involuntarily moved from the other's contact; he wanted to leave all — all of Eastlake. Once away, he was certain, his being would clarify, grow more secure. He even neglected to issue a characteristic abrupt refusal of Veneada's implied offer of assistance; though all that he possessed, now strapped in his wallet, was a meager provision for a debilitated man who had cast safety behind him.

The doctor pulled his horses in beside a small, box-like station, on flat tracks, dominated by a stout pole, to which was nailed a ladderlike succession of cross blocks.

Alexander Hulings was infinitely relieved when the other, after some last professional injunctions, drove away. Already, he thought, he felt better; and he watched, with a faint stirring of normal curiosity, the station master climb the pole and survey the mid-distance for the approaching train.

The engine finally rolled fussily into view, with a lurid, black column of smoke pouring from a thin belled stack, and dragging a rocking, precarious brigade of chariot coaches scrolled in bright yellow and staring blue. It stopped, with a fretful ringing and a grinding impact of coach on coach. Alexander Hulings' trunk was shouldered to a roof; and after an inspection of the close interiors he followed his baggage to an open seat above. The engine gathered momentum; he was jerked rudely forward and blinded by a cloud of smoke streaked with flaring cinders.

There was a faint cry at his back, and he saw a woman clutching a charring hole in her crinoline. The railroad journey was an insuperable torment; the diminishing

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crash at the stops, either at a station or where cut wood was stacked to fire the engine, the choking hot waves of smoke, the shouted confabulations between the captain and the engineer, forward on his precarious ledge — all added to an excruciating torture of Hulings' racked and shuddering nerves. His rigid body was thrown from side to side; his spine seemed at the point of splintering from the pounding of the wooden rails.

An utter mental dejection weighed down his shattered being; it was not the past but the future that oppressed him. Perhaps he was going only to die miserably in an obscure hole; Veneada probably wouldn't tell him the truth about his condition. What he most resented, with a tenuous spark of his customary obstinate spirit, was the thought of never justifying a belief he possessed in his ultimate power to conquer circumstance, to be greatly successful.

Veneada, a man without flattery, had himself used that word "great" in connection with him.

Alexander Hulings felt dimly, even now, a sense of cold power; a hunger for struggle different from a petty law practice in Eastlake. He thought of the iron that James Claypole unsuccessfully wrought; and something in the word, the implied obdurate material, fired his disintegrating mind. "Iron!" Unconsciously he spoke the word aloud. He was entirely ignorant of what, exactly, it meant; what were the processes of its fluxing and refinement; forge and furnace were hardly separated in his thoughts. But out of the confusion emerged the one concrete stubborn fact — iron!

He was drawn, at last, over a level grassy plain, at

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the far edge of which evening and clustered houses merged on a silver expanse of river. It was Columbus, where he found the canal packets lying in the terminal-station basin.

II

The westbound packet, the *Hit or Miss*, started with a long horn blast and the straining of the mules at the towrope. The canal boat slipped into its placid banked waterway. Supper was being laid in the gentlemen's cabin and Alexander Hulings was unable to secure a berth. The passengers crowded at a single long table; and the low interior, steaming with food, echoing with clattering china and a ceaseless gabble of voices, confused him intolerably. He made his way to the open space at the rear. The soundless, placid movement at once soothed him and was exasperating in its slowness. He thought of his journey as an escape, an emergence from a suffocating cloud; and he raged at its deliberation.

The echoing note of a *cornet-à-piston* sounded from the deck above; it was joined by the rattle of a drum; and an energetic band swept into the strains of Zip Coon. The passengers emerged from supper and gathered on the main deck; the gayly lighted windows streamed in moving yellow bars over dark banks and fields; and they were raised or lowered on the pouring black tide of masoned locks. If it had not been for the infernal persistence of the band Alexander Hulings would have been almost comfortable; but the music, at midnight, showed no signs of abating. Money was collected, whisky distributed; a quadrille formed forward. Hulings could

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see the women's crinolines, the great sleeves and skirts, dipping and floating in a radiance of oil torches. He had a place in a solid bank of chairs about the outer rail, and sat huddled in his cape. His misery, as usual, increased with the night; the darkness was streaked with immaterial flashes, disjointed visions. He was infinitely weary, and faint from a hunger that he yet could not satisfy. A consequential male at his side, past middle age, with close whiskers and a mob of seals, addressed a commonplace to him; but he made no reply. The other regarded Hulings with an arrogant surprise, then turned a negligent back. From beyond came a clear, derisive peal of girlish laughter. He heard a name — Gisela — pronounced.

Alexander Hulings' erratic thoughts returned to iron. He wondered vaguely why James Claypole had never succeeded with Tubal Cain. Probably, like so many others, he was a drunkard. The man who had addressed him moved away — he was accompanied by a small party; and another took his vacant place.

"See who that was?" he asked Hulings. The latter shook his head morosely. "Well, that," the first continued impressively, "is John Wooddrop."

Alexander Hulings had an uncertain memory of the name, connected with —

"Yes, sir — John Wooddrop, the Ironmaster. I reckon that man is the biggest — not only the richest but the biggest — man in the state. Thousands of acres, mile after mile; iron banks and furnaces and forges and mills; hundreds of men and women — all his. Like a European monarch! Yes, sir; resembles that. Word's law — says 'Come here!' or 'Go there!' His daughter is with him

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too; it's clear she's got the old boy's spirit — and his lady. They get off at Harmony; own the valley; own everything about."

Harmony was the place where Hulings was to leave the canal; from there he must drive to Tubal Cain. The vicarious boastfulness of his neighbor stirred within him an inchoate antagonism.

"There is one place near by he doesn't own," he stated sharply.

"Then it's no good," the other promptly replied. "If it was Wooddrop would have it. It would be his or nothing — he'd see to that. His name is Me, or nobody."

Alexander Hulings' antagonism increased and illogically fastened on the Ironmaster. The other's character, as it had been stated, was precisely the quality that called to the surface his own stubborn will of self-assertion. It precipitated a condition in which he expanded, grew determined, ruthless, cold.

He imagined himself, sick and almost moneyless, and bound for Claypole's failure, opposed to John Wooddrop, and got a faint thrill from the fantastic vision. He had a recurrence of the conviction that he, too, was a strong man; and it tormented him with the bitter contrast between such an image and his actual present self. He laughed aloud, a thin, shaken giggle, at his belief persisting in the face of such irrefutable proof of his failure. Nevertheless, it was firmly lodged in him, like a thorn pricking at his dissolution, gathering his scattered faculties into efforts of angry contempt at the laudation of others.

Veneada and Hallie Flower, he realized, were the only

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intimates he had gathered in a solitary and largely embittered existence. He had no instinctive humanity of feeling, and his observations, colored by his spleen, had not added to a small opinion of man at large. Always feeling himself to be a figure of supreme importance, he had never ceased to chafe at the small aspect he was obliged to exhibit. This had grown, through an uncomfortable sense of shame, to a perpetual disparagement of all other triumph and success.

Finally the band ceased its efforts, the oil lights burned dim, and a movement to the cabins proceeded, leaving him on a deserted deck. At last, utterly exhausted, he went below in search of a berth. They hung four deep about the walls, partly curtained, while the floor of the cabin was filled with clothesracks, burdened with a miscellany of outer garments. One place only was empty — under the ceiling; and he made a difficult ascent to the narrow space. Sleep was an impossibility — a storm of hoarse breathing, muttering and sleepy oaths dinned on his ears. The cabin, closed against the outer air, grew indescribably polluted. Any former torment of mind and body was minor compared to the dragging wakeful hours that followed; a dread of actual insanity seized him.

Almost at the first trace of dawn the cabin was awakened and filled with fragmentary dressing. The deck and bar were occupied by men waiting for the appearance of the feminine passengers from their cabin forward, and breakfast. The day was warm and fine. The packet crossed a turgid river, at the mouths of other canal routes, and entered a wide pastoral valley.

Alexander Hulings sat facing a smaller, various river;

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at his back was a barrier of mountains, glossy with early laurel and rhododendron. His face was yellow and sunken, and his lips dry. John Wooddrop passed and repassed him, a girl, his daughter Gisela, on his arm. She wore an India muslin dress, wide with crinoline, embroidered in flowers of blue and green worsted, and a flapping rice-straw hat draped in blond lace. Her face was pointed and alert.

Once Hulings caught her glance, and he saw that her eyes seemed black and — and — impertinent.

An air of palpable satisfaction emanated from the Ironmaster. His eyes were dark too; and, more than impertinent, they held for Hulings an intolerable patronage. John Wooddrop's foot trod the deck with a solid authority that increased the sick man's smoldering scorn. At dinner he had an actual encounter with the other. The table was filling rapidly; Alexander Hulings had taken a place when Wooddrop entered with his group and surveyed the seats that remained.

"I am going to ask you," he addressed Hulings in a deep voice, "to move over yonder. That will allow my family to surround me."

A sudden unreasonable determination not to move seized Hulings. He said nothing; he didn't turn his head nor disturb his position. John Wooddrop repeated his request in still more vibrant tones. Hulings did nothing. He was held in a silent rigidity of position.

"You, sir," Wooddrop pronounced loudly, "are deficient in the ordinary courtesies of travel! And note this, Mrs. Wooddrop" — he turned to his wife — "I shall never again, in spite of Gisela's importunities, move by public

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conveyance. The presence of individuals like this ——”

Alexander Hulings rose and faced the older, infinitely more important man. His sunken eyes blazed with such a feverish passion that the other raised an involuntary palm.

“Individuals,” he added, “painfully afflicted.”

Suddenly Hulings’ weakness betrayed him; he collapsed in his chair with a pounding heart and blurred vision. The incident receded, became merged in the resumption of the commonplace clatter of dinner.

Once more on deck, Alexander Hulings was aware that he had appeared both inconsequential and ridiculous, two qualities supremely detestable to his pride; and this added to his bitterness toward the Ironmaster. He determined to extract satisfaction from the other for his humiliation. It was characteristic of Hulings that he saw himself essentially as John Wooddrop’s equal; worldly circumstance had no power to impress him; he was superior to the slightest trace of the complacent inferiority exhibited by last night’s casual informer.

The day waned monotonously; half dazed with weariness he heard bursts of music; far, meaningless voices; the blowing of the packet horn. He didn’t go down again into the cabin to sleep, but stayed wrapped in his cloak in a chair. He slept through the dawn and woke only at the full activity of breakfast. Past noon the boat tied up at Harmony. The Wooddrops departed with all the circumstance of worldly importance, and in the stir of cracking whip and restive, spirited horses. Alexander Hulings moved unobserved, with his trunk, to the bank.

Tubal Cain, he discovered, was still fifteen miles dis-

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tant, and — he had not told James Claypole of his intended arrival — no conveyance was near by. A wagon drawn by six mules with gay bells and colored streamers and heavily loaded with limestone finally appeared, going north, on which Hulings secured passage.

The precarious road followed a wooded ridge, with a vigorous stream on the right and a wall of hills beyond. The valley was largely uninhabited. Once they passed a solid, foursquare structure of stone, built against a hill, with clustered wooden sheds and a great wheel revolving under a smooth arc of water. A delicate white vapor trailed from the top of the masonry, accompanied by rapid, clear flames.

“Blue Lump Furnace,” the wagon driver briefly volunteered. “Belongs to Wooddrop. But that doesn’t signify anything about here. Pretty near everything’s his.”

Alexander Hulings looked back, with an involuntary deep interest in the furnace. The word “iron” again vibrated, almost clanged, through his mind. It temporarily obliterated the fact that here was another evidence of the magnitude, the possessions, of John Wooddrop. He was consumed by a sudden anxiety to see James Claypole’s forge. Why hadn’t the fool persisted, succeeded?

“Tubal Cain’s in there.” The mules were stopped. “What there is of it! Four bits will be enough.”

He was left beside his trunk on the roadside, clouded by the dust of the wagon’s departure. Behind him, in the direction indicated, the ground, covered with underbrush, fell away to a glint of water and some obscure structures. Dragging his baggage he made his way down to a long wooden shed, the length facing him open on two covered

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hearths, some dilapidated troughs, a suspended ponderous hammer resting on an anvil, and a miscellaneous heap of rusting iron implements — long-jawed tongs, hooked rods, sledges and broken castings. The hearths were cold; there was not a stir of life, of activity, anywhere.

Hulings left his trunk in a clearing and explored farther. Beyond a black heap of charcoal, standing among trees, were two or three small stone dwellings. The first was apparently empty, with some whitened sacks on a bare floor; but within a second he saw through the open doorway the lank figure of a man kneeling in prayer. His foot was on the sill; but the bowed figure, turned away, remained motionless.

Alexander Hulings hesitated, waiting for the prayer to reach a speedy termination. But the other, with upraised, quivering hands, remained so long on his knees that Hulings swung the door back impatiently. Even then an appreciable time elapsed before the man inside rose to his feet. He turned and moved forward, with an abstracted gaze in pale-blue eyes set in a face seamed and scored by time and disease. His expression was benevolent; his voice warm and cordial.

“I am Alexander Hulings,” that individual briefly stated; “and I suppose you’re Claypole.”

The latter’s condition, he thought instantaneously, was entirely described by his appearance. James Claypole’s person was as neglected as the forge. His stained breeches were engulfed in scarred leather boots, and a coarse black shirt was open on a gaunt chest.

His welcome left nothing to be desired. The dwelling into which he conducted Hulings consisted of a single

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room, with a small shed kitchen at the rear and two narrow chambers above. There was a pleasant absence of apology for the meager accommodations. James Claypole was an entirely unaffected and simple host.

The late April evening was warm; and after a supper, prepared by Claypole, of thick bacon, potatoes and saleratus biscuit, the two men sat against the outer wall of the house. On the left Hulings could see the end of the forge shed, with the inevitable water wheel hung in a channel cut from the clear stream. The stream wrinkled and whispered along spongy banks, and a flicker hammered on a resonant limb. Hulings stated negligently that he had arrived on the same packet with John Wooddrop, and Claypole retorted:

“A man lost in the world! I tried to wrestle with his spirit, but it was harder than the walls of Jericho.”

His eyes glowed with fervor. Hulings regarded him curiously. A religious fanatic! He asked:

“What’s been the trouble with Tubal Cain? Other forges appear to flourish about here. This Wooddrop seems to have built a big thing with iron.”

“Mammon!” Claypole stated. “Slag; dross! Not this, but the Eternal World.” The other failed to comprehend, and he said so irritably. “All that,” Claypole specified, waving toward the forge, “takes the thoughts from the Supreme Being. Eager for the Word, and a poor speller-out of the Book, you can’t spend priceless hours shingling blooms. And then the men left, one after another, because I stopped pandering to their carnal appetites. No one can indulge in rum here, in a place of mine sealed to God.”

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"Do you mean that whisky was a part of their pay and that you held it back?" Alexander Hulings demanded curtly. He was without the faintest sympathy for what he termed such arrant folly.

"Yes, just that; a brawling, froward crew. Wood-drop wanted to buy, but I wouldn't extend his wicked dominion, satisfy fleshly lust."

"It's a good forge, then?"

"None better! I built her mostly myself, when I was laying up the treasure that rusted; stone on stone, log on log. Heavy, slow work. The sluice is like a city wall; the anvil bedded on seven feet of oak. It's right! But if I'd known then I should have put up a temple to Jehovah."

Hulings could scarcely contain his impatience.

"Why," he ejaculated, "you might have made a fine thing out of it! Opportunity, opportunity, and you let it go by. For sheer ——"

He broke off at a steady gaze from Claypole's calm blue eyes. It was evident that he would have to restrain any injudicious characterizations of the other's belief. He spoke suddenly:

"I came up here because I was sick and had to get out of Eastlake. I left everything but what little money I had. You see—I was a failure. I'd like to stay with you a while; when perhaps I might get on my feet again. I feel easier than I have for weeks," he realized, surprised, that this was so. He had a conviction that he could sleep here, by the stream, in the still, flowering woods. "I haven't any interest in temples," he continued; "but I guess — two men — we won't argue about

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that. Some allowance on both sides. But I am interested in iron; I'd like to know this forge of yours backward. I've discovered a sort of hankering after the idea; just that — iron. It's a tremendous fact, and you can keep it from rusting."

III

The following morning Claypole showed Alexander Hulings the mechanics of Tubal Cain. A faint reminiscent pride shone through the later unworldly preoccupation. He lifted the sluice gate, and the water poured through the masoned channel of the forebay and set in motion the wheel, hung with its lower paddles in the course. In the forge shed Claypole bound a connection, and the short haft of the trip hammer, caught in revolving cogs, raised the ponderous head and dropped it, with a jarring clang, on the anvil. The blast of the hearths was driven by water wind, propelled by a piston in a wood cylinder, with an air chamber for even pressure. It was all so elemental that the neglect of the last years had but spread over the forge an appearance of ill repair. Actually it was as sound as the clear oak largely used in its construction.

James Claypole's interest soon faded; he returned to his chair by the door of the dwelling, where he laboriously spelled out the periods of a battered copy of Addison's "Evidences of the Christian Religion." He broke the perusal with frequent, ecstatic ejaculations; and when Hulings reluctantly returned from his study of the forge the other was again on his knees, lost in passionate prayer.

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Hulings grew hungry — Claypole was utterly lost in visions — cooked some bacon and found cold biscuit in the shedlike kitchen.

The afternoon passed into a tenderly perfumed twilight. The forge retreated, apparently through the trees, into the evening. Alexander Hulings sat regarding it with an increasing impatience; first, it annoyed him to see such a potentiality of power lying fallow, and then his annoyance ripened into an impatience with Claypole that he could scarcely contain. The impracticable ass! It was a crime to keep the wheel stationary, the hearths cold.

He had a sudden burning desire to see Tubal Cain stirring with life; to hear the beat of the hammer forging iron; to see the dark, still interior lurid with fire. He thought again of John Wooddrop, and his instinctive disparagement of the accomplishments of others mocked both them and himself. If he, Alexander Hulings, had had Claypole's chance, his beginning, he would be more powerful than Wooddrop now.

The law was a trivial foolery compared to the fashioning, out of the earth itself, of iron. Iron, the indispensable! Railroads, in spite of the popular, vulgar disbelief, were a coming great factor; a thousand new uses, refinements, improved processes of manufacture were bound to develop. His thoughts took fire and swept over him in a conflagration of enthusiasm. By heaven, if Claypole had failed he would succeed! He, too, would be an Ironmaster!

A brutal chill overtook him with the night; he shook pitiably; dark fears crept like noxious beetles among his

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thoughts. James Claypole sat, with his hands on his gaunt knees, gazing, it might be, at a miraculous golden city beyond the black curtain of the world. Later Hulings lay on a couch of boards, folded in coarse blankets and his cape, fighting the familiar evil sinking of his oppressed spirit. He was cold and yet drenched with sweat . . . if he were defeated now, he thought, if he collapsed, he was done, shattered! And in his swirling mental anguish he clung to one stable, cool fact; he saw, like Claypole, a vision; but not gold — great shadowy masses of iron. Before dawn the dread receded; he fell asleep.

He questioned his companion at breakfast about the details of forging.

“The secret,” the latter stated, “is — timber; wood, charcoal. It’s bound to turn up; fuel famine will come, unless it is provided against. That’s where John Wooddrop’s light. He counts on getting it as he goes. A furnace’ll burn five or six thousand cords of wood every little while, and that means two hundred or more acres. Back of Harmony, here, are miles of timber the old man won’t loose up right for. He calculates no one else can profit with them and takes his own time.”

“What does Wooddrop own in the valleys?”

“Well — there’s Sally Furnace; the Poole Sawmill tract; the Medlar Forge and Blue Lump; the coal holes on Allen Mountain; Marta Furnace and Reeba Furnace — they ain’t right hereabouts; the Lode Orebank; the Blossom Furnace and Charming Forges; Middle and Low Green Forges; the Auspacher Farm ——”

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“That will do,” Hulings interrupted him moodily; “I’m not an assessor.”

Envy lashed his determination to surprising heights. Claypole grew uncommunicative, except for vague references to the Kingdom at hand and the dross of carnal desire. Finally, without a preparatory word, he strode away and disappeared over the rise toward the road. At supper he had not returned; there was no trace of him when, inundated with sleep, Hulings shut the dwelling for the night. All the following day Alexander Hulings expected his host; he spent the hours avidly studying the implements of forging; but the other did not appear. Neither did he the next day, nor the next.

Hulings was surprisingly happy; entirely alone, but for the hidden passage of wagons on the road and the multitudinous birds that inhabited the stream’s edge, in the peaceful, increasing warmth of the days and nights his condition slowly improved. He bought supplies at the packet station on the canal and shortly became as proficient at the stove as James Claypole. Through the day he sat in the mild sunlight or speculated among the implements of the forge. He visualized the process of iron making; the rough pigs — there were sows, too, he had gathered — lying outside the shed had come from the furnace. These were put into the hearths and melted — stirred perhaps; then — what were the wooden troughs for? — hammered, wrought on the anvil. Outside were other irregularly round pieces of iron, palpably closer in texture than the pig. The forging of them, he was certain, had been completed. There were, also, heavy bars, three feet in length, squared at each end.

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Everything had been dropped apparently at the moment of James Claypole's absorbing view of another, transcending existence. Late in an afternoon — it was May — he heard footfalls descending from the road; with a sharp, unreasoning regret, he thought the other had returned. But it was a short, ungainly man with a purplish face and impressive shoulders. "Where's Jim?" he asked with a marked German accent.

Alexander Hulings told him who he was and all he knew about Claypole.

"I'm Conrad Wishon," the newcomer stated, sinking heavily into a chair. "Did Jim speak of me — his head forgerman? No! But I guess he told you how he stopped the schnapps. Ha! James got religion. And he went away two weeks ago? Maybe he'll never be back. This" — he waved toward the forge — "means nothing to him.

"I live twenty miles up the road, and I saw a Glory-wagon coming on — an old Conestoga, with the Bible painted on the canvas, a traveling Shouter slapping the reins, and a congregation of his family staring out the back. James would take up with a thing like that in a shot. Yes, sir; maybe now you will never see him again. And your mother's cousin! There's no other kin I've heard of; and I was with him longer than the rest."

Hulings listened with growing interest to the equable flow of Conrad Wishon's statements and mild surprise.

"Things have been bad with me," the smith continued. "My wife, she died Thursday before breakfast, and one thing and another. A son has charge of a coaling gang on Allen Mountain, but I'm too heavy for that; and I was going down to Green Forge when I

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thought I'd stop and see Jim. But, hell! — Jim's gone; like as not on the Glorywagon. I can get a place at any hearth," he declared proudly. "I'm a good forger; none better in Hamilton County. When it's shingling a loop I can show 'em all!"

"Have some supper," Alexander Hulings offered.

They sat late into the fragrant night, with the moonlight patterned like a grey carpet at their feet, talking about the smithing of iron. Conrad Wishon revealed the practical grasp of a life capably spent at a single task, and Hulings questioned him with an increasing comprehension.

"If you had money," Wishon explained, "we could do something right here. I'd like to work old Tubal Cain. I understand her."

The other asked: "How much would it take?"

Conrad Wishon spread out his hands hopelessly. "A lot; and then a creekful back of that! Soon as Wooddrop heard the trip hammer he'd be after you to close you down. Do it in a hundred ways — no teaming principally."

Hulings' antagonism to John Wooddrop increased perceptibly; he became obsessed by the fantastic thought of founding himself — Tubal Cain — triumphantly in the face of the established opposition. But he had nothing — no money, knowledge, or even a robust person. Yet his will to succeed in the valleys hardened into a concrete aim . . . Conrad Wishon would be invaluable.

The latter stayed through the night and even lingered, after breakfast, into the morning. He was reluctant to leave the familiar scene of long toil. They were sitting lost in discussion when the beat of horses' hoofs was ar-

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rested on the road, and a snapping of underbrush announced the appearance of a young man with a keen, authoritative countenance.

"Mr. James Claypole?" he asked, addressing them collectively.

Alexander Hulings explained what he could of Claypole's absence.

"It probably doesn't matter," the other returned. "I was told the forge wasn't run, for some foolishness or other." He turned to go.

"What did you want with him — with Tubal Cain?" Conrad Wishon asked.

"Twenty-five tons of blooms."

"Now if this was ten years back ——"

The young man interrupted the smith, with a gesture of impatience, and turned to go. Hulings asked Conrad Wishon swiftly:

"Could it be done here? Could the men be got? And what would it cost?"

"It could," said Wishon; "they might, and a thousand dollars would perhaps see it through."

Hulings sharply called the retreating figure back. "Something more about this twenty-five tons," he demanded.

"For the Penn. Rolling Mills," the other crisply replied. "We're asking for delivery in five weeks, but that might be extended a little — at, of course, a loss on the ton. The quality must be first grade."

Wishon grunted.

"Young man," he said, "blooms I made would hardly need blistering to be called steel."

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"I'm Philip Grere," the newcomer stated, "of Grere Brothers, and they're the Penn Rolling Mills. We want good blooms soon as possible and it seems there's almost none loose. If you can talk iron, immediate iron, let's get it on paper; if not I have a long way to drive."

When he had gone Conrad Wishon sat staring, with mingled astonishment and admiration, at Hulings.

"But," he protested, "you don't know nothing about it!"

"You do!" Alexander Hulings told him; he saw himself as a mind, of which Wishon formed the trained and powerful body.

"Perhaps Jim will come back," the elder man continued.

"That is a possibility," Alexander admitted. "But I am going to put every dollar I own into the chance of finishing those twenty-five tons."

The smith persisted: "But you don't know me; perhaps I'm a rascal and can't tell a puddling furnace from a chafery."

Hulings regarded him shrewdly.

"Conrad," he demanded, "can Tubal Cain do it?"

"By *Gott*," Wishon exclaimed, "she can!"

After an hour of close calculation Conrad Wishon rose with surprising agility.

"I've got enough to do besides sitting here. Tubal Cain ought to have twenty men, anyhow; perhaps I can get eight. There's Mathias Slough, a good hammerman. He broke an elbow at Charming and Wooddrop won't have him back; but he can work still. Hance, a good nigger, is at my place, and there is another — Surrie.

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Haines Zerbey, too, worked at refining, but you'll need to watch his rum. Perhaps Old Man Boeshore will lend a hand, and he's got a strapping grandson — Emanuel. Jeremiah Stell doesn't know much, but he'd let you cut a finger off for a dollar." He shook his head gravely. "That is a middling poor collection."

Alexander Hulings felt capable of operating Tubal Cain successfully with a shift of blind paralytics. A conviction of power, of vast capability, possessed him. Suddenly he seemed to have become a part of the world that moved, of its creative energy; he was like a piece of machinery newly connected with the forceful driving whole. Conrad Wishon had promised to return the next day with the men he had enumerated, and Alexander opened the small scattered buildings about the forge. There were, he found, sufficient living provisions for eight or ten men out of a moldering quantity of primitive bed furnishings, rusted tin and cracked glass. But it was fortunate that the days were steadily growing warmer.

Wishon had directed him to clean out the channel of the forebay, and throughout the latter half of the day he was tearing heavy weeds from the interstices of the stones, laboring in a chill slime that soon completely covered him. He removed heavy rocks, matted dead bushes, banked mud; and after an hour he was cruelly, impossibly weary. He slipped and bruised a shoulder, cut open his cheek; but he impatiently spat out the blood trailing into his mouth, and continued working. His weariness became a hell of acute pain; without manual practice his movements were clumsy; he wasted what strength he had. Yet as his suffering increased he grew only more

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relentlessly methodical in the execution of his task. He picked out insignificant obstructions, scraped away grass that offered no resistance to the water power. When he had finished, the forebay, striking in at an angle from the stream to the wheel, was meticulously clean.

He stumbled into his dwelling and fell on the bed, almost instantly asleep, without removing a garment, caked with filth; and never stirred until the sun again flooded the room. He cooked and ravenously ate a tremendous breakfast, and then forced himself to walk the dusty miles that lay between Tubal Cain and the canal. His legs seemed to be totally without joints and his spine felt like a white-hot bar. At the store about which the insignificant village of Harmony clustered he ordered and paid for a great box of supplies, later carried by an obliging teamster and himself to the forge.

Once more there, he addressed himself to digging out the slag that had hardened in the hearths. The lightest bar soon became insuperably ponderous; it wobbled in his grasp, evaded its purpose. Vicious tears streamed over his blackened countenance and he maintained a constant audible flow of bitter invective. But even that arduous task was nearly accomplished when dark overtook him.

He stripped off his garments, dropping them where he stood, by the forge shed, and literally fell forward into the stream. The cold shock largely revived him and he sipped on huge tins of coffee and hard fitch. Immediately after he dropped asleep as if he had been knocked unconscious by a club.

At midmorning he heard a rattle of conveyance from the road and his name called. Above he found a wagon, with-

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out a top, filled with the sorriest collection of humanity he had ever viewed, and drawn by a dejected bony horse and a small wicked mule.

"Here they are," Conrad Wishon announced; "and Hance brought along his girl to cook."

Mathias Slough, the hammerman, was thin and grey, as if his face were covered with cobwebs; Hance, Conrad's "nigger," black as an iron bloom, was carrying upside down a squawking hen; Surrie, lighter, had a dropped jaw and hands that hung below his knees; Haines Zerbey had pale, swimming eyes, and executed a salute with a battered flat beaver hat; Old Man Boeshore resembled a basin, bowed in at the stomach, his mouth had sunk on toothless gums, but there was agility in his step; while Emanuel, his grandson, a towering hulk of youth, presented a facial expanse of mingled pimples and down. Jeremiah Stell was a small, shriveled man, with dead-white hair on a smooth, pinkish countenance.

Standing aside from the nondescript assemblage of men and transient garments, Alexander Hulings surveyed them with cold determination; two emotions possessed him — one of an almost humorous dismay at the slack figures on whom so much depended; and a second, stronger conviction that he could force his purpose even from them. They were, in a manner, his first command; his first material from which to build the consequence, the success, that he felt was his true expression.

He addressed a few brief periods to them; and there was no warmth, no effort to conciliate, in his tones, his dry statement of a heavy task for a merely adequate gain. He adopted this attitude instinctively, without fore-

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thought; he was dimly conscious, as a principle, that underpaid men were more easily driven than those overfully rewarded. And he intended to drive the men before him to the limit of their capability. They had no individual existence for Alexander Hulings, no humanity; they were merely the implements of a projection of his own; their names — Haines Zerbey, Slough — had no more significance than the terms bellows or tongs.

They scattered to the few habitations by the stream, structures mostly of logs and plaster; and in a little while there rose the odorous smoke and sputtering fat of Hance's girl's cooking. Conrad Wishon soon started the labor of preparing the forge. Jeremiah Stell, who had some slight knowledge of carpentry, was directed to repair the plunger of the water-wind apparatus. Slough was testing the beat and control of the trip hammer. Hance and Surrie carried outside the neglected heaps of iron hooks and tongs. Conrad explained to Alexander Hulings:

“ I sent word to my son about the charcoal; he'll leave it at my place, but we shall have to haul it from there. Need another mule — maybe two. There's enough pig here to start, and my idea is to buy all we will need now at Blue Lump; they'll lend us a sled, so's we will have it in case old Wooddrop tries to clamp down on us. I'll go along this afternoon and see the head furnace man. It will take money.”

Without hesitation, Hulings put a considerable part of his entire small capital into the other's hand. At supertime Conrad Wishon returned with the first load of metal for the Penn Rolling Mills contract.

Later Hance produced a wheezing accordion and, rock-

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ing on his feet, drew out long, wailing notes. He sang:

*“Brothers, let us leave
Bukra Land for Hayti;
There we be receive’
Grand as Lafayette.”*

“With changes of men,” Conrad continued to Alexander Hulings, “the forges could run night and day, like customary. But with only one lot we’ll have to sleep. Someone will stay up to tend the fires.”

In the morning the labor of making the wrought blooms actually commenced. Conrad Wishon and Hance at one hearth, and Haines Zerbey with Surrie at the other, stood ceaselessly stirring, with long iron rods, the fluxing metal at the incandescent cores of the fires. Alexander then saw that the troughs of water were to cool the rapidly heating rods. Conrad Wishon was relentless in his insistence on long working of the iron. There were, already, muttered protests. “The dam’ stuff was cooked an hour back!” But he drowned the objections in a surprising torrent of German-American cursing.

Hulings was outside the shed when he heard the first dull fall of the hammer; and it seemed to him that the sound had come from a sudden pounding of his expanded heart. He, Alexander Hulings, was making iron; his determination, his capability and will were hammering out of the stubborn raw material of earth a foothold for himself and a justification! The smoke, pouring blackly, streaked with crimson sparks, from the forge shed, sifted a fine soot on the green-white flowers of a dogwood tree. A metallic clamor rose; and Emanuel, the youth, stripped

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to the waist and already smeared with sweat and grime, came out for a gulping breath of unsullied air.

The characteristics of the small force soon became apparent. Conrad Wishon labored ceaselessly, with an unimpaired power at fifty apparent even to Alexander's intense self-absorption. Of the others, Hance, the negro, was easily the superior; his strength was Herculean, his willingness inexhaustible. Surrie was sullen. Mathias Slough constantly grumbled at the meager provisions for his comfort and efforts; yet he was a skillful workman. When Alexander had correctly gauged Zerbey's daily dram the latter, too, was useful; but the others were negligible. They made the motions of labor, but force was absent.

Alexander Hulings watched with narrowed eyes. When he was present the work in the shed notably improved; all the men except Conrad avoided his implacable gaze. He rarely addressed a remark to them; he seemed withdrawn from the operation that held so much for him. Conrad Wishon easily established his dexterity at "shingling a loop."

Working off a part of a melting sow, he secured it with wide-jawed shingling tongs; and, steadying the pulsating mass on an iron plate, he sledged it into a bloom. For ten hours daily the work continued, the hearths burned, the trip hammer fell and fell. The interior of the shed was a grimy shadow lighted with lurid flares and rose and gentian flowers of iron. Ruddy reflections slid over glistening shoulders and intent, bitter faces; harsh directions, voices, sounded like the grating of castings.

The oddly assorted team was dispatched for charcoal, and then sent with a load of blooms to the canal.

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Hance had to be spared, with Surrie, for that; the forge was short of labor, and Alexander Hulings joined Conrad in the working of the metal. It was, he found, exhausting toil. He was light and unskilled, and the mass on the hearth slipped continually from his stirring; or else it fastened, with a seeming spite, on his rod, and he was powerless to move it. Often he swung from his feet, straining in supreme, wrenching effort. His body burned with fatigue, his eyes were scorched by the heat of the fires; he lost count of days and nights. They merged imperceptibly one into another; he must have dreamed of his racking exertions, for apparently they never ceased.

Alexander became indistinguishable from the others, all cleanness was forgotten; he ate in a stupefaction of weariness, securing with his fingers whatever was put before him. He was engaged in a struggle the end of which was hidden in the black smoke perpetually hanging over him; in the torment of the present, an inhuman suffering to which he was bound by a tyrannical power outside his control, he lost all consciousness of the future.

The hammerman's injured arm prevented his working for two days, and Alexander Hulings cursed him in a stammering rage, before which the other was shocked and dumb. He drove Old Man Boeshore and his grandson with consideration for neither age nor youth; the elder complained endlessly, tears even slid over his corrugated face; the youth was brutally burned, but Hulings never relaxed his demands.

It was as if they had all been caught in a whirlpool, in which they fought vainly for release — the whirlpool of Alexander Hulings' domination. They whispered to-

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gether, he heard fragments of intended revolt; but under his cold gaze, his thin, tight lips, they subsided uneasily. It was patent that they were abjectly afraid of him. . . . The blooms moved in a small but unbroken stream over the road to the canal.

He had neglected to secure other horses or mules; and, while waiting for a load of iron on the rough track broken from the road to the forge, the horse slid to his knees, fell over, dead — the last ounce of effort wrung from his angular frame. The mule seemed impervious to fatigue; with his ears perpetually laid back and a raised lip, his spirit, his wickedness, persisted in the face of appalling toil. The animal's name, Hulings knew, was Alexander; he overheard Hance explaining this to Old Man Boeshore:

“That mule's bound to be Alexander; ain't nobody but an Alexander work like that mule! He's bad too; he'd lay you cold and go right on about his business.”

Old Man Boeshore muttered something excessively bitter about the name Alexander.

“If you sh'd ask me,” he stated, “I'd tell you that he ain't human. He's got a red light in his eye, like ——”

Hulings gathered that this was not still directed at the mule.

More than half of the order for the Penn Rolling Mills had been executed and lay piled by the canal. He calculated the probable time still required, the amount he would unavoidably lose through the delay of faulty equipment and insufficient labor. If James Claypole came back now, he thought, and attempted interference, he would commit murder. It was evening, and he was seated list-

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lessly, with his chair tipped back against the dwelling he shared with Conrad Wishon. The latter, close by, was bowed forward, his head, with a silvery gleam of faded hair, sunk on his breast. A catbird was whistling an elaborate and poignant song, and the invisible stream passed with a faint, choked whisper.

“We’re going to have trouble with that girl of Hance’s,” Wishon pronounced suddenly; “she has taken to meeting Surrie in the woods. If Hance comes on them there will be wet knives!”

Such mishaps, Alexander Hulings knew, offered real menace to his success. The crippling or loss of Hance might easily prove fatal to his hopes; the negro, immensely powerful, equable and willing, was of paramount importance.

“I’ll stop that!” he declared. But the trouble developed before he had time to intervene.

He came on the two negroes the following morning, facing each other, with, as Conrad had predicted, drawn knives. Hance stood still; but Surrie, with bent knees and the point of his steel almost brushing the grass, moved about the larger man. Hulings at once threw himself between them.

“What damned nonsense’s this?” he demanded. “Get back to the team, Hance, and you, Surrie, drop your knife!”

The former was on the point of obeying, when Surrie ran in with a sweeping hand. Alexander Hulings jumped forward in a cold fury and felt a sudden numbing slice across his cheek. He had a dim consciousness of blood smearing his shoulder; but all his energy was directed

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on the stooped figure falling away from his glittering rage.

“Get out!” he directed in a thin, evil voice. “If you are round here in ten minutes I’ll blow a hole through your skull!”

Surrie was immediately absorbed by the underbrush.

Hulings had a long diagonal cut from his brow across and under his ear. It bled profusely, and as his temper receded faintness dimmed his vision. Conrad Wishon blotted the wound with cobwebs; a cloth, soon stained, was bound about Alexander’s head, and after dinner he was again in the forge, whipping the flagging efforts of his men with a voice like a thin leather thong. If the labor was delayed he recognized that the contract would not be filled. The workmen were wearing out, like the horse. He moved young Emanuel to the hauling with Hance, the wagon now drawn by three mules. The hammerman’s injured arm had grown inflamed and he was practically one-handed in his management of the trip hammer.

While carrying a lump of iron to the anvil the staggering, ill-assorted group with the tongs dropped their burden, and stood gazing stupidly at the fallen, glowing mass. They were hardly revived by Hulings’ lashing scorn. He had increased Haines Zerbey’s daily dram, but the drunkard was now practically useless. Jeremiah Stell contracted an intermittent fever; and, though he still toiled in the pursuit of his coveted wage, he was of doubtful value.

Alexander Hulings’ body had become as hard as Conrad’s knotted forearm. He ate huge amounts of half-

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cooked pork, washed hastily down by tin cups of black coffee, and fell into instant slumber when the slightest opportunity offered. His face was matted by an unkempt beard; his hands, the pale hands of an Eastlake lawyer, were black, like Hance's, with palms of leather. He surveyed himself with curious amusement in a broken fragment of looking-glass nailed to the wall; the old Hulings, pursued by inchoate dread, had vanished. . . In his place was Alexander Hulings, a practical iron man! He repeated the descriptive phrase aloud, with an accent of arrogant pride. Later, with an envelope from the Penn Rolling Mills, he said it again, with even more confidence; he held the pay for the blooms which he had — it seemed in another existence — promised to deliver.

He stood leaning on a tree before the forge; within Conrad Wishon and Hance were piling the metal hooks with sharp, ringing echoes. All the others had vanished magically, at once, as if from an exhausted spell. Old Man Boeshore had departed with a piping implication, supported by Emanuel, his grandson.

Alexander Hulings was reviewing his material situation. It was three hundred and thirty dollars better than it had been on his arrival at Tubal Cain. In addition to that he had a new store of confidence, of indomitable pride, vanity, a more actual support. He gazed with interest toward the near future, and with no little doubt. It was patent that he could not proceed as he had begun; such combinations could not be forced a second time. He intended to remain at James Claypole's forge, conducting it as though it were his own — for the present, anyhow, but he should have to get an efficient working

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body; and many additions were necessary — among them a blacksmith shop. He had, with Conrad Wishon, the conviction that Claypole would not return.

More capital would be necessary. He was revolving this undeniable fact when, through the lush June foliage, he saw an open carriage turn from the road and descend to the forge clearing. It held an erect, trimly whiskered form and a negro driver. The former was John Wooddrop. He gazed with surprise, that increased to a recognition, a memory, of Alexander Hulings.

“Jim Claypole?” he queried.

“Not here,” Hulings replied, even more laconic.

“Nonsense! I’m told he’s been running Tubal Cain again. Say to him — and I’ve no time to dawdle — that John Wooddrop’s here.”

“Well, Claypole’s not,” the other repeated. “He’s away. I’m running this forge — Alexander Hulings.”

Wooddrop’s mouth drew into a straight hard line from precise whisker to whisker. “I have been absent,” he said finally. It was palpably an explanation, almost an excuse. Conrad Wishon appeared from within the forge shed. “Ah, Conrad!” John Wooddrop ejaculated pleasantly. “Glad to find you at the hearth again. Come and see me in the morning.”

“I think I’ll stay here,” the forgerman replied, “now Tubal Cain’s working.”

“Then, in a week or so,” the Ironmaster answered imperturbably.

All Alexander Hulings’ immaterial dislike of Wooddrop solidified into a concrete, vindictive enmity. He saw the beginning of a long, bitter, stirring struggle.

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IV

“That’s about it!” Conrad Wishon affirmed. They were seated by the doorway of the dwelling at Tubal Cain. It was night, and hot; and the heavy air was constantly fretted by distant, vague thunder. Alexander Hulings listened with pinched lips.

“I saw Derek, the founder at Blue Lump, and ordered the metal; then he told me that Wooddrop had sent word not to sell a pig outside his own forges. That comes near closing us up. I misdoubt that we could get men, anyhow — not without we went to Pittsburgh; and that would need big orders, big money. The old man’s got us kind of shut in here, with only three mules and one wagon — we couldn’t make out to haul any distance; and John Wooddrop picks up all the loose teams. It looks bad, that’s what it does. No credit too; I stopped at Harmony for some forge hooks, and they wouldn’t let me take them away until you had paid. A word’s been dropped there likewise.”

Hulings could see, without obvious statement, that he occupied a difficult position; it was impossible seemingly, with his limited funds and equipment, to go forward and — no backward course existed: nothing but a void, ruin, the way across which had been destroyed. He turned with an involuntary dread from the fleeting contemplation of the past, mingled with monotony and suffering, and set all his cold, passionate mind on the problem of his future. He would, he told himself, succeed with iron here. He would succeed in spite of John Wooddrop — no, because

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of the Ironmaster; the latter increasingly served as a concrete object of comparison, an incentive, a deeply involved spectator.

He lost himself in a gratifying vision, when Conrad's voice, shattering the facile heights he had mounted, again fastened his attention on the exigencies of the present.

"A lot of money!" the other repeated. "I guess we'll have to shut down; but I'd almost rather drive mules on the canal than go to John Wooddrop."

Hulings declared: "You'll do neither, and Tubal Cain won't shut down!" He rose, turned into the house.

"What's up?" Wishon demanded at the sudden movement.

"I'm going after money," Hulings responded from within—"enough. A packet is due east before dawn."

If the canal boat had seemed to go slowly on his way to Harmony, it appeared scarcely to stir on his return. There was no immediate train connection at Columbus, and he footed the uneven shaded streetways in an endless pattern, unconscious of houses, trees or passing people, lost in the rehearsal of what he had to say, until the horn of an immediate departure summoned him to a seat in a coach.

The candles at each end sent a shifting, pale illumination over the cramped interior, voluminous skirts and prodigiously whiskered countenances. Each delay increased his impatience to a muttering fury; it irked him that he was unable to declare himself, Alexander Hulings, to the train captain, and by the sheer bulk of that name force a more rapid progress.

Finally in Eastlake, Veneada gazed at him out of a silent astonishment.

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“ You say you’re Alex Hulings! ” the doctor exclaimed. “ Some of you seems to be; but the rest is — by heaven, iron! I’ll admit now I was low about you when you left, in April; I knew you had gimp, and counted on it; however — ” The period expired in a wondering exhalation. Veneada pounded on his friend’s chest, dug into his arm. “ A horse! ” he declared.

Alexander Hulings impatiently withdrew from the other’s touch.

“ Veneada, ” he said, “ once you asked me to come to you if I wanted money, if I happened on a good thing. I said nothing at the time, because I couldn’t picture an occasion when I’d do such a thing. Well — it’s come. I need money, and I’m asking you for it. And, I warn you, it will be a big sum. If you can’t manage it I must go somewhere else; I’d go to China, if necessary, I’d stop people, strangers, on the street.

“ A big sum, ” Hulings reiterated somberly; “ perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, thousand. Not a loan, ” he added immediately, “ but an investment — an investment in me. You must come out to Harmony. I can’t explain, it wouldn’t sound convincing in Eastlake. In the valleys, at Tubal Cain, the thing will be self-evident. I have made a beginning with practically nothing; and I can go on. But it will require capital, miles of forest, furnaces built, Pittsburgh swept bare of good men. No ” — he held up a hardened, arresting palm — “ don’t attempt to discuss it now. Come out to Tubal Cain and see; learn about John Wooddrop and how to turn iron into specie. ”

At the end of the week there were three chairs canted against the stone wall of the little house by the stream that

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drove Tubal Cain Forge. Conrad Wishon, with a scarlet undershirt open on a broad, hairy chest, listened with wonderment to the sharp periods of Alexander Hulings and Veneada; he heard incredulously mammoth sums of money estimated, projected, dismissed as commonplace. Veneada said:

“ I’ve always believed in your ability, Alex; all that I questioned was the opportunity. Now that has gone; the chance is here. You’ve got those steel-wire fingers of yours about something rich, and you will never let go. It sounds absurd to go up against this Wooddrop, a despot and a firmly established power; anyone might well laugh at me, but I feel a little sorry for the older man. He doesn’t know you.

“ You haven’t got insides, sympathies, weaknesses, like the others of us; the thing is missing in you that ordinarily betrays human men into slips; yes — compassion. You are not pretty to think about, Alex; but I suppose power never really is. You know I’ve got money and you know, too, that you can have it. As safe with you as in a bank vault! ”

“ We’ll go back to Eastlake tomorrow,” Hulings decided, “ lay out our plans and draw up papers. We’ll buy the loose timber quietly through agents; I’ll never appear in any of it. After that we can let out the contracts for two furnaces. I don’t know anything about them now; but I shall in a week. Wishon had better live on here, pottering about the forge, until he can be sent to Pittsburgh after workmen. His pay will start tomorrow.”

“ What about Tubal Cain, and that fellow — what’s his name? ”

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“Claypole, James. I’ll keep a record of what his forge makes, along with mine, and bank it. Common safety. Then I must get over to New York, see the market there, men. I have had letters from an anchor foundry in Philadelphia. There are nail factories, locomotive shops, stove plate, to furnish. A hundred industries. I’ll have them here in time — rolling mills you will hear back in the mountains. People on the packets will see the smoke of my furnaces — Alexander Hulings’ iron!”

“You might furnish me with a pass, so that I could occasionally walk through and admire,” Veneada said dryly.

Hulings never heard him.

“I’ll have a mansion,” he added abstractedly, “better than Wooddrop’s, with more rooms ——”

“All full, I suppose, of little glorious Hulings!” the doctor interrupted.

Alexander regarded him unmoved. His thoughts suddenly returned to Hallie Flower. He saw her pale, strained face, her clasped hands; he heard the thin echo of her mingled patience and dismay: “Then I’ll never be married!” There was no answering stir of regret, remorse; she slipped forever out of his consciousness, as if she had been a shadow vanishing before a flood of hard, white light.

V

Greatly to Alexander Hulings’ relief, Doctor Veneada never considered the possibility of a partnership; it was as far from one man’s wish, for totally different reasons, as from the other’s.

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“No, no, Alex,” he declared; “I couldn’t manage it. Some day, when you were out of the office, the widow or orphan would come in with the foreclosure, and I would tear up the papers. Seriously I won’t do — I’m fat and easy and lazy. My money would be safer with me carefully removed from the scene.”

In the end Alexander protected Veneada with mortgages on the timber and land he secured about Harmony through various agents and under different names. Some of the properties he bought outright, but in the majority he merely purchased options on the timber. His holdings in the latter finally extended in a broad, irregular belt about the extended local industries of John Wooddrop. It would be impossible for the latter, when, in perhaps fifteen years, he had exhausted his present forests, to cut an acre of wood within practicable hauling distance. This accomplished, a momentary grim satisfaction was visible on Hulings’ somber countenance.

He had, however, spent all the money furnished by Doctor Veneada, without setting the foundations of the furnaces and forges he had projected, and he decided not to go to his friend for more. There were two other possible sources of supply: allied iron industries — the obvious recourse, and the railroads. The latter seemed precarious; everywhere people, and even print, were ridiculing the final usefulness of steam traffic; it was judged unfit for heavy and continuous hauling — a toy of inventors and fantastic dreaming; canals were the obviously solid means of transportation. But Alexander Hulings became fanatical overnight in his belief in the coming empire of steam.

With a small carpetbag, holding his various deeds and

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options, and mentally formulating a vigorous expression of his opinions and projections, he sought the doubtful capital behind the Columbus Transportation Line. When, a month later, he returned to Tubal Cain, it was in the company of an expert industrial engineer, and with credit sufficient for the completion of his present plans. He had been gone a month, but he appeared older by several years. Alexander Hulings had forced from reluctant sources, from men more wily, if less adamant, than himself, what he desired; but in return he had been obliged to grant almost impossibly favorable contracts and preferences. A tremendous pressure of responsibility had gathered about him; but under it he was still erect, coldly confident, and carried himself with the special pugnacity of small, vain men.

On a day in early June, a year from the delivery of his first contract at Tubal Cain, he stood in a fine rain at the side of a light road wagon, drawn, like John Wooddrop's, by two sweeping young horses, held by a negro, and watched the final courses of his new furnace. The furnace itself, a solid structure of unmasoned stone, rose above thirty feet, narrowed at the top to almost half the width of its base. Directly against its face and hearth was built the single high interior of the cast house, into which the metal would be run on a sand pig bed and harden into commercial iron.

On the hill rising abruptly at the back was the long wall of the coal house, with an entrance and runway leading to the opening at the top of the furnace stack. Lower down, the curving, artificial channel of the forebay swept to where the water would fall on a ponderous overshot wheel

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and drive the great tilted bellows that blasted the furnace.

The latter, Alexander knew, must have a name. Most furnaces were called after favorite women; but there were no such sentimental objects in his existence. He recalled the name of the canal packet that had first drawn him out to Harmony — the *Hit or Miss*. No casual title such as that would fit an enterprise of his. He thought of Tubal Cain, and then of Jim Claypole. He owed the latter something; and yet he wouldn't have another man's name. . . . Conrad Wishon had surmised that the owner of Tubal Cain had vanished — like Elijah — on a Glory-wagon. That was it — Glory Furnace! He turned and saw John Wooddrop leaning forward out of his equipage, keenly studying the new buildings.

“That's a good job,” the Ironmaster allowed; “but it should be — built by Henry Bayard, the first man in the country. It ought to do very well for five or six years.”

“Fifty,” Hulings corrected him.

John Wooddrop's eyes were smiling.

“It's all a question of charcoal,” he explained, as Wishon had, long before. “To be frank, I expect a little difficulty myself, later. It is surprising how generally properties have been newly bought in the county. I know, because lately I, too, have been reaching out. Practically all the available stuff has been secured. Thousands of acres above you, here, have been taken by a company, hotel — or something of the sort.”

“The Venealic Company,” Hulings said; and then, in swelling pride, he added: “That's me!” Wooddrop's gaze hardened. Alexander Hulings thought the other's face grew paler. His importance, his sense of accom-

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plishment, of vindication, completely overwhelmed him. "And beyond, it is me!" he cried. "And back of that, again!" He made a wide, sweeping gesture with his arm. "Over there; the Hezekiah Mills tract — that's me too; and the East purchase, and on and round. Fifty — this Glory Furnace, and ten others, could run on for a century.

"You've been the big thing here — even in the state. You are known on canal boats, people point you out; yes, and patronize me. You did that yourself — you and your women. But it is over; I'm coming now, and John Wooddrop's going. You are going with those same canal boats, and Alexander Hulings is rising with the railroads."

He pounded himself on the chest, and then suddenly stopped. It was the only impassioned speech, even in the disastrous pursuit of the law, that he had ever made; and it had an impotent, foolish ring in his ear, his deliberate brain. He instantly disowned all that part of him which had betrayed his ordinary silent caution into such windy boasting. Hulings was momentarily abashed before the steady scrutiny of John Wooddrop.

"When I first saw you," the latter pronounced, "I concluded that you were unbalanced. Now I think that you are a maniac!"

He spoke curtly to his driver, and was sharply whirled away through the grey-green veil of rain and foliage. Hulings was left with an aggravated discontent and bitterness toward the older man, who seemed to have the ability always to place him in an unfavorable light.

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VI

Doctor Veneada returned for the first run of metal from Glory Furnace; there were two representatives of the other capital invested, and, with Alexander Hulings, Conrad Wishon, and some local spectators, they stood in the gloom of the cast house waiting for the founder to tap the clay sealing of the hearth. Suddenly there was a rush of crackling white light, pouring sparks, and the boiling liquid flooded out, rapidly filling the molds radiating from the channels stamped in the sand bed. The incandescent iron flushed from silver to darker, warmer tones.

A corresponding warmth ran through Alexander Hulings' body; Glory Furnace was his; it had been conceived by him and his determination had brought it to an actuality. He would show Wooddrop a new type of "maniac." This was the second successful step in his move against the Ironmaster, in the latter's own field. Then he realized that he, too, might now be called Ironmaster. He directed extensive works operated under his name; he, Hulings, was the head! Already there were more than a hundred men to do what he directed, go where he wished. The feeling of power, of consequence, quickened through him. Alexander held himself, if possible, more rigidly than before; he followed every minute turn of the casting, tersely admonished a laborer.

He was dressed with the utmost care; a marked niceness of apparel now distinguished him. His whiskers were closely trimmed, his hair brushed high under a glossy tile hat; he wore checked trousers, strapped on glazed Wel-

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lington boots, a broadcloth coat, fitted closely to his waist, with a deep rolling collar; severe neckcloth, and a number of seals on a stiff twill waistcoat. Veneada, as always, was carelessly garbed in wrinkled silk and a broad planter's hat. It seemed to Alexander that the other looked conspicuously older than he had only a few months back; the doctor's face was pendulous, the pouches beneath his eyes livid.

Alexander Hulings quickly forgot this in the immediate pressure of manufacture. The younger Wishon, who had followed his father into Alexander's service, now came down from the charcoal stacks in a great sectional wagon drawn by six mules, collared in bells and red streamers. The pigs were sledged in endless procession from Glory, and then from a second furnace, to the forges that reached along the creek in each direction from Tubal Cain. The latter was worked as vigorously as possible, but Alexander conducted its finances in a separate, private column; all the profit he banked to the credit of James Claypole. He did this not from a sense of equity, but because of a deeper, more obscure feeling, almost a superstition, that such acknowledgment of the absent man's unwitting assistance was a safeguard of further good fortune.

The months fled with amazing rapidity; it seemed to him that one day the ground was shrouded in snow, and on the next dogwood was blooming. No man in all his properties worked harder or during longer hours than Alexander; the night shift at a forge would often see him standing grimly in the lurid reflections of the hearths; charcoal burners, eating their fitch and potatoes on an outlying mountain, not infrequently heard the beat of his

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horse's hoofs on the soft moss, his domineering voice bullying them for some slight oversight. He inspired everywhere a dread mingled with grudging admiration; it was known that he forced every possible ounce of effort from workman and beast.

Nevertheless, toward the end of the third summer of his success he contracted a lingering fever, and he was positively commanded to leave his labors for a rest and change. He sat on the porch of the house he had commenced building, on a rise overlooking the eddying smoke of his industries, wrapped in a shawl, and considered the various places that offered relaxation; he could go to the sea, at Long Branch, or to Saratoga, the gayety and prodigality of which were famous. . . . But his thought returned to his collapse four years before; he heard Veneada counseling him to take the water of the Mineral Springs. He had been too poor then for the Mineral; had he gone there, he would have arrived unnoticed. By heaven, he would go there now! It was, he knew, less fashionable than the other places; its day had been twenty, thirty years before. But it represented once more his progress, his success; and, in the company of his personal servant, his leather boxes strapped at the back of his lightest road wagon, he set out the following morning.

Almost sixty miles of indifferent roads lay before him; and, though he covered, in his weakened condition, far more than half the distance by evening he was forced to stay overnight at a roadside tavern. The way was wild and led through narrow, dark valleys, under the shadow of uninhabited ridges, and through swift fords. Occasionally he passed great, slow Conestoga wagons, entrained

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for the West, leather-hooded, ancient vehicles, and men on horses.

The wagon broke suddenly into the smooth, green valley that held the Mineral Springs. Against a western mountain were grouped hotels; a bridge, crossing a limpid stream; pointed kiosks in the Chinese taste; and red gravel walks. The hotel before which Alexander stopped, a prodigiously long, high structure painted white, had a deep porch across its face with slender columns towering up unbroken to the roof and festooned with trumpet flowers. A bell rang loudly for dinner, and there was a colorful flow of crinoline over the porch, a perfumed, flowery stir, through which he impatiently made his way, followed by negro boys with his luggage.

Within, the office was high and bare, with a sweeping staircase, and wide doors opened on a lofty thronged dining room. Above, he was led through interminable narrow corridors, past multitudinous closed doors, to a closetlike room completely filled by a narrow bed, a chair and a corner washstand; this, with some pegs in the calcined wall and a bell rope, completed the provisions for his comfort. His toilet was hurried, for he had been warned that extreme promptness at meals was more than desirable; and, again below, he was led by a pompous negro between long, crowded tables to a place at the farther end. The din of conversation and clatter of dishes were deafening. In the ceiling great connected fans were languidly pulled by black boys, making a doubtful circulation.

His dinner was cold and absurdly inadequate, but the table claret was palatable. And, after the isolation of

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Tubal Cain, the droves of festive people absorbed him. Later, at the bar, he came across an acquaintance, a railroad director, who pointed out to Alexander what notables were present. There was an Englishman, a lord; there was Bartram Ainscough, a famous gambler; there — Alexander's arm was grasped by his companion.

“See that man — no, farther — dark, in a linen suit? Well, that's Partridge Sinnox, of New Orleans.” He grew slightly impatient at Hulings' look of inquiry. “Never heard of him! Best-known pistol shot in the States. A man of the highest honor. Will go out on the slightest provocation,” his voice lowered. “He's said to have killed twelve — no less. His companion there — from Louisiana too — never leaves him. Prodigious rich — canefields.”

Alexander Hulings looked with small interest at the dueller and his associate. The former had a lean, tanned face, small black eyes that held each a single point of light, and long, precise hands. Here, Alexander thought, was another form of publicity, different from his own. As always, his lips tightened in a faint contempt at pretensions other than his, or that threatened his preëminence. Sinnox inspired none of the dread or curiosity evident in his companion; and he turned from him to the inspection of a Pennsylvania coal magnate.

The colonnade of the hotel faced another cultivated ridge, on which terraced walks mounted to a pavilion at the crest; and there, through the late afternoon, he rested and gazed down at the Springs or over to the village beyond. Alexander was wearier than he had supposed; the iron seemed suddenly insupportably burdensome, a long-

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ing for lighter, gayer contacts possessed him. He wanted to enter the relaxations of the Springs.

Dancing, he knew, was customary after supper; and he lingered over a careful toilet — bright blue coat, tight black trousers, and flat, glistening slippers, with a soft cambric ruffle. Alexander Hulings surveyed his countenance in a scrap of mirror, and saw, with mingled surprise and discontent, that he — like Veneada — bore unmistakable signs of age, marks of strife and suffering; his whiskers had a plain silvery sheen. Life, receding unnoticed, had set him at the verge of middle age. But at least, he thought, his was not an impotent medial period; if, without material success, he had unexpectedly seen the slightly drawn countenance meeting him in the mirror, he would have killed himself. He realized that coldly. He could never have survived an established nonentity. As it was, descending the stairs to supper, immaculate and disdainful, he was upheld by the memory of his accomplishments, his widening importance, weight. He actually heard a whispered comment: “Hulings, iron.”

VII

After supper the furnishings of the dining room were swept aside by a troop of waiters, while a number of the latter, with fiddles and cornets, were grouped on a table, over which a green cloth had been spread. With the inevitable scraping of strings and preliminary unattended dance, a quadrille was formed. Alexander, lounging with other exactly garbed males in the doorway, watched with

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secret envy the participants in the figures gliding from one to another. As if from another life he recalled their names; they were dancing *Le Pantalon* now; *La Poulee* would follow; then the *Pastorale* and *L'Été*.

Above the spreading gauze, the tulle and glacé silks of the women, immense candelabra of glass pendants and candles shone and glittered; the rustle of crinoline, of light, passing feet, sounded below the violins and blown cornets, the rich husky voices calling the changes of the quadrille.

He was troubled by an obscure desire to be a center of interest, of importance, for the graceful feminine world about him. Sinnox, the man from New Orleans, was bowing profoundly to his partner; a figure broke up into a general boisterous galloping—girls, with flushed cheeks, swinging curls, spun from masculine shoulder to shoulder. The dance ended, and the floating, perfumed skirts passed him in a soft flood toward the porch.

Without, the colonnade towered against a sky bright with stars; the night was warm and still. Alexander Hulings was lonely; he attempted to detain the acquaintance met in the bar, but the other, bearing a great bouquet of rosebuds in a lace-paper cone, hurried importantly away. A subdued barytone was singing: "Our Way Across the Mountain, Ho!" The strains of a waltz, the *Carlotta-Grisi*, drifted out, and a number of couples answered its invitation.

A group at the iron railing across the foot of the colonnade attracted his attention by its excessive gayety. The center, he saw, was a young woman, with smooth bandeaux and loops of black hair, and a goya lily caught below her ear. She was not handsome, but her features were ani-

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mated, and her shoulders as finely white and sloping as an alabaster vase.

It was not this that held his attention, but a sense of familiarity, a feeling that he had seen her before. He walked past the group, without plan, and, meeting her gaze, bowed awkwardly in response to a hesitating but unmistakable smile of recognition. Alexander stopped, and she imperiously waved him to join the number about her. He was in a cold dread of the necessity of admitting, before so many, that he could not recall her name; but obviously all that she desired was to swell the circle of her admirers, for, beyond a second nod, she ignored him.

The Southerner was at her shoulder, maintaining a steady flow of repartee, and Alexander envied him his assured presence, his dark, distinguished appearance. The man who had been indicated as Sinnox' companion stood by Hulings, and the latter conceived a violent prejudice for the other's meager yellow face and spiderlike hand, employed with a cheroot.

Alexander hoped that somebody would repeat the name of the girl who had spoken to him. A woman did, but only in the contracted, familiar form of Gisela. . . Gisela — he had heard that too. Suddenly she affected to be annoyed; she arched her fine brows and glanced about, her gaze falling upon Alexander Hulings. Before he was aware of her movement a smooth white arm was thrust through his; he saw the curve of a powdered cheek, an elevated chin.

“Do take me out of this!” she demanded. “New Orleans molasses is — well, too thick.”

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Obeying the gentle pressure of her arm, he led her down the steps to the graveled expanse below. She stopped by a figure of the Goddess of Health, in filigree on mossy rocks, pouring water from an urn. Her gown was glazed green muslin, with a mist of white tulle, shining with particles of silver. The goya lily exhaled a poignant scent.

"I didn't really leave because of Mr. Sinnox," she admitted; "a pin was scratching, and I was devoured with curiosity to know who you were, where I had met ——"

Suddenly, in a flash of remembered misery, of bitter resentment, he recognized her — Gisela, John Wooddrop's daughter. The knowledge pinched at his heart like malicious fingers; the starry night, the music and gala attire, his loneliness had betrayed him into an unusual plasticity of being. He delayed for a long breath, and then said dryly: "I'm Alexander Hulings."

"Not ——" she half cried, startled. She drew away from him and her face grew cold. In the silence that followed he was conscious of the flower's perfume and the insistent drip of the water falling from the urn. "But I haven't met you at all," she said; "I don't in the least know you." Her attitude was insolent, and yet she unconsciously betrayed a faint curiosity. "I think you lacked delicacy to join my friends — to bring me out here!"

"I didn't," he reminded her; "you brought me."

Instantly he cursed such clumsy stupidity. Her lower lip protruded disdainfully.

"Forgive me," she said, dropping a curtsy, "but I needn't keep you."

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She swept away across the gravel and up the stairs to the veranda. It was evident that the group had not separated; for almost immediately there rose a concerted laughter, a palpable mockery, drifting out to Alexander.

His face was hot, his hands clenched in angry resentment. More than anything else, he shrunk from being an object of amusement, of gibes. It was necessary to his self-esteem to be met with grave appreciation.

This was his first experience of the keen assaults of social weapons, and it inflicted on him an extravagant suffering. His instinct was to retire farther into the night, only to return to his room when the hotel was dark, deserted. But a second, stronger impulse sent him deliberately after Gisela Wooddrop, up the veranda stairs, and rigidly past the group gazing at him with curious mirth.

An oil flare fixed above them shone down on the lean, saturnine countenance of Partridge Sinnox. The latter, as he caught Alexander Hulings' gaze, smiled slightly.

That expression followed Alexander to his cramped room; it mocked him as he viciously pulled at the bell rope, desiring his servant; it was borne up to him on the faint strains of the violins. And in the morning it clouded his entire outlook. Sinnox' smile expressed a contempt that Alexander Hulings' soul could not endure. From the first he had been resentful of the Southerner's cheap prestige. He added the qualifying word as he descended to breakfast.

Sinnox, as a dueller, roused Hulings' impatience; he had more than once faced impromptu death — iron bars in the hands of infuriated employees, and he had overborne them with a cold phrase. This theatrical playing with

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pistols — cheap! Later, in the crowded bar, he was pressed elbow to elbow with Sinnox and his companion; and he automatically and ruthlessly cleared sufficient space for his comfort. Sinnox' associate said, in remonstrance:

“ Sir, there are others — perhaps more considerable.”

“ Perhaps! ” Alexander Hulings carelessly agreed.

Sinnox gazed down on him with narrowed eyes.

“ I see none about us,” he remarked, “ who would have to admit the qualification.”

Alexander's bitterness increased, became aggressive. He met Sinnox' gaze with a stiff, dangerous scorn:

“ In your case, at least, it needn't stand.”

“ Gentlemen,” the third cried, “ no more, I beg of you.” He grasped Alexander Hulings' arm. “ Withdraw! ” he advised. “ Mr. Sinnox' temper is fatal. Beyond a certain point it cannot be leashed. It has caused great grief. Gentlemen, I beg ——”

“ Do you mean ——” Sinnox demanded, and his face was covered by an even, dark flush to the sweep of his hair.

“ Cheap! ” Alexander repeated aloud, sudden and unpremeditated.

The other's temper rose in a black passion; he became so enraged that his words were mere unintelligible gasps. His hand shook so that he dropped a glass of rock-and-rye splintering on the floor. “ At once! ” he finally articulated. “ Scurvy ——”

“ This couldn't be helped,” his companion proclaimed, agitated. “ I warned the other gentleman. Mr. Sinnox is not himself in a rage, his record is well known. He was elbowed aside by ——”

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“Alexander Hulings!” that individual pronounced.

He was aware of the gaze of the crowding men about him; already he was conscious of an admiration roused by the mere fact of his facing a notorious bully. Cheap! The director joined him.

“By heavens, Hulings, you’re in dangerous water. I understand you have no family.”

“None!” Alexander stated curtly.

Illogically he was conscious of the scent of a goya lily. Sinnox was propelled from the bar, and his friend reappeared and conferred with the director.

“At once!” Hulings heard the former announce. “Mr. Sinnox . . . unbearable!”

“Have you a case of pistols?” the director asked. “Mr. Sinnox offers his. I believe there is a quiet open back of the bathhouse. But my earnest advice to you is to withdraw; you will be very little blamed; this man is notorious, a professional fighter. You have only to say——”

Cheap! Alexander thought, fretful at having been involved in such a ridiculous affair. He was even more deliberate than usual; but, though he was certain of his entire normality, the faces about him resembled small, bobbing balloons.

Alexander finished his drink — surprised to find himself still standing by the bar — and silently followed the director through the great hall of the hotel out onto the veranda, and across the grass to a spot hidden from the valley by the long, low bulk of the bathing house.

Sinnox and his companion, with a polished mahogany box, were already there; while a small, curious group con-

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gregated in the distance. Sinnox' friend produced long pistols with silken-brown barrels and elegantly carved ivory stocks, into which he formally rammed powder and balls. Alexander Hulings was composed; but his fingers were cold, slightly numb, and he rubbed them together angrily. Not for an instant did he think that he might be killed; other curious, faint emotions assailed him — long-forgotten memories of distant years; Veneada's kindly hand on his shoulder; the mule called Alexander because of its aptitude for hard labor; John Wooddrop's daughter.

He saw that the pistols had been loaded; their manipulator stood with them, butts extended, in his grasp. He began a preamble of customary explanation, which he ended by demanding, for his principal, an apology from Alexander Hulings. The latter, making no reply, was attracted by Sinnox' expression of deepening passion; the man's face, he thought, positively was black. Partridge Sinnox' entire body was twitching with rage. . . . Curious, for a seasoned, famous dueller!

Suddenly Sinnox, with a broken exclamation, swung on his heel, grasped one of the pistols in his second's hands, and discharged it point-blank at Alexander Hulings.

An instant confused outcry rose. Alexander heard the term "Insane!" pronounced, as if in extenuation, by Sinnox' friend. The latter held the remaining undischarged pistol out of reach; the other lay on the ground before Partridge Sinnox. Alexander's face was as grey as granite.

"That was the way he did it," he unconsciously pronounced aloud.

He wondered slowly at the fact that he had been

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unhit. Then, with his hand in a pocket, he walked stiffly up to within a few feet of Sinnox, and produced a small, ugly derringer, with one blunt barrel on top of the other.

At the stunning report that followed, the vicious, stinging cloud of smoke, he seemed to wake. He felt himself propelled away from the vicinity of the bathhouse; low, excited exclamations beat upon his ears: "Absolutely justified!" "Horrible attempt to murder!" "Get his nigger and things. Best for the present." He impatiently shook himself free from his small following.

"Did I kill him?" he demanded.

There was an affirmative silence.

In his wagon, driving rapidly toward Tubal Cain, a sudden sense of horror, weakness, overtook him; the roadside rocked beneath his vision.

"Mordecai," he said to his coachman, "I—I shot a man, derringered him."

The negro was unmoved.

"Man 'at fool round you, he's bound to be killed!" he asserted. "Yes, sir; he just throwed himself right away!"

Alexander Hulings wondered how John Wooddrop's daughter would be affected. At least, he thought grimly, once more self-possessed, he had put a stop to her laughter at his expense.

VIII

In the weeks that followed he devoted himself energetically to the finishing of the mansion in course of erection above Tubal Cain. It was an uncompromis-

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ing, square edifice of brick, with a railed belvedere on the roof, and a front lawn enclosed by a cast-iron fence. On each side of the path dividing the sod were wooden Chinese pagodas like those he had seen at the Mineral Springs; and masoned rings for flower beds, and ferneries, artificially heaped stones, with a fine spray from concealed pipes. Rearing its solid bulk against the living greenery of the forest, it was, he told himself pridefully, a considerable dwelling. Within were high walls and flowery ceilings, Italian marble mantels and tall mirrors, black carved and gilded furniture, and brilliant hassocks on thick-piled carpet.

The greater part of the labor was performed by the many skilled workmen now employed in his furnaces and forges. He was utterly regardless of cost, obligations, of money itself. Alexander had always been impatient at the mere material fact of wealth, of the possession and the accumulation of sheer gold. To him it was nothing more than a lever by which he moved men and things; it was a ladder that carried him above the unnoticed and unnotable. He could always get money, at need, from men or iron; to debts he never gave a thought — when they fell due they were discharged or carried on.

His reason for finishing his dwelling with such elaboration was obscure. Veneada had laughed at him, speaking of small Hulings, but he harbored no concrete purpose of marriage; there was even no dominant feminine figure in his thoughts. Perhaps faintly at times he caught the odor of a goya lily; but that was probably due to the fact that lilies were already blooming in the circular conservatory of highly colored glass attached to his veranda.

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The greater part of the house was darkened, shrouded in linen. He would see, when walking through the hall, mysterious and shadowy vistas, lengthened endlessly in the long mirrors, of dusky carpet, and alabaster and ormolu, the faint glitter of the prisms hung on the mantel lamps. Clocks would strike sonorously in the depths of halls, with the ripple of cathedral chimes. He had a housekeeper, a stout person in oiled curls, and a number of excessively humble negro servants. Alexander Hulings got from all this an acute pleasure. It, too, was a mark of his success.

He had, below, on the public road, a small edifice of one room, which formed his office, and there he saw the vast number of men always consulting with him; he never took them above to his house. And when they dined with him it was at the hotel, newly built by the packet station on the canal — functions flooded with the prodigal amounts of champagne Hulings thought necessary to his importance.

Most of his days were spent in his road wagon, in which he traveled to Pittsburgh, West Virginia, Philadelphia, where he had properties or interests. In the cities of his associates he also avoided their homes, and met them in hotels; discussed the terms of business in bars or public parlors. With women of position he was at once indifferent and ill at ease, constantly certain that he was not appearing to good advantage, and suspecting their asides and enigmatic smiles. He was laboriously, stiffly polite, speaking in complimentary flourishes that sometimes ended in abrupt constraint. At this, afterward, he would chafe, and damn the superior airs of women.

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He had returned from such an expedition to Wheeling, and was sitting in his office, when a vehicle pulled up before his door. Deliberate feet approached and John Wooddrop entered. The latter, Alexander realized enviously, was an excessively handsome old man; he had a commanding height and a square, highly colored countenance, with close white sideburns and vigorous silver hair. His manner, too, was assured and easy. He greeted Alexander Hulings with a keen, open smile.

"Everything is splendid here!" he proclaimed. "I looked in that chafery down stream, and the metal was worked like satin. Fine weather for the furnaces — rain's ugly; a furnace is like a young girl."

Hulings wondered — contained and suspicious — what the other wanted. Wooddrop, though they passed each other frequently on the road, had not saluted him since the completion of Glory Furnace. He thought for a moment that already the older man was feeling the pinch of fuel scarcity and that he had come to beg for timber. In such a case Alexander Hulings decided coldly that he would not sell Wooddrop an ell of forest. In addition to the fact that the complete success of one or the other depended ultimately on his rival's failure, he maintained a personal dislike of John Wooddrop; he had never forgotten the humiliation forced on him long before, in the dining room of the packet, the *Hit or Miss*; he could not forgive Wooddrop's preëminence in the iron field. The latter was a legend of the manufacture of iron.

However, any idea of the other's begging privilege was immediately banished by John Wooddrop's equable bearing. He said:

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“I want to speak to you, Hulings, about a rather delicate matter. In a way it is connected with my daughter, Gisela. You saw her, I believe, at the Springs.”

Alexander Hulings somberly inclined his head.

“Of course,” Wooddrop continued, “I heard about the difficulty you had with that Louisiana bravo. I understand you acted like a man of spirit and were completely exonerated; in fact, I had some small part in quashing legal complications. This was done not on your account, but because of Gisela, who confided to me that she held herself in blame. Mr. Hulings,” he said gravely, “my feeling for my daughter is not the usual affection of parent for child. My wife is dead. Gisela — But I won’t open a personal subject with you. I spoke as I did merely, in a way, to prepare you for what follows. My daughter felt that she did you a painful wrong; and I have come, in consequence, to offer you my good will. I propose that we end our competition and proceed together, for the good of both. Consolidated, we should inevitably control the iron situation in our state; you are younger, more vigorous than myself, and I have a certain prestige. Sir, I offer you the hand of friendly coöperation.”

Alexander Hulings’ gaze narrowed as he studied the man before him. At first, he had searched for an ulterior motive, need, in Wooddrop’s proposal; but he quickly saw that the proposal had been completely stated. Illogically he thought of black ringleted hair and glazed muslin; he heard the echo of water dripping from a stone urn. Lost in memories, he was silent, for so long that John Wooddrop palpably grew impatient. He cleared his throat sharply; but Hulings didn’t shift a muscle. Alex-

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ander was thinking now of the order he had filled the first summer at Tubal Cain, of his brutal labor and bitter, deferred aspirations. His rise, alone, had been at the price of ceaseless struggle; it was not yet consummated; but it would be — it must, and still alone. Nothing should rob him of the credit of his achievement; no person coupled with him might reduce or share his triumph. What he said sounded inexcusably harsh after the other's open manner.

“Only,” he said — “only if the amalgamated industries bear my name — the Alexander Hulings Ironworks.”

John Wooddrop's face darkened as he comprehended the implied insult to his dignity and position. He rose, so violently thrusting back the chair in which he had been sitting, that it fell with a clatter.

“You brass trumpet!” he ejaculated. “You intolerable little bag of vanity! Will you never see yourself except in a glass of flattery or intolerable self-satisfaction? It would be impossible to say which you inspire most, contempt or pity.”

Strangely enough, Hulings didn't resent the language applied to him. He gazed at Wooddrop without anger. The other's noise, he thought, was but a symptom of his coming downfall. He was slowly but surely drawing the rope about the throat of Wooddrop's industries.

“Absolutely the last time,” the other stuttered. “Now you can go to hell on your own high horse! Blinded by your own fatuousness — don't see where the country is running. You may impose on others, but I know your

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business, sir; and it's as hollow as a tin plate stove. The times will soon kick it in."

John Wooddrop stamped away from Hulings in a rage.

IX

That evening Alexander Hulings wondered what Gisela had told her father; he wondered more vaguely what she had thought of him — what, if at all, she still thought. He had had a formal room illuminated for his cigar after dinner; and he sat, a small, precise figure, with dust-colored hair and a somber, intent countenance, clasping a heavy roll of expensive tobacco, in a crimson plush chair. The silence, the emptiness about him was filled with rich color, ponderous maroon draperies, marble slabs and fretted tulipwood.

It suddenly struck him that, by himself, he was slightly ridiculous in such opulence. His house needed a mistress, a creature of elegance to preside at his table, to exhibit in her silks and jewels another sign of his importance. Again, as if from the conservatory, he caught a faint poignant perfume.

Gisela Wooddrop was a person of distinction, self-possessed and charming. There was a subtle flavor in thus considering her father's daughter — old Wooddrop's girl — and himself. He rose and walked to a mirror, critically surveying his countenance — yes, it was well marked by age, yet it was sharp in outline; his step was springy; he felt none of the lassitude of increasing years.

He was in his prime. Many young women would pre-

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fer him, his house and name, to the windy pretensions of youthful scapegoats. A diamond necklace was a convincing form of courtship. There was no absolute plan in his thoughts that night; but, in the dry romantic absorption of the days that followed, a fantastic purpose formed and increased — he determined to marry Gisela Wooddrop.

He had for this, he assured himself, some slight encouragement; it was patent that her father had entirely misread the girl's intent in suggesting an end to the hostilities which had made impossible any social intercourse. She was interested in him; the duel with Sinnox had captured her imagination. Women responded surprisingly to such things. Then she had held that it had been partly her fault! Now it seemed to him that he understood why he had built so elaborately since his return from the Mineral Springs; unconsciously — all the while — it had been for his wife — for Gisela.

There were great practical difficulties in the realization of his desire, even in his opportunity to present his question; to see Gisela Wooddrop long enough and sufficiently privately to explain all he hoped. He was, too, far past the age of romantic assignations, episodes; he could no more decorate a moonlit scene beneath a window. Alexander could not count on adventitious assistance from emotional setting: his offer could carry only its grave material solidity. Often he laughed curtly at what momentarily seemed an absurd fantasy, a madness approaching senility; then his pride would flood back, reassert the strength of his determination, the desirability of Alexander Hulings.

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X

The occasion evaded him; the simplicity of his wish, of the bald relationship between the Wooddrops and Tubal Cain, preventing it more surely than a multiplication of barriers. He never considered the possibility of a compromise with John Wooddrop, a retreat from his position. Alexander thought of Gisela as a possible addition to his dignity and standing — of the few women he had seen she possessed the greatest attractions — and he gave no thought of a sacrifice to gain her. She was to be a piece with the rest of his success — a wife to honor his mansion, to greet a selected few of his friends, and wear the gold and jewels purchased by the Hulings iron.

He made no overt attempt to see her, but waited for opportunity. Meantime he had commenced to think of her in terms of passionless intimacy. Alexander Hulings was a solitary man — except for his industrial activity his mind was empty, and Gisela Wooddrop quickly usurped the hours after dinner, the long drives through massed and unscarred forests. He recalled her minutely — every expression that he had seen, every variation of dress. Wooddrop's daughter was handsomely provided for; but Alexander Hulings' wife would be a revelation in luxury. In New York he bought a pair of India cashmere shawls, paying a thousand dollars for them, and placed them on a chair, ready —

The weeks multiplied; and he got such pleasure from the mere thought of Gisela sweeping through his rooms,

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accompanying him to Philadelphia, shining beside him at the opera, that he became almost reluctant to force the issue of her choice. He was more than customarily careful with his clothes; his silk hats were immaculate; his trousers ranged in color from the most delicate sulphur to astounding London checks; he had his yellow boots polished with champagne, his handkerchiefs scented with essence of nolette and almond. For all this, his countenance was none the less severe, his aptitude for labor untouched; he followed every detail of iron manufacture, every improved process, every shift in the market.

The valley about Tubal Cain now resembled a small, widely scattered town; the dwellings of Hulings' workmen extended to the property line of the Blue Lump Furnace; roads were cut, bridges thrown across the stream. The flutter of wings, the pouring birdsong and vale of green, that Alexander had found had given place to a continuous, shattering uproar day and night — the charging of furnaces; the dull thunder of the heavy wagons of blooms; the jangle of shingling sledges and monotonous fall of trip hammers — mingled and rose in a stridulous volume to the sky, accompanied by chemical vapors, uprushing cinders and the sooty smoke of the forges. A company store had been built and stocked, and grimy troops of laborers were perpetually gathered, off shift, by its face.

Harmony itself, the station on the canal, had expanded; the new hotel, an edifice of brick with a steep slate roof and iron grilling, faced a rival saloon and various emporia of merchandise. An additional basin had been cut

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in the bank for the loading of Alexander Hulings' iron onto the canal boats.

He had driven to the canal — it was early summer — to see about a congestion of movement; and, hot, he stopped in the hotel for a pint of wine in a high glass with cracked ice. The lower floor was cut in half by a hall and stairs; on the right the bar opened onto the narrow porch, while at the left a ladies' entrance gave way to the inevitable dark, already musty parlor. The bar was crowded, and, intolerant of the least curtailment of his dignity or comfort, he secured his glass and moved across the hall to the stillness of the parlor.

A woman was standing, blurred in outline, at one of the narrow windows. She turned as he entered; he bowed, prepared to withdraw, when he saw that it was Gisela Wooddrop. She wore white muslin, sprigged in orange chenille, with green ribbons, and carried a green parasol. Alexander stood motionless in the doorway, his champagne in one hand and a glossy stovepipe hat in the other. He was aware of a slight inward confusion, but outwardly he was unmoved, exact. Gisela, too, maintained the turn of her flexible body, her hands on the top of the parasol. Under her bonnet her face was pale, her eyes noticeably bright. Alexander Hulings said:

“ Good afternoon! ”

He moved into the room. Gisela said nothing; she was like a graceful painted figure on a shadowy background. A complete ease possessed Alexander.

“ Miss Wooddrop,” he continued, in the vein of a simple statement. She nodded automatically. “ This is a happy

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meeting — for me. I can now express my gratitude for your concern about a certain unfortunate occurrence at the Mineral Springs. At the same time, I regret that you were caused the slightest uneasiness.”

She shuddered delicately.

“Nothing more need be said about that,” she told him. “I explained to my father; but I was sorry afterward that I did it, and — and put him to fresh humiliation.”

“There,” he gravely replied, “little enough can be discussed. It has to do with things that you would have limited patience with, strictly an affair of business. I was referring to your susceptibility of heart, a charming female quality.”

He bowed stiffly. Gisela came nearer to him, a sudden emotion trembling on her features.

“Why don’t you end it?” she cried, low and distressed. “It has gone on a long while now — the bitterness between you; I am certain in his heart father is weary of it, and you are younger —” She broke off before the tightening of his lips.

“Not a topic to be developed here,” he insisted.

He had no intention, Alexander Hulings thought, of being bent about even so charming a finger. And it was well to establish at once the manner in which any future they might share should be conducted. He wanted a wife, not an intriguante nor Amazon. Her feeling, color, rapidly evaporated, and left her pallid, confused, before his calm demeanor. She turned her head away, her face lost in the bonnet, but slowly her gaze returned to meet his keen inquiry. His impulse was to ask her, then, at once, to marry him; but he restrained that headlong course, feel-

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ing that it would startle her into flight. As it was, she moved slowly toward the door.

"I am to meet a friend on the Western packet," she explained; "I thought I heard the horn."

"It was only freight," he replied. "I should be sorry to lose this short opportunity to pay you my respects; to tell you that you have been a lot in my thoughts lately. I envy the men who see you casually, whenever they choose."

She gazed at him with palpable surprise gathering in her widely opened eyes. "But," she said breathlessly, "everybody knows that you never address a polite syllable to a woman. It is more speculated on than any of your other traits."

He expanded at this indication of a widespread discussion of his qualities.

"I have had no time for merely polite speeches," he responded. "And I assure you that I am not only complimentary now; I mean that I am not saluting you with vapid elegance. I am awaiting only a more fitting occasion to say further."

She circled him slowly, with a minute whispering of crinoline, her gaze never leaving his face. Her muslin, below her white, bare throat, circled by a black velvet band, was heaving. The parasol fell with a clatter. He stooped immediately; but she was before him and snatched it up, with crimson cheeks.

"They say that you are the most hateful man alive!" she half breathed.

"Who are 'they'?" he demanded contemptuously. "Men I have beaten and women I failed to see. That

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hatred grows with success, with power; it is never wasted on the weak. My competitors would like to see me fall into a furnace stack — the men I have climbed over, and my debtors. They are combining every month to push me to the wall, a dozen of them together, yelping like a pack of dogs. But they haven't succeeded; they never will!" His words were like the chips from an iron bloom. "They never will," he repeated harshly, "and I have only begun. I want you to see my house sometime. I planned a great part of it with you in mind. No money was spared. . . . I should be happy to have you like it. I think of it as yours."

All the time he was speaking she was stealing by imperceptible degrees toward the door; but at his last, surprising sentence she stood transfixed with mingled wonder and fear. She felt behind her for the open doorway and rested one hand against the woodwork. A ribald clatter sounded from the bar, and without rose the faint, clear note of an approaching packet. Her lips formed for speech, but only a slight gasp was audible; then her spreading skirts billowed through the opening and she was gone.

Alexander Hulings found that he was still holding his silk hat; he placed it carefully on the table and took a deep drink from the iced glass. He was conscious of a greater feeling of triumph than he had ever known before. He realized that he had hardly needed to add the spoken word to the impression his being had made on Gisela Wooddrop. He had already invaded her imagination; the legend of his struggle and growth had taken possession of her. There remained now only a formal

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declaration, the outcome of which he felt almost certain would be in his favor.

Again in his house, he inspected the silk hangings of the particularly feminine chambers. He trod the thick carpets with a keen anticipation of her exclamations of pleasure, her surprise at convenient trifle after trifle. In the stable he surveyed a blooded mare she might take a fancy to; he must buy a light carriage, with a fringed canopy — yes, and put a driver into livery. Women liked such things.

At dinner he speculated on the feminine palate; he liked lean mountain venison, and a sherry that left almost a sensation of dust on the tongue; but women preferred sparkling hock and pastry, fruit preserved in white brandy, and pagodas of barley sugar.

Through the open windows came the subdued clatter of his forges; the hooded candles on the table flickered slightly in a warm eddy, while corresponding shadows stirred on the heavy napery, the Sheffield, and delicate creamy Belleek of his dinner service — the emblem of his certitude and pride.

XI

In October Alexander Hulings took Gisela Wooddrop to the home that had been so largely planned for her enjoyment. They had been married in a private parlor of the United States Hotel, in Philadelphia; and after a small supper had gone to the Opera House to see "Love in a Village," followed by a musical *pasticcio*. Gisela's mother had died the winter before, and she was attended

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by an elderly distant cousin; no one else was present at the wedding ceremony except a friend of Gisela's — a girl who wept copiously — and Doctor Veneada. The latter's skin hung in loose folds, like a sack partially emptied of its contents; his customary spirit had evaporated too; and he sat through the wedding supper neither eating nor speaking, save for the forced proposal of the bride's health.

Gisela Wooddrop and Alexander Hulings, meeting on a number of carefully planned, apparently accidental occasions, had decided to be married while John Wooddrop was confined to his room by severe gout. In this manner they avoided the unpleasant certainty of his refusal to attend his daughter's, and only child's, wedding. Gisela had not told Alexander Hulings what the aging Ironmaster had said when necessarily informed of her purpose. No message had come to Alexander from John Wooddrop; since the ceremony the Hulings had had no sign of the other's existence.

Alexander surveyed his wife with huge satisfaction as they sat for the first time at supper in their house. She wore white, with the diamonds he had given her about her firm young throat, black-enamel bracelets on her wrists, and her hair in a gilt net. She sighed with deep pleasure.

"It's wonderful!" she proclaimed, and then corroborated all he had surmised about the growth of her interest in him; it had reached forward and back from the killing of Partridge Sinnox. "That was the first time," she told him, "that I realized you were so — so big. You looked so miserable on the canal boat, coming out here those

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years ago, that it hardly seemed possible for you merely to live; and when you started the hearths at Tubal Cain everyone who knew anything about iron just laughed at you — we used to go down sometimes and look at those killing workmen you had, and that single mule and old horse.

“I wasn’t interested then, and I don’t know when it happened; but now I can see that a time soon came when men stopped laughing at you. I can just remember when father first became seriously annoyed, when he declared that he was going to force you out of the valleys at once. But it seemed you didn’t go. And then in a few months he came home in a dreadful temper, when he found that you controlled all the timber on the mountains. He said of course you would break before he was really short of charcoal. But it seems you haven’t broken. And now I’m married to you; I’m Gisela Hulings!”

“This is hardly more than the beginning,” he added; “the foundation — just as iron is the base for so much. I — we — are going on,” he corrected the period lamely, but was rewarded by a charming smile. “Power!” he said, shutting up one hand, his straight, fine features as hard as the cameo in his neckcloth.

She instantly fired at his tensivity of will.

“How splendid you are, Alexander!” she cried. “How tremendously satisfactory for a woman to share! You can have no idea what it means to be with a man like a stone wall!

“I wish,” she said, “that you would always tell me about your work. I’d like more than anything else to see you going on, step by step up. I suppose it is ex-

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traordinary in a woman. I felt that way about father's iron, and he only laughed at me; and yet once I kept a forge daybook almost a week, when a clerk was ill. I think I could be of real assistance to you, Alexander."

He regarded with the profoundest distaste any mingling of his, Alexander Hulings', wife and a commercial industry. He had married in order to give his life a final touch of elegance and proper symmetry. No, no; he wanted Gisela to receive him at the door of his mansion, in fleckless white, as she was now, and jewels, at the end of his day in the clamor and soot of business and put it temporarily from his thoughts.

He was distinctly annoyed that her father had permitted her to post the forge book; it was an exceedingly unladylike proceeding. He told her something of this in carefully chosen, deliberate words; and she listened quietly, but with a faint air of disappointment.

"I want you to buy yourself whatever you fancy," he continued; "nothing is too good for you — for my wife. I am very proud of you and insist on your making the best appearance, wherever we are. Next year, if the political weather clears at all, we'll go to Paris, and you can explore the mantuamakers there. You got the shawls in your dressing room?"

She hesitated, cutting uncertainly with a heavy silver knife at a crystallized citron.

Then, with an expression of determination, she addressed him again:

"But don't you see that it is your power, your success over men, that fascinates me; that first made me think of you? In a way this is not — not an ordinary affair of

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ours; I had other chances more commonplace, which my father encouraged, but they seemed so stupid that I couldn't entertain them. I love pretty clothes, Alexander; I adore the things you've given me; but will you mind my saying that that isn't what I married you for? I am sure you don't care for such details, for money itself, in the least. You are too strong. And that is why I married you, why I love to think about you, and what I want to follow, to admire and understand."

He was conscious of only a slight irritation at this masculine-sounding speech; he must have no hesitation in uprooting such ideas from his wife's thoughts; they detracted from her feminine charm, struck at the bottom of her duties, her privileges and place.

"At the next furnace in blast," he told her with admirable control, "the workmen will insist on your throwing in, as my bride, a slipper; and in that way you can help the charge."

Then, by planning an immediate trip with her to West Virginia, he abruptly brought the discussion to a close.

Alexander was pleased, during the weeks which followed, at the fact that she made no further reference to iron. She went about the house, gravely busy with its maintenance, as direct and efficient as he was in the larger realm. Almost her first act was to discharge the housekeeper. The woman came to Alexander, her face smeared with crying, and protested bitterly against the loss of a place she had filled since the house was roofed.

He was, of course, curt with her, and ratified Gisela's

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decision; but privately he was annoyed. He had not even intended his wife to discharge the practical duties of living — thinking of her as a suave figure languidly moving from parlor to dining room or boudoir; however, meeting her in a hall, energetically directing the dusting of a cornice, in a rare flash of perception he said nothing.

XII

He would not admit, even to himself, that his material affairs were less satisfactory than they had been the year before, but such he vaguely knew was a fact. Speculation in Western government lands, large investments in transportation systems for the present fallow, had brought about a general condition of commercial unrest. Alexander Hulings felt this, not only by the delayed payment for shipments of metal but in the allied interests he had accumulated. Merchandise was often preceded by demands for payment; the business of a nail manufactory he owned in Wheeling had been cut in half.

He could detect concern in the shrewd countenance and tones of Samuel Cryble, a hard-headed Yankee from a Scotch Protestant valley in New Hampshire, who had risen to the position of his chief assistant and, in a small way, copartner. They sat together in the dingy office on the public road and silently, grimly, went over invoices and payments, debts and debtors. It was on such an occasion that Alexander had word of the death of Doctor Veneada.

Hulings' involuntary concern, the stirred memories of

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the dead man's liberal spirit and mind — he had been the only person Alexander Hulings could call friend — speedily gave place to a growing anxiety as to how Veneada might have left his affairs. He had been largely a careless man in practical matters.

Alexander had never satisfied the mortgage he had granted Veneada on the timber properties purchased with the other man's money. He had tried to settle the indebtedness when it had first fallen due, but the doctor had begged him to let the money remain as it was.

“I'll only throw it away on some confounded soft-witted scheme, Alex,” he had insisted. “With you, I know where it is; it's a good investment.”

Now Hulings recalled that the second extension had expired only a few weeks before Veneada's death, incurring an obligation the settlement of which he had been impatiently deferring until he saw the other.

He had had a feeling that Veneada, with no near or highly regarded relatives, would will him the timber about the valleys; yet he was anxious to have the thing settled. The Alexander Hulings Company was short of available funds. He returned to Eastlake for Veneada's funeral; and there, for the first time, he saw the cousins to whom the doctor had occasionally and lightly alluded. They were, he decided, a lean and rapacious crew.

He remained in Eastlake for another twenty-four hours, but was forced to leave with nothing discovered; and it was not until a week later that, again in his office, he learned that Veneada had made no will. This, it seemed, had been shown beyond any doubt. He rose, walked to a dusty window, and gazed out unseeingly at an eddy of

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dead leaves and dry metallic snow in a bleak November wind.

After a vague, disconcerted moment he shrewdly divined exactly what would occur. He said nothing to Cryble, seated with his back toward him; and even Gisela looked with silent inquiry at his absorption throughout supper. She never questioned him now about any abstraction that might be concerned with affairs outside their pleasant life together.

The inevitable letter at last arrived, announcing the fact that, in a partition settlement of Veneada's estate by his heirs, it was necessary to settle the expired mortgage. It could not have come, he realized, at a more inconvenient time.

He was forced to discuss the position with Cryble; and the latter heard him to the end with a narrowed, searching vision.

"That money out of the business now might leave us on the bank," he asserted. "As I see it, there's but one thing to do—go over all the timber, judge what we actually will need for coaling, buy that—or, if we must, put another mortgage on it—and let the rest, a good two-thirds, go."

This, Alexander acknowledged to himself, was the logical if not the only course. And then John Wooddrop would purchase the remainder; he would have enough charcoal to keep up his local industries beyond his own life and another. All his—Alexander's—planning, aspirations, sacrifice, would have been for nothing. He would never, like John Wooddrop, be a great industrial despot, or command, as he had so often pictured, the iron

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situation of the state. To do that, he would have to control all the iron the fumes of whose manufacture stained the sky for miles about Harmony. If Wooddrop recovered an adequate fuel supply Alexander Hulings would never occupy more than a position of secondary importance.

There was a bare possibility of his retaining all the tracts again by a second mortgage; but as he examined that, it sank from a potentiality to a thing without substance. It would invite an investigation, a public gleaning of facts, that he must now avoid. His pride could not contemplate the publication of the undeniable truth — that what he had so laboriously built up stood on an insecure foundation.

“It is necessary,” he said stiffly, “in order to realize on my calculations, that I continue to hold all the timber at present in my name.”

“And that’s where you make a misjudgment,” Cryble declared, equally blunt. “I can see clear enough that you are letting your personal feeling affect your business sense. There is room enough in Pennsylvania for both you and old Wooddrop. Anyhow, there’s got to be somebody second in the parade, and that is a whole lot better than tail end.”

Alexander Hulings nodded absently; Cryble’s philosophy was correct for a clerk, an assistant, but Alexander Hulings felt the tyranny of a wider necessity. He wondered where he could get the money to satisfy the claim of the doctor’s heirs. His manufacturing interests in West Virginia, depreciated as they were at present, would about cover the debt. Ordinarily they were worth a third

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more; and in ten years they would double in value. He relentlessly crushed all regret at parting with what was now his best property and promptly made arrangements to secure permanently the timberland.

Soon, he felt, John Wooddrop must feel the pinch of fuel shortage; and Alexander awaited such development with keen attention. As he had anticipated, when driving from the canal, he saw that the Blue Lump Furnace had gone out of blast, its workmen dispersed. Gisela, the day before, had been to see her father; and he was curious to hear what she might report. A feeling of coming triumph, of inevitable, worldly expansion, settled comfortably over him, and he regarded his wife pleasantly through a curtain of cigar smoke.

They were seated in a parlor, already shadowy in an early February dusk; coals were burning brightly in a polished open stove, by which Gisela was embroidering in brightly colored wool on a frame. She had the intent, placid expression of a woman absorbed in a small, familiar duty. As he watched her Alexander Hulings' satisfaction deepened — young and fine and vigorous, she was preëminently a wife for his importance and position. She gazed at him vacantly, her eyes crinkled at the corners, her lips soundlessly counting stitches, and a faint smile rose to his lips.

He was anxious to hear what she might say about John Wooddrop, and yet a feeling of propriety restrained him from a direct question. He had not had a line, a word or message, from Wooddrop since he had married the other's daughter. The aging man, he knew, idolized Gisela; and her desertion — for so John Wooddrop would hold it —

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must have torn the Ironmaster. She had, however, been justified in her choice, he contentedly continued his train of thought. Gisela had everything a woman could wish for. He had been a thoughtful husband. Her clothes, of the most beautiful texture and design, were pinned with jewels; her deftly moving fingers flashed with rings; the symbol of his success, his ——

“My father looks badly, Alexander,” she said suddenly. “I wish you would see him, and that he would talk to you. But you won’t and he won’t. He is very nearly as stubborn as yourself. I wish you could make a move; after all, you are younger. . . . But then, you would make each other furious in a second.” She sighed deeply.

“Has he shown any desire to see me?”

“No,” she admitted. “You must know he thinks you married me only to get his furnaces; he is ridiculous about it — just as if you needed any more! He has been fuming and planning a hundred things since his charcoal has been getting low.”

She stopped and scrutinized her embroidery, a naïve pattern of rose and urn and motto. He drew a long breath; that was the first tangible indication he had had of the working out of his planning, the justification of his sacrifice.

“I admire father,” she went on once more, conversationally; “my love for you hasn’t blinded me to his qualities. He has a surprising courage and vigor for an —— Why, he must be nearly seventy! And now he has the most extraordinary plan for what he calls ‘getting the better of you.’ He was as nice with me as

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possible, but I could see that he thinks you're lost this time. . . . No, the darker green. Alexander, don't you think the words would be sweet in magenta? "

"Well," he demanded harshly, leaning forward, "what is this plan? "

She looked up, surprised at his hard impatience.

"How queer you are! And that's your iron expression; you know it's expressly forbidden in the house, after hours. His plan? I'm certain there's no disloyalty in telling you. Isn't it mad, at his age? And it will cost him an outrageous amount of money. He is going to change the entire system of all his forges and furnaces. It seems stone coal has been found on his slopes; and he is going to blow in with that, and use a hot blast in his smelting."

Alexander Hulings sat rigid, motionless; the cigar in his hand cast up an unbroken blue ribbon of smoke. Twice he started to speak, to exclaim incredulously; but he uttered no sound. It seemed that all his planning had been utterly overthrown, ruined; in a manner which he — anyone — could not have foreseen. The blowing in of furnaces with hard coal had developed since his entrance into the iron field. It had not been generally declared successful; the pig produced had been so impure that, with working in an ordinary or even puddling forge, it had often to be subjected to a third, finery fire. But he had been conscious of a slow improvement in the newer working; he had vaguely acknowledged that sometime anthracite would displace charcoal for manufacturing purposes; in future years he might adopt it himself.

But John Wooddrop had done it before him; all the

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square miles of timber that he had acquired with such difficulty, that he had retained at the sacrifice of his best property, would be worthless. The greater part of it could not be teamed across Wooddrop's private roads or hauled advantageously over a hundred intervening streams and miles. It was all wasted, lapsed — his money, dreams!

“It will take over a year,” she went on. “I don't understand it at all; but it seems that sending a hot blast into a furnace, instead of the cold, keeps the metal at a more even temperature. Father's so interested you'd think he was just starting out in life — though, really, he is an old man.” She laughed. “Competition has been good for him.”

All thrown away; in vain! Alexander Hulings wondered what acidulous comment Cryble would make. There were no coal deposits on his land, its nature forbade that; besides, he had no money to change the principal of his drafts. He gazed about at the luxury that surrounded Gisela and himself; there was no lien on the house, but there still remained some thousands of dollars to pay on the carpets and fixtures. His credit, at least, was unimpeachable; decorators, tradespeople of all sorts, had been glad to have him in their debt. But if any whisper of financial stringency escaped, a horde would be howling about his gate, demanding the settlement of their picayune accounts.

The twilight had deepened; the fire made a ruddy area in the gloom, into the heart of which he flung his cigar. His wife embroidered serenely. As he watched her, noting her firm, well-modeled features, realizing her utter

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unconsciousness of all that he essentially at that moment was, he felt a strange sensation of loneliness, of isolation.

Alexander Hulings had a sudden impulse to take her into his confidence; to explain everything to her — the disaster that had overtaken his project of ultimate power, the loss of the West Virginia interest, the tightness of money. He had a feeling that she would not be a negligible adviser — he had been a witness of her efficient management of his house — and he felt a craving for the sympathy she would instantly extend.

Alexander parted his lips to inform her of all that had occurred; but the habit of years, the innate fiber of his being, prevented. A wife, he reminded himself, a woman, had no part in the bitter struggle for existence; it was not becoming for her to mingle with the affairs of men. She should be purely a creature of elegance, of solace, and, dressed in India muslin or vaporous silk, ornament a divan, sing French or Italian songs at a piano. The other was manifestly improper.

This, illogically, made him irritable with Gisela; she appeared, contentedly sewing, a peculiarly useless appendage in his present stress of mind. He was glum again at supper, and afterward retired into an office he had had arranged on the ground floor of the mansion. There he got out a number of papers, accounts and pass books; but he spent little actual time on them. He sat back in his chair, with his head sunk low, and mind thronged with memories of the past, of his long, uphill struggle against oblivion and ill health.

Veneada was gone; yes, and Conrad Wishon too — the

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supporters and confidants of his beginning. He himself was fifty years old. At that age a man should be firmly established, successful and not deviled by a thousand unexpected mishaps. By fifty a man's mind should be reasonably at rest, his accomplishment and future secure; while there was nothing of security, but only combat, before him.

Wooddrop had been a rich man from the start, when he, Alexander Hulings, at the humiliating failure of the law, had had to face life with a few paltry hundreds. No wonder he had been obliged to contract debts, to enter into impossibly onerous agreements! Nothing but struggle ahead, a relentless continuation of the past years; and he had reached, passed, his prime!

There, for a day, he had thought himself safe, moving smoothly toward the highest pinnacles; when, without warning, at a few words casually pronounced over an embroidery frame, the entire fabric of his existence had been rent! It was not alone the fact of John Wooddrop's progressive spirit that he faced, but now a rapidly accumulating mass of difficulties. He was dully amazed at the treacherous shifting of life, at the unheralded change of apparently solid ground for quicksand.

XIII

Though the industries centered about Tubal Cain were operated and apparently owned by the Alexander Hulings Iron Company, and Hulings was publicly regarded as their proprietor, in reality his hold on them was hardly more than nominal. At the erection of the furnaces and

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supplementary forges he had been obliged to grant such rebates to the Colurabus Transportation interest in return for capital, he had contracted to supply them at a minimum price such a large proportion of his possible output, that, with continuous shifts, he was barely able to dispose advantageously of a sixth of the year's manufacture.

He had made such agreement confident that he would ultimately control the Wooddrop furnaces; when, doubling his resources, he would soon free himself from conditions imposed on him by an early lack of funds. Now it was at least problematic whether he would ever extend his power to include the older man's domain. His marriage with Gisela had only further separated them, hardening John Wooddrop's resolve that Hulings should never fire a hearth of his, a determination strengthened by the rebuilding of Wooddrop's furnaces for a stone-coal heat.

The widespread land speculation, together with the variability of currency, now began seriously to depress the country, and, more especially, Alexander Hulings. He went to Philadelphia, to Washington, for conferences; but returned to his mansion, to Gisela, in an increasing somberness of mood. All the expedients suggested, the legalizing of foreign gold and silver, the gradual elimination of the smaller state-bank notes, an extra coinage, one after another failed in their purpose of stabilization; acute panic threatened.

Alexander was almost as spare of political comments to his wife as he was of business discussion. That, too, he thought, did not become the female poise. At times,

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bitter and brief, he condemned the Administration; during dinner he all but startled a servant into dropping a platter by the unexpected violence of a period hurled at the successful attempts to destroy the national bank. And when, as — he declared — a result of that, the state institutions refused specie payment, and a flood of rapidly depreciating paper struck at the base of commerce, Alexander gloomily informed Gisela that the country was being sold for a barrel of hard cider.

He had, with difficulty, a while before secured what had appeared to be an advantageous order from Virginia; and, after extraordinary effort, he had delivered the iron. But during the lapsing weeks, when the state banks refused to circulate gold, the rate of exchange for paper money fell so far that he lost all his calculated profit, and a quarter of the labor as well. The money of other states depreciated in Pennsylvania a third. In addition to these things Alexander commenced to have trouble with his workmen — wages, too, had diminished, but their hours increased. Hulings, like other commercial operators, issued printed money of his own, good at the company store, useful in the immediate vicinity of Tubal Cain, but valueless at any distance. Cryble, as he had anticipated, recounted the triumph of John Wooddrop.

“The old man can’t be beat!” he asserted. “We’ve got a nice little business here. Tailed on to Wooddrop’s, we should do good; but you are running it into an iron wall. You ain’t content with enough.”

Cryble was apparently unconscious of the dangerous glitter that had come into Hulings’ gaze. Alexander

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listened quietly until the other had finished, and then curtly released him from all connection or obligation with himself. James Cryble was undisturbed.

"I was thinking myself about a move," he declared. "This concern is pointed bull-headed onto destruction! You're a sort of peacock," he further told Hulings; "you can't do much besides spread and admire your own feathers. But you'll get learned."

Alexander made no reply, and the other shortly after disappeared from his horizon. Cryble, he thought contemptuously, a man of routine, had no more salience than one of the thousands of identical iron pigs run from Glory Furnace. There commenced now a period of toil more bitter, more relentless than his first experience in the valleys; by constant effort he was able to keep just ahead of the unprofitable labor for the Columbus Railroad. The number of workmen grew constantly smaller, vaguely contaminated by the unsettled period, while his necessity increased. Again and again he longed to strip off his coat and superfluous linen and join the men working the metal in the hearths; he would have felt better if he could have had actual part in rolling and stamping the pig beds, or even in dumping materials into the furnace stack.

As it was, consumed by a fever of impatience and concern, the manufacture of his iron seemed to require months between the crude ore and the finished bars and blooms. He detected a growing impotence among laborers, and told them of it with an unsparing, lashing tongue. A general hatred of him again flashed into being; but it was still accompanied by a respect amounting to fear.

He was approached, at a climax of misfortune, by

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representatives of the railroad. They sat, their solid faces rimmed in whiskers, and smooth fingers playing with portentous seals, in his office, while one of their number expounded their presence.

"It's only reasonable, Hulings," he stated suavely, "that one man can't stand up against present conditions. Big concerns all along the coast have gone to wreck. You are an exceptional man, one we would be glad to have in our Company; and that, briefly, is what we have come to persuade you to do — to merge your activities here into the railroad; to get on the locomotive with us.

"Long ago you were shrewd enough to see that steam transportation was the coming power; and now — though for the moment we seem overextended — your judgment has been approved. It only remains for you to ratify your perspicacity and definitely join us. We can, I think, offer you something in full keeping with your ability — a vice presidency of the reorganized company and a substantial personal interest."

Alexander attended the speaker half absently, though he realized that probably he had arrived at the crisis of his life, his career; his attention was rapt away by dreams, memories. He saw himself again, saturated with sweat and grime, sitting with Conrad Wishon against the little house where they slept, and planning his empire of iron; he thought again, even further back, of the slough of anguish from which he had won free; and persistently, woven through the entire texture, was his vision of iron and of pride. He had sworn to himself that he would build success from the metal for which he had such a personal affinity; that he would be known as the great Iron-

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master of Pennsylvania; and that unsubstantial ideal, tottering now on the edge of calamity, was still more potent, more persuasive, than the concrete and definite promises of safety, prosperity, the implied threat, of the established power before him.

He had an objective comprehension of the peril of his position, his negligible funds and decreasing credit, the men with accounts clamoring for settlement; he thought absurdly of a tessellated floor he had lately laid in his vestibule, the mingled aggression and uncertainty on every hand; but his subjective self rose up and dominated him. Louder than any warning, was the cry, the necessity, for the vindication of the triumphant Alexander Hulings, perpetually rising higher. To surrender his iron now, to enter, a mere individual, however elevated, into a corporation, was to confess himself defeated, to tear down all the radiant images from which he had derived his reason for being.

Hulings thought momentarily of Gisela; he had, it might be, no right to involve her blindly in a downfall of the extent that now confronted him. However, he relentlessly repressed this consideration, together with a vague idea of discussing with her their — his — position. His was the judgment, the responsibility, that sustained them; she was only an ornament, the singer of little airs in the evening; the decoration, in embroidery and gilt flowers, of his table.

He thanked the speaker adequately and firmly voiced his refusal of the offer.

“I am an iron man,” he stated in partial explanation; “as that I must sink or swim.”

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“Iron,” another commented dryly, “is not noted for its floating properties.”

“I am disappointed, Hulings,” the first speaker acknowledged; “yes, and surprised. Of course we are not ignorant of the condition here; and you must also know that the company would like to control your furnaces. We have offered you the palm, and you must be willing to meet the consequences of your refusal. As I said, we’d like to have you too—energetic and capable; for, as the Bible reads, ‘He that is not for me ——’”

When they had gone, driving in a local surrey back to the canal, Alexander Hulings secured his hat and, dismissing his carriage, walked slowly down to Tubal Cain Forge. An increasing roar and uprush of sooty smoke and sparks marked the activity within; the water poured dripping over the water wheel, through the channel he had cleared, those long years back, with bleeding hands; strange men stood at the shed opening; but the stream and its banks were exactly as he had first seen them.

His life seemed to have swung in a circle from that former day to now — from dilemma to dilemma. What, after all, did he have, except an increasing weariness of years, that he had lacked then? He thought, with a grim smile, that he might find in his safe nine hundred dollars. All his other possessions suddenly took on an unsubstantial aspect; they were his; they existed; yet they eluded his realization, brought him none of the satisfaction of an object, a fact, solidly grasped.

His name, as he had planned, had grown considerable in men’s ears, its murmur rose like an incense to his pride; yet, underneath, it gave him no satisfaction. It

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gave him no satisfaction because it carried no conviction of security, no personal corroboration of the mere sound.

What, he now saw, he had struggled to establish was a good opinion in his own eyes, that actually he was a strong man; the outer response, upon which he had been intent, was unimportant compared with the other. And in the latter he had not moved forward a step; if he had widened his sphere he had tacitly accepted heavier responsibilities — undischarged. A flicker hammered on a resonant limb, just as it had long ago. How vast, eternal, life was! Conrad Wishon, with his great arched chest and knotted arms, had gone into the obliterating earth.

Death was preferable to ruin, to the concerted gibes of little men, the forgetfulness of big; once, looking at his greying countenance in a mirror, he had realized that it would be easier for him to die than fail. Then, with a sudden twisting of his thoughts, his mind rested on Gisela, his wife. He told himself, with justifiable pride, that she had been content with him; Gisela was not an ordinary woman, she had not married him for a cheap and material reason, and whatever admiration she had had in the beginning he had been able to preserve. Alexander Hulings was certain of that; he saw it in a hundred little acts of her daily living. She thought he was a big man, a successful man; he had not permitted a whisper of his difficulties to fret her serenity, and, by heaven! he thought with a sharp return of his native vigor, she never should hear of them; he would stifle them quietly, alone, one by one.

The idea of death, self-inflicted, a flaccid surrender, receded before the flood of his returning pride, confidence.

TUBAL CAIN

Age, he exulted, had not impaired him; if his importance was now but a shell, he would fill it with the iron of actuality; he would place himself and Gisela forever beyond the threats of accident and circumstance.

XIV

Gisela had been to Philadelphia, and she was unusually gay, communicative; she was dressed in lavender-and-rose net, with black velvet, and about her throat she wore a sparkling pendant that he had never before noticed.

“I hope you’ll like it,” she said, fingering the diamonds; “the shape was so graceful that I couldn’t resist. And you are so generous, Alexander!”

He was always glad, he told her briefly, to see her in new and fine adornments. He repressed an involuntary grimace at the thought of the probable cost of the ornament. She could hardly have chosen a worse time in which to buy jewels. Not only his own situation but the whole time was one for retrenchment. The impulse to tell her this was speedily lost in his pride of her really splendid appearance. He himself had commanded her to purchase whatever she fancied; he had explained that that — the domain of beauty — was exclusively hers; and it was impossible to complain at her first considerable essay.

Here his feeling was rooted in the deepest part of his being — he was, after all, twenty-five years older than Gisela; and, as if in a species of reparation for the discrepancy, he owed her all the luxury possible. This he had promised her — and himself; and an inability to

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provide gowns and necklaces and gewgaws was a most humiliating confession of failure, a failure unendurable to him on every plane. Alexander, too, had told her finally that she had no place in his affairs of business; and after that he could not very well burden her with the details of a stupid — and momentary — need for economy.

“I got a bouquet holder,” she continued — “sweet, in chased gold, with garnets. And a new prayer book; you must see that — bound in carved ivory, from Paris.” He listened with a stolid face to her recital, vaguely wondering how much she had spent; how long the jeweler would wait for settlement. “And there was a wonderful Swiss watch I thought of for you; it rang the hours and ——”

“That,” he said hastily, “I don’t need. I have two excellent watches.”

“But you are always complaining!” she returned, mildly surprised. “I didn’t get it, but told the man to put it aside. I’ll write if you don’t want it.”

“Do!”

Suddenly he felt weary, a twinge of sciatica shot through his hip; he must keep out of the damp cast houses, with their expanses of wet sand. But actually he was as good as he had ever been; better, for he now saw clearly what he must accomplish, satisfy. The present national crisis would lift; there was already a talk of the resumption of gold payment by the state banks; and the collapse of a firm associated with him in a rolling mill had thrown its control into his hands. Steam power had already been connected, and he could supply the railroad corporation with a certain number of finished rails direct, adding slightly to his profit.

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The smallest gain was important, a scrap of wood to keep him temporarily afloat on disturbed waters; he saw before him, close by, solid land. But meantime more than one metaphorical wave swept over his head, leaving him shaken. The Columbus people returned a shipment of iron, with the complaint that it was below the grade useful for their purpose. He inspected the rejected bars with his head forgerman, and they were unable to discover the deficiency.

"That's good puddled iron," the forgerman asserted. "I saw the pig myself, and it could have been wrought on a cold anvil. Do they expect blister steel?"

Alexander Hulings kept to himself the knowledge that this was the beginning of an assault upon his integrity, his name and possessions. At court he could have established the quality of his iron, forced the railroad to accept it within their contract. But he had no money to expend on tedious legal processes; and they knew that in the city.

"We can get a better price for it than theirs," he commented.

The difficulty lay in supplying a stated amount. The forgerman profanely explained something of his troubles with labor:

"I get my own anvils busy, and perhaps the furnaces running out the metal, when the damn charcoal burners lay down. That's the hardest crowd of niggers and drunken Dutch that ever cut wood! It's never a week but one is shot or has his throat cut; and some of the coal they send down looks like pine ash."

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At their home he found Gisela with the draperies of the dining room in a silken pile on the carpet.

"I'm tired of this room," she announced; "it's too — too heavy. Those plum-colored curtains almost made me weep. Now what do you think of this? A white marble mantel in place of that black, and a mirror with wreaths of colored gilt. An apple green carpet, with pink satin at the windows, draped with India muslin, and gold cords, and Spanish mahogany furniture — that's so much lighter than this." She studied the interior seriously. "Less ormolu and more crystal," Gisela decided.

He said nothing; he had given her the house — it was her world, to do with as she pleased. The decorating of the dining room had cost over three thousand dollars. "And a big Chinese cage, full of finches and rollers." He got a certain grim entertainment from the accumulating details of her planning. Certainly it would be impossible to find anywhere a wife more unconscious of the sordid details of commerce. Gisela was his ideal of elegance and propriety.

Nevertheless, he felt an odd, illogical loneliness fastening on him here, where he had thought to be most completely at ease. His mind, filled with the practical difficulties of tomorrow, rebelled against the restriction placed on it; he wanted to unburden himself of his troubles, to lighten them with discussion, give them the support of another's belief in his ability, his destiny; but, with Cryble gone, and his wife dedicated to purely æsthetic considerations, there was no one to whom he dared confess his growing predicament.

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Marriage, he even thought, was something of a failure — burdensome. Gisela, in the exclusive rôle of a finch in an elaborate cage, annoyed him now by her continual chirping song. He thought disparagingly of all women; light creatures fashioned of silks and perfume, extravagant. After supper he went directly into his office room.

There, conversely, he was irritated with the accounts spread perpetually before him, the announcements of fresh failures, depreciated money and bonds. He tramped back and across the limited space, longing to share Gisela's tranquillity. In a manner he had been unjust to her; he had seen, noted, other women, his own was vastly superior. Particularly she was truthful, there was no subterfuge, pretense, about her; and she had courage, but — John Wooddrop's daughter — she would have. Alexander Hulings thought of the old man with reluctant admiration; he was strong; though he, Hulings, was stronger. He would, he calculated brutally, last longer; and in the end he would, must win.

XV

Yet adverse circumstances closed about him like the stone walls of a cell. The slightest error or miscalculation would bring ruin crashing about his pretensions. It was now principally his commanding interest in the rolling mill that kept him going; his forges and furnaces, short of workmen, were steadily losing ground. And, though summer was at an end, Gisela chose this time to divert the labor of a considerable shift to the setting of new

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masoned flower beds. He watched the operation somberly from the entrance of the conservatory attached, like a parti-colored fantastic glass bubble, to his house.

"It won't take them over four or five days," Gisela said at his shoulder.

He positively struggled to condemn her foolish waste, but not a word escaped the barrier of his pride. Once started, he would have to explain the entire precarious situation to her — the labor shortage, the dangerous tension of his credit, the inimical powers anxious to absorb his industry, the fact that he was a potential failure. He wished, at any sacrifice, to keep the last from his wife, convinced as she was of his success.

Surely in a few months the sky would clear and he would triumph — this time solidly, beyond all assault. He rehearsed this without his usual conviction; the letters from the Columbus System were growing more dictatorial; he had received a covertly insolent communication from an insignificant tool works.

The Columbus Railroad had written that they were now able to secure a rail, satisfactory for their purpose and tests, at a considerably lower figure than he demanded. This puzzled him; knowing intimately the whole iron situation, he realized that it was impossible for any firm to make a legitimate profit at a smaller price than his. When he learned that the new contracts were being met by John Wooddrop his face was ugly — the older man, at a sacrifice, was deliberately, coldly hastening his downfall. But he abandoned this unpleasant thought when, later, in a circuitous manner, he learned that the Wooddrop Rolling Mills, situated ten miles south of the valleys,

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were running on a new, secret and vastly economical system.

He looked up, his brow scored, from his desk. Conrad Wishon's son, a huge bulk, was looking out through a window, completely blocking off the light. Alexander Hulings said:

"I'd give a thousand dollars to know something of that process!"

The second Wishon turned on his heel.

"What's that?" he demanded.

Alexander told him. The other was thoughtful.

"I wouldn't have a chance hereabouts," he pronounced; "but I'm not so well known at the South Mills. Perhaps ——"

Hulings repeated moodily:

"A thousand dollars!"

He was skeptical of Wishon's ability to learn anything of the new milling. It had to do obscurely with the return of the bars through the rollers without having to be constantly re-fed. Such a scheme would cut forty men from the pay books.

A black depression settled over him, as tangible as soot; he felt physically weary, sick. Alexander fingered an accumulation of bills; one, he saw, was from the Philadelphia jeweler — a fresh extravagance of Gisela's. But glancing hastily at its items, he was puzzled — "Resetting diamond necklace in pendant, fifty-five dollars." It was addressed to Gisela; its presence here, on his desk, was an error. After a momentary, fretful conjecturing he dismissed it from his thoughts; women were beyond comprehension.

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He had now, from the sciatica, a permanent limp; a cane had ceased to be merely ornamental. A hundred small details, falling wrongly, rubbed on the raw of his dejection. The feeling of loneliness deepened about him. As the sun sank, throwing up over the world a last dripping bath of red-gold light, he returned slowly to his house. Each window, facing him, flashed in a broad sheet of blinding radiance, a callous illumination. A peacock, another of Gisela's late extravagances, spread a burnished metallic plumage, with a grating cry.

But the hall was pleasantly still, dim. He stood for a long minute, resting, drawing deep breaths of quietude. Every light was lit in the reception room, where he found his wife, seated, in burnt-orange satin and bare powdered shoulders, amid a glitter of glass prisms, gilt and marble. Her very brilliance, her gay, careless smile, added to his fatigue. Suddenly he thought — I am an old man with a young wife! His dejection changed to bitterness. Gisela said:

“I hope you like my dress; it came from Vienna, and was wickedly expensive. Really I ought to wear sapphires with it; I rather think I'll get them. Diamonds look like glass with orange.”

Her words were lost in a confused blurring of his mind. He swayed slightly. Suddenly the whole circumstance of his living, of Gisela's babbling, became unendurable. His pride, his conception of a wife set in luxury above the facts of existence, a mere symbol of his importance and wealth, crumbled, stripping him of all pretense. He raised a thin, darkly veined and trembling hand.

“Sapphires!” he cried shrilly. “Why, next week

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we'll be lucky if we can buy bread! I am practically smashed — smashed at fifty and more. This house that you fix up and fix up, that dress and the diamonds and clocks, and — and ——— They are not real; in no time they'll go, fade away like smoke, leave me — us — bare. For five years I have been fighting for my life; and now I'm losing; everything is slipping out of my hands. While you talk of sapphires; you build bedamned gardens with the men I need to keep us alive; and peacocks and ——”

He stopped as abruptly as he had commenced, flooded with shame at the fact that he stood before her self-condemned; that she, Gisela, saw in him a sham. He miserably avoided her gaze, and was surprised when she spoke, in an unperturbed warm voice:

“Sit down, Alexander; you are tired and excited.” She rose and, with a steady hand, forced him into a chair. “I am glad that, at last, you told me this,” she continued evenly; “for now we can face it, arrange, together. It can't be so bad as you suppose. Naturally you are worn, but you are a very strong man; I have great faith in you.”

He gazed at her in growing wonderment; here was an entirely different woman from the Gisela who had chattered about Viennese gowns. He noted, with a renewed sense of security, the firmness of her lips, her level, unflinching gaze. He had had an unformulated conviction that in crises women wrung their hands, fainted. She gesticulated toward the elaborate furnishings, including her satin array:

“However it may have seemed, I don't care a bawbee about these things! I never did; and it always annoyed

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father as it annoyed you. I am sorry, if you like. But at last we understand each other. We can live, fight, intelligently."

Gisela knew; regret, pretense, were useless now, and curiously in that knowledge she seemed to come closer to him; he had a new sense of her actuality. Yet that evening she not only refused to listen to any serious statements, but played and sang the most frothy Italian songs.

XVI

On the day following he felt generally upheld. His old sense of power, of domination, his contempt for petty men and competitions, returned. He determined to go to Pittsburgh himself and study the labor conditions; perhaps secure a fresh, advantageous connection. He was planning the details of this when a man he knew only slightly, by sight, as connected with the coaling, swung unceremoniously into his office.

"Mr. Hulings, sir," he stammered, "Wishon has been shot — killed."

"Impossible!" he ejaculated.

But instantly Alexander Hulings was convinced that it was true. His momentary confidence, vigor, receded before the piling adversities, bent apparently upon his destruction.

"Yes, his body is coming up now. All we know is, a watchman saw him standing at a window of the Wood-drop Mills after hours, and shot him for trespassing — spying on their process."

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Alexander's first thought was not of the man just killed, but of old Conrad, longer dead. He had been a faithful, an invaluable assistant; without him Hulings would never have risen. And now he had been the cause of his son's death! A sharp regret seized him, but he grew rapidly calm before the excitement of the inferior before him.

"Keep this quiet for the moment," he commanded.

"Quiet!" the other cried. "It's already known all over the mountains. Wishon's workmen have quit coal-ing. They swear they will get Wooddrop's superintendent and hang him."

"Where are they?" Hulings demanded.

The other became sullen, uncommunicative. "We want to pay them for this," he muttered. "No better man lived than Wishon."

Alexander at once told his wife of the accident. She was still surprisingly contained, though pale. "Our men must be controlled," she asserted. "No further horrors!"

Her attitude, he thought, was exactly right; it was neither callous nor hysterical. He was willing to assume the burden of his responsibilities. It was an ugly, a regrettable occurrence; but men had been killed in his employ before — not a week passed without an accident, and if he lost his head in a welter of sentimentality he might as well shut down at once. Some men lived, struggled upward. It was a primary part of the business of success to keep alive.

Gisela had correctly found the real danger of their position — the thing must go no further. The sky had clouded and a cold rain commenced to fall. He could, however, pay no attention to the weather; he rose from a

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partial dinner and departed on a score of complicated and difficult errands. But his main concern, to locate and dominate the mobbing charcoal burners, evaded his straining efforts. He caught rumors, echoed threats; once he almost overtook them, yet, with scouts placed, they avoided him.

He sent an urgent message to John Wooddrop, and, uncertain of its delivery, himself drove in search of the former; but Wooddrop was out somewhere in his wide holdings; the superintendent could not be located. A sense of an implacable fatality hung over him; every chance turned against him, mocked the insecurity of his boasted position, deepened the abyss waiting for his inevitable fall.

He returned finally, baffled and weary, to his house; yet still tense with the spirit of angry combat. A species of fatalism now enveloped him in the conviction that he had reached the zenith of his misfortunes; if he could survive the present day. . . . A stableman met him at the veranda.

"Mrs. Hulings has gone," the servant told him. "A man came looking for you. It seems they had Wooddrop's manager back in the Mills tract and were going to string him up. But you couldn't be found. Mrs. Hulings, she went to stop it."

An inky cloud floated nauseously before his eyes — not himself alone, but Gisela, dragged into the dark whirlpool gathered about his destiny! He was momentarily stunned, with twitching hands and a riven, haggard face, remembering the sodden brutality of the men he had seen

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in the smoke of charring, isolated stacks; and then a sharp energy seized him.

“How long back?” Hulings demanded.

“An hour or more, perhaps a couple.”

Alexander raged at the mischance that had sent Gisela on such an errand. Nothing, he felt, with Wooddrop’s manager secured, would halt the charcoal burners’ revenge of Wishon’s death. The rain now beat down in a heavy diagonal pour and twilight was gathering.

“We must go at once for Mrs. Hulings,” he said. Then he saw Gisela approaching, accompanied by a small knot of men. She walked directly up to him, her crinoline soggy with rain, her hair plastered on her brow; but her deathly pallor drove all else from his observation. She shuddered slowly, her skirt dripping ceaselessly about her on the sod.

“I was too late!” she said in a dull voice. “They had done it!” She covered her eyes, moved back from the men beside her, from him. “Swinging a little . . . all alone! So sudden — there, before me!” A violent shivering seized her.

“Come,” Alexander Hulings said hoarsely; “you must get out of the wet. Warm things. Immediately!”

He called imperatively for Gisela’s maid, and together they assisted her up to her room. There Gisela had a long, violent chill; and he sent a wagon for the doctor at Harmony.

The doctor arrived, disappeared above; but, half an hour later, he would say little. Alexander Hulings commanded him to remain in the house. The lines deepened momentarily on the former’s countenance; he saw himself

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unexpectedly in a shadowy pier glass, and stood for a long while subconsciously surveying the lean, grizzled countenance that followed his gaze out of the immaterial depths. "Alexander Hulings," he said aloud, in a tormented mockery; "the master of — of life!"

He was busy with the local marshal when the doctor summoned him from the office.

"Your wife," the other curtly informed him, "has developed pneumonia."

Hulings steadied himself with a hand against a wall.

"Pneumonia!" he repeated, to no one in particular. "Send again for John Wooddrop."

He was seated, a narrow, rigid figure, waiting for the older man, in the midst of gorgeous upholstery. Two facts hammered with equal persistence on his numbed brain: one that all his projects, his dream of power, of iron, now approached ruin, and the other that Gisela had pneumonia. It was a dreadful thing that she had come on in the Mills tract! The Columbus System must triumphantly absorb all that he had, that he was to be. Gisela had been chilled to the bone; pneumonia! It became difficult and then impossible to distinguish one from the other — Gisela and the iron were inexplicably welded in the poised catastrophe of his ambition.

Alexander Hulings rose, his thin lips pinched, his eyes mere sparks, his body tense, as if he were confronting the embodied force that had checked him. He stood upright, so still that he might have been cast in the metal that had formed his vision of power, holding an unquailing mien. His inextinguishable pride cloaked him in a final contempt for all that life, that fate, might do. Then

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his rigidity was assaulted by John Wooddrop's heavy and hurried entrance into the room.

Hulings briefly repeated the doctor's pronouncement. Wooddrop's face was darkly pouched, his unremoved hat a mere wet film, and he left muddy exact footprints wherever he stepped on the velvet carpet.

"By heaven!" he quavered, his arms upraised. "If between us we have killed her ——" His voice abruptly expired.

As Alexander Hulings watched him the old man's countenance grew livid, his jaw dropped; he was at the point of falling. He gasped, his hands beating the air; then the unnatural color receded, words became distinguishable: "Gisela! . . . I'd never forgive! Hellish!" It was as if Death had touched John Wooddrop on the shoulder, dragging a scarifying hand across his face, and then briefly, capriciously withdrawn.

"Hulings! Hulings," he articulated, sinking weakly on a chair, "we must save her. And, anyhow, God knows we were blind!" He peered out of suffused rheumy eyes at Alexander, appalling in his sudden disintegration under shock and the weight of his years. "I'm done!" he said tremulously. "And there's a good bit to see to — patent lawyer tomorrow, and English shipments. Swore I'd keep you from it," he held out a hand; "but there's Gisela, brought down between us now, and — and iron's colder than a daughter, a wife. We'd best cover up the past quick as we can!"

At the instant of grasping John Wooddrop's hand Alexander Hulings' inchoate emotion shifted to a vast realization, blotting out all else from his mind. In the con-

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trol of the immense Wooddrop resources he was beyond, above, all competition, all danger. What he had fought for, persistently dreamed, had at last come about — he was the greatest Ironmaster of the state!

THE DARK FLEECE

I

THE house in old Cottarsport in which Olive Stanes lived was set midway on the steepness of Orange Street. It was a low dwelling of weathered boards holding close to the rocky soil, resembling, like practically all the Cottarsport buildings, the salt weed clinging to the seaward rocks of the harbor; and Orange Street, narrow, without walks and dipping into cuplike depressions, was a type of almost all the streets. The Stanes house was built with its gable to the public way; the length faced a granite shoulder thrust up through the spare earth, a tall, weedy disorder of golden glow, and the sedgy incline to the habitation above.

When Hester and Jem and then Rhoda were little they had had great joy of the boulder in the side yard: at first impossible and then difficult of accomplishment, they had rapidly grown into a complete mastery of its potentialities as a fort, a mansion impressive as that of the Canderays' on Regent Street, and a ship under the dangerous shore of the Feejees. Olive, the solitary child of Ira Stanes' first marriage, had had no such reckless pleasure from the rock —

She had been, she realized, standing in the narrow

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portico that commanded by two steps the uneven flagging from the street, a very careful, yes, considerate, child when measured by the gay irresponsibility of her half brother and sisters. Money had been no more plentiful in the Stanes family, nor in all Cottarsport, then than now; her dresses had been few, she had been told not to soil or tear them, and she had rigorously attended the instruction.

The second Mrs. Stanes, otherwise an admirable wife and mother, had, to Olive's young disapproval, rather encouraged a boisterous conduct in her children which overlooked a complete cleanliness or tidy array. And when she, like her predecessor, had died, and left Olive, at twenty-three to assume full maternal responsibilities, that serious vicarious parent had entered into an inevitable and largely unavailing struggle against the minor damage caused mostly by the activities about the boulder.

Now Hester and Rhoda had left behind such purely imaginative games, and Jem was away fishing on the Georges Bank; her duty and worries had shifted, but not lessened; while the rock remained precisely as it had been through the children's growth, as it had appeared in her own earliest memories, as it was before ever the Stanes dwelling, now a hundred and fifty years in place, or old Cottarsport itself, had been dreamed of. Her thoughts were mixed: at once they created a vague parallel between the granite in the side yard and herself, Olive Stanes — they both seemed to have been so long in one spot, so unchanged; and they dwelt on the fact that soon — as soon as Jason Burrage got home — she must be utterly different.

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Jason had written her that, if they cared to, they could build a house as large as the Canderays'. Under the circumstances she had been obliged to look on that as, perhaps, an excusable exaggeration, but she instinctively condemned the dereliction of the truth; yet, more than any other figure could possibly have done, it impressed upon her, from the boldness of the imagery, that Jason had succeeded in finding the gold for which he had gone in search nine years before. He was coming back, soon, rich.

The other important fact reiterated in his last letter, that in all his absent years of struggle he had never faltered in his purpose of coming to her with any fortune he might chance to get, she regarded with scant thought. It had not occurred to Olive that Jason Burrage would do anything else; her only concern had been that he might be killed; otherwise he had said that he loved her, and that they were to marry when he returned.

She hadn't, really, been in favor of his going. The Burrages, measured by Cottarsport standards, were comfortably situated, Mr. Burrage's packing warehouse and employment in dried fish were locally called successful; but Jason had never been satisfied with familiar values; he had always exclaimed against the narrowness of his local circumstance, and restlessly reached toward greater possessions and a wider horizon. This dissatisfaction Olive had thought wicked, in that it had seemed to criticize the omnipotent and far-seeing wisdom of the Eternal; it had caused her much unhappiness and prayer, she had talked very earnestly to Jason about his stubborn spirit, but it had persisted in him, and at last

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carried him west in the first madness of the discovery of gold in a California river.

Olive, at times, had thought that Jason's revolt had been brought about by the visible example of the worldly pomp of the Canderays — of their great white house with the balustraded captain's walk on the gambreled roof, their chaise, and equable but slightly disconcerting courtesy. But she had been obliged to admit that, after all was said, Jason's bearing was the result of his own fretful heart.

He had always been different from the other Cottarsport youths and men: while they were commonly long and bony, and awkwardly hung together, thickly tanned by the winds and sun and spray of the sea, Jason was small, compact, with dead black hair and pale skin. Mr. Burrage was the usual Cottarsport old man, he resembled a worn and discolored piece of drift-wood; but, while his wife was not conspicuously out of the ordinary, still there was a snap in her unfading eyes, a ruddy roundness of cheek, that showed a lingering trace of a French Acadian intermarriage a century and more ago.

Olive always regarded with something like surprise her unquestioned love for Jason. It had grown quietly, unknown to her, through a number of preliminary years in which she had felt that she must exert some influence for his good. He frightened her a little by his hot utterances and by the manner in which his soul shivered on the verge of a righteous damnation. The effort to preserve him from such destruction became intenser and more involved; until suddenly, to her after consternation, she had surrendered her lips in a single, binding kiss.

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But with that consummation a great deal of her troubling had ceased; spiritual vision, she had been certain, must follow their sacred union and subsequent life. Even the gold agitation and Jason's departure for Boston and the western wild had not given her especial concern. God was the supreme Master of human fate, and if He willed for Jason to go forth who was she, Olive Stanes, to make a to-do? She had quietly addressed herself to the task of Hester, Jem and Rhoda, to the ordering of her father's household—he was mostly away on the sea and a solitary man at home—and the formal recurrence of the occasions of the church.

In such ways, she thought, bathed in the keen, pale red glow of a late afternoon in October, her youth had slipped imperceptibly away.

II

A strong salt wind dipped into the hollow, and plastered her skirt, without hoops, against her erect, thin person. With the instinct, bred by the sea, of the presence in all calculations of the weather, she mechanically dwelt on its force and direction, wrinkling her forehead and pinching her lips—she could hear the rising wind straining through the elms on the hills behind Cottarsport—and then she turned abruptly and entered the house.

There was a small dark hallway within, a narrow flight of stairs leading sharply up; the door on the right, to the formal chamber, was closed; but at the left an interior of somber, scrubbed wood was visible. On the side against the hall a cavernous fire-place, with a brick

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hearth, blackened with shadows and the soot of ancient fires, had been left open, but held an air-tight, sheet-iron stove. The windows, high on the walls, were small and long, rather than deep; and a table, perpetually spread, stood on a thick hooked rug of brilliant, primitive design.

Rhoda, in a creaking birch rocker, was singing an inarticulated song with closed eyes. Her voice gave both the impression of being subdued and filling the room with a vibrant power. She had a mature face for sixteen years, vividly colored and sensitive, a wide mouth and heavy twists of russet hair with metallic lights. The song stopped as Olive entered. Rhoda said:

"I wish Hester would hurry home; I'm dreadful hungry."

"Sometimes they keep her at the packing house, especially if there's a boat in late and extra work."

"It's not very smart of her without being paid more. They'll just put anything on you they can in this stingy place. I can tell you I wouldn't do two men's work for a woman's pay. I'm awful glad Jason's coming back soon, Olive, with all that money, and I can go to Boston and study singing."

"I've said over and over, Rhoda," Olive replied patiently, "that you mustn't think and talk all the time about Jason's worldly success. It doesn't sound nice, but like we were all trying to get everything we could out of him before ever he's here."

"Didn't he say in the last letter that I was to go to Boston!" Rhoda exclaimed impatiently. "Didn't he just up and tell me that! Why, with all the gold Jason's got

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it won't mean anything for him to send me away. It isn't as if I wouldn't pay you all back for the trouble I've been. I know I can sing, and I'll work harder than ever Hester dreamed of ——"

As if materialized by the pronouncement of her name the latter entered the room. "Gracious, Hester," Rhoda declared distastefully, making a nose, "you smell of dead haddock right this minute." The former, unlike Rhoda's softly rounded proportions, was more bony than Olive, infinitely more colorless, although ten years the younger. She had a black worsted scarf over her drab head in place of a hat, its ends wrapped about her meager shoulders and bombazine waist. Without preliminary she dropped into her place at the supper table, the shawl trailing on the broad, uneven boards of the floor.

"The wind's smartening up on the bay," she told them. "Captain Eagleston looks for half a blow. It has got cold, too. I wish the tea'd be ready when I get in from the packing house. It seems that much could be done with Olive only sitting around and Rhoda singing to herself in the mirror on her dresser."

"It'll draw in a minute more," Olive said in the door from the kitchen, beyond the fireplace. Rhoda smiled cheerfully.

"I suppose," Hester went on, in a voice without emphasis, but which yet contrived to be thinly bitter, "you were all talking about what would happen when Jason came home with that fortune of his. Far as I can see he's promised and provided for everybody, Jem and Rhoda and his parents and Olive, every Tom and Noddy, but me."

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"I don't like to keep on about it," Olive protested, pained. "Yet you can't see, Hester, how independent you are. A person wouldn't like to offer you anything until you had signified. You were never very nice with Jason anyway."

"Well, I'm not going to be nicer after he's back with gold in his pocket. I guess he'll find I'm not hanging on his shoulder for a cashmere dress or a trip to Boston."

"Pa ought to get into Salem soon," Rhoda observed. "He said after this he wasn't going to ship again, even along the coast, but tally fish for Mr. Burrage. Pa's getting old."

"And Jem'll be home from the Georges, too," Olive added, seating herself with the tea. "I do hope he won't sign for China or any of those long voyages like he threatened."

"He won't get so far away from Jason," Hester stated.

"I saw Honora Canderay today," Rhoda informed them. "She wasn't in the chaise, but walking past the courthouse. She had on a small bonnet with flowers inside the brim and skimpy hoops, gallooned and scalloped."

"Did she stop?" Olive inquired.

"Yes, and said I was as bright as a fall maple leaf. I wish I could look like Honora Canderay ——"

"Wait till Jason's back," Hester interrupted.

"It isn't her clothes," Rhoda went on; "they're elegant material, of course, but not the colors I'd choose; nor it isn't her looks, either, no one would say she's down-

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right pretty; it's just — just her. Is she as old as you, Olive? ”

“ Let's see, I'm thirty-six, and Honora Canderay was . . . she's near as old, a year younger maybe.”

“ She is wonderful to get close to,” said Rhoda, “ no cologne and yet a lovely kind of smell ——”

“ Not like dead haddock,” this was Hester again.

“ Do you know,” proceeded the younger, “ she seemed to me kind of lonely. I wanted to give her a hug, but I wouldn't have for all the gold in California. I can't make out if she is freezing outside and nice in, or just polite and thinks nobody's good enough for her. She had an India shawl as big as a sail, with palm leaf ends, and ——”

“ Rhoda, I wish you wouldn't put so much on clothes and such corruption,” Olive spoke firmly, with a light of zeal in her gaze. “ Can't you think on the eternities? ”

“ Like Jason Burrage and Honora Canderay,” explained Hester; “ Honora Canderay and Jason Burrage. They're eternities if there ever were any. If it isn't one it's bound to be the other.”

III

Olive's room had a sloping outer wall and casually placed insufficient windows; her bed, with a blue-white quilt, was supported by heavy maple posts; there were a chest of drawers, with a minute mirror stand, a utilitarian wash-pitcher and basin, a hanging for the protection of her clothes, and uncompromising chairs. A small circular table with a tatted cover held her Bible and a de-

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votional book, "The Family Companion," by a Pastor. It was cold when she went up to bed; with a desire to linger in her preparations, she put some resinous sticks of wood into a sheet-iron stove, and almost immediately there was a busily exploding combustion. A glass lamp on the chest of drawers shed a pale illumination that failed to reach the confines of the room; and, for a while, she moved in and out of its wan influence.

She was thinking fixedly about Jason Burrage, and the great impending change in her condition, not in its worldly implications — she thought mostly of material values in the spirit of her admonitions to Rhoda — but in its personal and inner force. At times a pale question of her aptitude for marriage disturbed her serenity; at times she saw it as a sacrifice of her being to a condition commanded of God, a species of martyrdom even. The nine years of Jason's absence had fixed certain maidenly habits of privacy, the mold of her life had taken a definite cast. Her existence had its routine, the recurrence of Sunday, its contemplations, duties and heavenly aim. And, lately, Jason's letters had disturbed her.

They seemed filled with an almost wicked pride and a disconcerting energy; he spoke of things instinctively distressing to her; there were hints of rude, Godless force and gaiety — allusions to the Jenny Lind Theatre, the El Dorado, which she apprehended as a name of evil import, and to the excursions they would make to Boston or as far as New York.

Jason, too, she realized, must have developed; and California, she feared, might have emphasized exactly such traits as she would wish suppressed. The power

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of self-destruction in the human heart she believed immeasurable. All, all, must throw themselves in abject humility upward upon the Rock of Salvation. And she could find nothing humble in Jason's periods, burdened as they were with a patent satisfaction in the success of his venture.

Yet parallel with this was a gladness that he had triumphed, and that he was coming back to Cottarsport a figure of importance. She could measure that by the attitude of their town, by the number and standing of the people who cordially stopped her on the street for the purposes of congratulation and curiosity. Everyone, of course, had known of their engagement, there had been a marked interest when Jason and a fellow townsman, Thomas Gast, had departed; but that would be insignificant compared to the permanent bulk Jason must now assume. Why, he would be with the Canderays, Cottarsport's most considerable people.

As always, at the merest thought of the Canderays, personal facts were suspended for a mental glance at that apart family. There was no sense of inferiority in Olive's mind, but an instinctive feeling of difference. This wasn't the result of their big house, nor because the Captain's wife had been a member of Boston society, but from the contrariness in the family itself, now centered in Honora, the only one alive.

Perhaps Honora's diversity lay in the fact that, while she seldom actually left Cottarsport, it was easy to see that she had a part in a life far beyond anything Olive, whose consciousness was strictly limited to one narrow place, knew. She always suggested a wider and more

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elegantly finished existence than that of local sociables and church activities. Captain Ithiel Canderay, a member of a Cottarsport family long since moved away, had, from obscure surprising promptings, returned at his successful retirement from the sea, and built his impressive dwelling in the grey community. He had always, however different the tradition of his wife's attitude, entered with a candid spirit into the interests and life of the town, where he had inspired solid confidence in a domineering but unimpeachable integrity. Such small civic honors as the locality had to bestow were his, and were discharged to the last and most exacting degree. But there had been perpetually about him the aloof air of the quarter-deck, his tones had never lost the accent of command, and, while Cottarsport bitterly guarded its personal equality and independence, it took a certain pride in recognition of the Captain's authority.

Something of this had unquestionably descended upon Honora, her position was made and zealously guarded by the town. Yet that alone failed to hold the reason for Olive's feeling; it was at once more particular and more all-embracing, and largely feminine. She was almost contemptuous of the other's delicacy of person, of the celebrated facts that Honora Canderay never turned her hand to the cooking of a dish nor the sweeping of a stair; and at the same time these very things lifted her apart from Olive's commonplace round.

Her mind turned again to herself and Jason's home-coming. He had been wonderfully generous in his written promises to Rhoda and Jem; and he would be equally thoughtful of Hester, she was certain of that. People

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had a way of overlooking Hester, a faithful and, for all her talk, a Christian character. Rhoda would study to be a singer; striving, Olive hoped, to put what talent she had to a sanctioned use; and Jem, a remarkably vigorous and able boy of eighteen, would command his own fishing schooner.

The sheet-iron stove glowed cherry red with the energy of its heat, and a blast of wind rushed against the windows. The latter, she recognized, had steadily grown in force; and Olive thought of her father in the barque *Emerald* of Salem, somewhere between Richmond and the home port . . . The lamplight swelled and diminished.

She got a new pleasure from the conjunction of her surrender to matrimony and the good it would bring the others; that — self-sacrifice — was excellence; such subjection of the pride of the flesh was the essence of her service. Then some mundane affairs invaded her mind — a wedding dress, the preparation of food for a small company after the ceremony, whether she would like having a servant — Jason would insist on that — and decided in the negative. She wouldn't be put upon in her own kitchen.

Her arrangements for the night were complete, and she set the stove door slightly open, shivering in her coarse night dress before the icy cold drifts of wind in the room, extinguished the lamp, and, after long, conscientiously deliberate prayers, got into bed. The wind boomed about the house, rattling all the sashes. Its force now seemed to be buffeting her heart until she got a measure of release from the thought of the granite boulder in the side yard, changeless and immovable.

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IV

The morning was gusty, with a coldly blue and cloudless sky. Olive, reaching the top of Orange Street, was whipped with dust, her hoops flattened grotesquely against her body. The town fell away on either hand, lying in a half moon on its harbor. The latter, as blue and bright as the sky, was formed by the rocky arm of Cottar's Neck, thrust out into the sea and bent from right to left. Most of the fishing fleet showed their bare spars at the wharves, but one, a minute fleck of white canvas, was beating her way through the Narrows. She wondered, descending, if it were Jem coming home.

Olive was going to the Burrages'; it was possible that they had had a later letter than hers from Jason. It might be he would arrive that very day. She was conscious of her heart throbbing slightly at that possibility, but from a complexity of emotions which still left her uneasy if faintly exhilarated. She crossed the courthouse square, where she saw that the green grass had become brown, apparently over night, and turned into Marlboro Street. Here the houses were more recent than the Stanes', they were four square, with a full second story — a series of detached white blocks with flat porticoes — each set behind a wood fence in a lawn with flower borders or twisted and tree-like lilacs.

She entered the Burrage dwelling without the formality of knocking; and, familiar with the household, passed directly through a narrow, darkened hall, on which all the doors were closed, to the dining room and kitchen beyond.

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As she had known he would be, Hazzard Burrage was seated with his feet, in lamb's wool slippers, thrust under the stove. For the rest, but lacking his coat, he was formally and completely dressed; his corded throat was folded in a formal black stock, a watch chain and seal hung across his waistcoat. Mrs. Burrage was occupied in lining a cupboard with fresh shelf paper with a cut lace border. She was a small woman, with quick exact movements and an impatient utterance; but her husband was slow — a man who deliberately studied the world with a deep-set gaze.

"I thought you might have heard," Olive stated directly, on the edge of a painted, split-hickory chair. They hadn't, Mrs. Burrage informed her:

"I expect he'll just come walking in. That's the way he always did things, and I guess California, or anywhere else, won't change him to notice it. And when he does," she continued, "he's going to be put out with Hazzard. I told you Jason sent us three thousand dollars to get the front of the house fixed up. He said he didn't want to find his father sitting in the kitchen when he got back. Jason said we were to burn three or four stoves all at once. But he won't, and that's all there is to it. Why, he just put the money in the bank and there it lies. I read him the parable about the talents, but it didn't stir him an inch."

"Jason always was quick acting," Hazzard Burrage declared, "he never stopped to consider; and it's as like as not he'll need that money. It wouldn't surprise me if when he sat down and counted what he had Jason'd find it was less than he thought."

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"He wrote me," Olive stated, "that we could build a house as big as the Canderays'."

"Jason always was one to talk," Mrs. Burrage replied in defense of her son.

Olive moved over to the older woman and held the dishes to be replaced in the cupboard. They commented on the force of the wind throughout the night. "The tail end of a blow at sea," Burrage told them; "I wouldn't wonder but it reached right down to the West Indies."

"I hope he brings me a grey satinet pelerine like I wrote," said Mrs. Burrage. She was obviously flushed at the thought of the possession of such a garment — a fact which Olive felt, at the other's age, to be inappropriate to the not distant solemnity of the Christian ordeal of death. She repeated automatically: ". . . turn from these vanities unto the living God."

She rose, "I'll let you know if I hear anything, and anyhow stop in tomorrow."

Outside sere leaves were whirling in grey funnels of dust, the intense blue bay sparkled under the cobalt sky; and, leaving Marlboro Street with a hand on her bonnet, she ran directly into Honora Canderay.

"Oh!" Olive exclaimed, breathless and slightly concerned. "Indeed if I saw you, Honora; the wind was that strong pulling at a person."

"What does it matter," Honora replied. She was wrapped from throat to hem in a cinnamon colored velvet cloak that, fluttering, showed a lining of soft, quilted yellow. In the flood of morning her skin was flawless; her delicate lips and hazel eyes held the faint mockery that was the visible sign of her disturbing quality. She

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laid a hand, in a short, furred kid glove, on Olive's arm.

"I am so pleased about Jason's success," she continued, in a clear insistent voice. "You must be mad with anxiety to have him back. It's the most romantic thing in the world. Aren't you thrilled to the soul!"

"I'm glad to — to know he's been preserved," Olive stammered, confused by Honora's frank speech.

"You sound exactly as if he were a jar of quinces," the other answered impatiently; "and not a true lover coming back from California with bags of gold."

Olive's confusion deepened to painful embarrassment at the indelicate term lover. She wondered, hotly red, how Honora could go on so, and made a motion to continue on her way. But the other's fingers closed and held her. "I wonder, Olive," she said more thoughtfully, "if I know you well enough, if you will allow me, to give you some advice. It is this — don't be too rigid with Jason when he gets back. For nearly ten years he's been out in a life very different from Cottarsport, and he must have changed in that time. Here we stay almost the same — ten or twenty or fifty years is nothing really. The fishing boats come in, they may have different names, but they are the same. We stop and talk, Honora Canderay and Olive Stanes, and years before and years later women will stand here and do the same with beliefs no wider than your finger. But it isn't like that outside; and Jason will have that advantage of us — things really very small, but which have always seemed tremendous here, will mean no more to him than they are worth. He will be careless, perhaps, of your most cherished ideas; and, if you are to meet him fairly, you must try to see through

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his eyes as well as your own. Truly I want you to be happy, Olive; I want everyone in Cottarsport to be as happy . . . as he can."

Olive's embarrassment increased: it was impossible to know what Honora Canderay meant by her last words, in that echoing voice. Nevertheless, her independence of spirit, the long nourished tenets of the abhorrence of sin, asserted themselves in the face of even Honora's directions. "I trust," she replied stiffly, "that Jason has been given grace to walk in the path of God ——" She stopped with lips parted, her breath laboring with shock, at the interruption pronounced in ringing accents. Honora Canderay said:

"Grace be damned!"

Olive backed away with her hands pressed to her cheeks. In the midst of her shuddering surprise she realized how much the other resembled her father, the captain.

"I suppose," Honora further ventured, "that you are looking for a bolt of lightning, but it is late in the season for that. There are no thunder storms to speak of after September," she turned abruptly, and Olive watched her depart, gracefully swaying against the wind.

V

All Olive's unformed opinions and attitude concerning Honora Canderay crystallized into one sharp, intelligible feeling — dislike. The breadth of being which the other had seemed to possess was now revealed as nothing more than a lack of reverence. She was inexpressibly upset by Honora's profanity, the blasphemous

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mous mind it exhibited, her attempted glossing of sin. It was nothing less. In the assault on Olive's most fundamental verities — the contempt which she divined had been offered to the edifice of her conscience and creed — she responded blindly, instinctively, with an overwhelming condemnation. At the same time she was frightened, and hurried away from the proximity of such unsanctified talk. She did not go to Citron Street, and the shops, as she had intended; but kept directly on until she found herself at the harbor and wharves. The latter serrated the water's edge, projecting from the relatively tall, bald warehouses, reeking with the odor of dead fish, cut open and laid in salt, grey-white areas to the sun and wind.

A small group of men, with flat bronzed countenances and rough furze coats, uneasily stirred their hats, in the local manner of saluting women, and turned to gaze fixedly at her as she passed. Even in her perturbation of mind she was conscious of their unusual scrutiny. She couldn't, now, for the life of her, recall what needed to be bought; and, mounting the narrow uneven way from the water, she proceeded home.

Some towels, laid on the boulder to dry, had not been sufficiently weighted and hung blown and crumpled on a lilac bush. These she collected, rearranged, complaining of the blindness of whoever might be about the house, and then proceeded within. There, to her amazement, she found Hester, in the middle of the morning, and Rhoda bent over the dinner table, sobbing into her arm. Hester met her with a drawn face darkly smudged beneath the eyes.

“The *Emerald* was lost off the Cape,” she said; “sunk

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with all on board. A man came over from Salem to tell us. He had to go right back. Pa, he's lost."

Olive sank into a chair with limp hands. Rhoda continued uninterrupted her sobbing, while Hester went on with her recital in a thin, blank voice. "The ship *J. Q. Adams* stood by the *Emerald* but there was such a sea running she couldn't do anything else. They just had to see the *Emerald*, with the men in the rigging, go under. That's what he said who was here. They just had to see Pa drown before their eyes. . . . The wind was something terrible."

A deep, dry sorrow constricted Olive's heart. Suddenly the details of packing her father's blue sea chest returned to her mind — the wool socks she had knitted and carefully folded in the bottom, the needles and emery and thread stowed in their scarlet bag, the tin of goose grease for his throat, the Bible that had been shipped so often. She thought of them all scattered and rent in the wild sea, of her father —

She forced herself to rise, with a set face, and put her hand on Rhoda's shoulder. "It's right to mourn, like Rachel, but don't forget the majesty of God." Rhoda shook off her palm and continued in an ecstasy of emotional relief. Olive hardened. "Get up," she commanded, "we must fix things here, for the neighbors and Pastor will be in. I wish Jem were back."

At this Rhoda became even more unrestrained, and Olive remembered that Jem too was at sea, and that probably he had been caught in the same gale. "He'll be all right," she added quickly, "the fishing boats live through everything."

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Yet she was infinitely relieved when, two days later, Jem arrived safely home. He came into the house with a pounding of heavy boots, a powerfully built youth with a rugged jaw and an intent quiet gaze. "I heard at the wharf," he told Olive. They were in the kitchen, and he pulled off his boots and set them away from the stove.

"I'm thankful you're so steady and able," she said.

"I am glad Jason's coming home — rich," he replied tersely. Later, after supper, while they still sat at the table, he went on, "There is a fine yawl for sale at Ipswich, sails ain't been made a year, fifty-five tons; I could do right good with that. The fishing's never been better. Do you think Jason would be content to buy her, Olive? I could pay him back after a run or two."

"He told you he'd do something like that," she answered. "I guess now it wouldn't mean much to him."

"And I'll be away," Rhoda eagerly added; "you wouldn't have to give me anything, Jem. Jason promised me, too."

An unreasonable and disturbing sense of insecurity enveloped Olive. But, of course, it would be all right — Jason was coming back rich, to marry her. Jem would have the yawl and Rhoda get away to study singing. And yet all that she vaguely dreaded about Jason himself persisted darkly at the back of her consciousness, augmented by Honora Canderay's warning. She was a little afraid of Jason, too; in a way, after so long, he seemed like a stranger, a stranger whom she was going to wed.

"He'll be all dressed up," Rhoda stated. "I hope, Olive, you will kiss him as soon as he steps through the door. I know I would."

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"Don't be so shameless, Rhoda," the elder admonished her. "You are very indelicate. I'd never think of kissing Jason like that."

"I will go over and see the man who owns her," Jem said enigmatically. "She's a cockpit boat but I heard the wave wasn't made that could fill her. And we have my share of the last run till Jason's here."

He paid this faithfully into Olive's hand the next day and then disappeared. She thought he came through the door again, someone stood behind her. Olive turned slowly and saw an impressive figure in stiff black broadcloth and an incredibly high glassy silk hat.

VI

She knew instinctively that it must be Jason Burage, and yet the feeling of strangeness persisted. All sense of the time which had elapsed since Jason left was lost in the illusion that the figure familiar to her through years of knowledge and association had instantly, by a species of magic, been transformed into the slightly smiling, elaborate man in the doorway. She stepped backward, hesitatingly pronouncing his name.

"Olive," he exclaimed, with a deep, satisfied breath, "it hasn't changed a particle!" To her extreme relief he did not make a move to embrace her; but gazed intently about the room. One of the things that made him seem different, she realized, was the rim of whiskers framing his lower face. She became conscious of details of his appearance — baggy dove-colored trousers over glazed boots, a quince yellow waistcoat in diamond pattern, a cluster of

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seals. Then her attention was held by his countenance and she saw that his clothes were only an insignificant part of his real difference from the man she had known.

Jason Burrage had always had a set will, the reputation of an impatient, even ugly disposition. This had been marked by a sultry lip and flickering eye; but now, though his expression was noticeably quieter, it gave her the impression of a glittering and dangerous reserve; his masklike calm was totally other than the mobile face she had known. Then, too, he had grown much older — she swiftly computed his age: it could not be more than forty-two, yet his hair was thickly stained with grey, lines starred the corners of his eyes and drew faintly at his mouth.

“Are you glad to see me, Olive?” he asked.

“Why, Jason, what an unnecessary question. Of course I am, more thankful than I can say for your safety.”

“I walked across the hills from the Dumner stage,” he proceeded. “It was something to see Cottarsport on its bay and the Neck and the fishing boats at Planger’s wharf. I’d like to have an ounce of gold for every time I thought about it and pictured it and you. Out on the placers of the Calaveras, or the Feather, I got to believing there wasn’t any such town, but here it is ——” he advanced toward her. She realized that she was about to be kissed and a painful color dyed her cheeks.

“You’ll stop for supper,” she said practically.

“I haven’t been home yet, I came right here; I’ll see them and come back. I’ll bet I find them in the kitchen,

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with the front stoves black, in spite of what I wrote and sent. I brought you a present, just for fun, and I'll leave it now since it's heavy." He bent over a satchel at his feet and got a buckskin bag, bigger than his two fists, which he dropped with a dull thud on the table.

"What is it, Jason?" she asked. But of herself she knew the answer. He untied a string, and, dipping in his fingers, showed her a fine yellow metallic trickle. "Gold dust, two tumblers full," he replied. "We used to measure it that way — a pinch a dollar, teaspoonful to the ounce, a wineglass holds a hundred, and a tumbler a thousand dollars."

She was breathless before the small shapeless pouch that held such a staggering amount. He laughed, "Why, Olive, it's nothing at all. I just brought it like that so you could see how we carried it in California. We are all rich now, Olive — the Burrages, and you're one, and the Stanes. I have close to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

This sum was little more to her than a fable, a thing beyond the scope of her comprehension; but the two thousand dollars before her gaze was a miracle made manifest. There it was to study, feel; subconsciously she inserted her hand in the bag, into the cold, smooth particles.

"A hundred and fifty thousand," he repeated; "but if you think I didn't work for it, if you suppose I picked it right out of a pan on the river bars, why — why you are wrong." Words failed him to express the erroneousness of such conclusions. "I slaved like a Mexican," he added; "and in bad luck almost to the end." She sat and gazed at him with an easier air and a growing interest, her hands

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clasped in her lap. "What I didn't know when I left Cottarsport was wonderful.

"Why, take the mining," he stated with a gesture, "I mean the bowl mining at first, just the heavy work in it killed off most of the prospectors — all day with a big iron pan, half full of clay and gravel, sloshing about in those rivers. And maybe you'd work a month without a glimmer, waking wet and cold under the sierras, whirling the pan round and round; and maybe when you had the iron cleared out with a magnet, and dropped in the quicksilver what gold was there wouldn't amalgam. I can tell you, Olive, only the best, or the hardest, came through."

He produced a blunt, tapering cigar and lighted it expansively.

"A lonely and dangerous business: everyone carried his dust right on his body, and there were plenty would risk a shot at a miner coming back solitary with his donkey and his pile. It got better when the new methods came, and we used a rocker hollowed out of a log. Then four of us went in partnership — one to dig the gravel, another to carry it to the cradle, a third to keep it rocking, and the last to pour in the water. Then we drew off the gold and sand through a plug hole.

"We did fine at that," he told her, "and in the fall of Fifty cleaned up eighteen thousand apiece. Then we had an argument: we were in the Yuba country, where it was kind of bad, two of us, and I was one of them, said to divide the dust, and get out best we could; but the others wanted to send all the gold to San Francisco in charge of one of them and a man who was going down with more dust. We finally agreed to this and lost every ounce

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we'd mined. The escort said they were shot by some of the disbanded California army, but I'm not sure. It seemed to me like our two had met somewhere, killed the other, and got the gold to rights."

"O Jason!" Olive exclaimed.

"That was nothing," he said complacently; "but only a joker to start with. I did a lot of things then to get a new outfit—sold peanuts on the Plaza in 'Frisco, or hollered the New York *Tribune* at a dollar and a half a copy; I washed glasses in a saloon and drove mules. After that I took a steamer for Stocton and the Calaveras. You ought to have seen Stocton, Olive, board shanties and blanket houses and tents with two thieves left hanging on a gallows. We went from there, a party of us, for the north bank of the Calaveras, tramping in dust so hot that it scorched your face. Sluicing had just started and long Toms—a long Tom is a short placer—so we didn't know much about it. Looking back I can see the gold was there; but after working right up to the end of the season we had no more than a couple of thousand apiece. There were too many of us to start with.

"Well, I drifted back to San Francisco," he paused, and the expression which had most disturbed her deepened on his countenance, a stillness like the marble of a grave-stone guarding implacable secrets.

"San Francisco is different from Cottarsport, Olive," he said after a little. "Here you wouldn't believe there was such a place; and there Cottarsport seemed too safe to be true . . . Well, I went after it again, this time as far north as Shasta. I prospected from the Shasta country south, and got a good lump together again. By then

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placer mining was better understood, we had sluice boxes two or three hundred feet long, connected with the streams, with strips nailed across the bottom where the gold and sand settled as the water ran through. Yes, I did well; and then fluming commenced.

“That,” he explained, “is damming a river around its bed and washing the opened gravel. It takes a lot of money, a lot of work and men; and sometimes it pays big, and often it doesn’t. I guess there were fifty of us at it. We slaved all the dry season at the dam and flume, a big wood course for the stream; we had wing dams for the placers and ditches, and the best prospects for eight or ten weeks’ washing. It was early in September when we were ready to start, and on a warm afternoon I said to an old pardner, ‘What do you make out of those big, black clouds settling on the peaks?’ He took one look — the wind was a steady and muggy southwest’er — and then he sat down and cried. The tears rolled right over his beard.

“It was the rains, nearly two months early, and the next day dams, flume, boards and hope boiled down past us in a brown mash. That left me poorer than I’d ever been before; I had more when I was home on the wharves.”

“Wait,” she interrupted him, rising, “if you’re coming back to supper I must put the draught on the stove.” From the kitchen she heard him singing in a low, contented voice:

“‘The pilot bread was in my mouth,
The gold dust in my eye,
And though from you I’m far away,
Dear Anna, don’t you cry!’”

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Then:

“ Oh, Ann Eliza!
Don't you cry for me.
I'm going to Calaveras
With my wash bowl on my knee.' ”

She returned and resumed her position with her hands folded.

“ And that,” Jason Burrage told her, “ was how I learned gold mining in California. I sank shafts, too, and worked a windlass till the holes got so deep they had to be timbered and the ore needed a crusher. But after the fluming I knew what to wait for. I kept going in a sort of commerce for a while — buying old outfits and selling them again to the late comers — a pick or shovel would bring ten dollars and long boots fifty dollars a pair. I got twenty-four dollars for a box of Seidlitz powders. Then in Fifty-four I went in with three scientific men, one had been a big chemist at Paris, and things took a turn. We had the dead wood on gold. Why, we did nothing but re-travel the American Fork and Indian Bar, the Casumnec and Moquelumne, and work the tailings the earlier miners had piled up and left, just like I had south. We did some pretty things with cyanide, yes, and hydraulics and powder.

“ Things took a turn,” he repeated; “ investments in stampers and so on, and here I am.”

After he had gone — supper, she had informed him, was at five exactly — Olive had the bewildered feeling of partially waking from an extraordinary dream. Yet the buckskin bag on the table possessed a weighty actuality.

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VII

She sat for a long while gazing intently at the gold, which, like a crystal ball, held for her varied reflections. Then, recalling the exigencies of the kitchen, she hurried abruptly away. Her thoughts wheeled about Jason Burrage in a confusion of all the impressions she had ever had of him. But try as she might she could not picture the present man as a part of her life in Cottarsport, she could not see herself married to him, although that event waited just beyond today. She set her lips in a straight line, a fixed purpose gave her courage in place of the timidity inspired by Jason's opulent strangeness — she couldn't allow herself to be turned aside for a moment from the way of righteousness. The gods of mammon, however they might blackly assault her spirit, should be confounded.

“ . . . hide me
Till the storm of life is past.”

She sang in a high quavering voice. There was a stir beyond — surely Jason wasn't back so soon; but it was Jem.

“ What's on the table here? ” he called.

“ You let that be,” she cried back in a panic at having left the gift so exposed. “ That's gold dust, Jason brought it, two thousand dollars' worth.”

A prolonged whistle followed her announcement. Jem appeared with the buckskin bag in his hand. “ Why, here's two yawls right in my hand,” he asserted.

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"Mind one thing, Jem," she went on, "he's coming back for supper, and I won't have you and Rhoda at him about boats and singing the minute he's in the house."

Rhoda, with exclamations, and then Hester, inspected the gold. "I'd slave five years for that," the latter stated, "and then hardly get it; and here you have it for nothing."

"You'll get the good of it too, Hester," Olive told her.

"I'll just work for what I get," she replied fiercely. "I won't take a penny from Jason, Olive Stanes; you can't hold that over me, and the sooner you both know it the better."

"You ought to pray to be saved from pride."

"I don't ask benefits from anyone," Hester stoutly observed.

"Hester ——" Olive commenced, scandalized, but she stopped at Jason's entrance. "Hester she wanted a share of the gold," Jem declared with a light in his slow gaze, "and Olive was cursing at her."

"Lots more," said Jason Burrage, "buckets full."

In spite of the efforts of everyone to be completely at ease the supper was unavoidably stiff. But when Jason had lighted one of his blunt cigars, and begun a vivid description of western life, the Stanes were transported by the marvels following one upon another: a nugget had been picked up over a foot long, it weighed a hundred and ninety pounds, and realized forty-three thousand dollars. "Why, fifty and seventy-five lumps were common," he asserted. "At Ford's Bar a man took out seven hundred dollars a day for near a month. Another found

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seventeen thousand dollars in a gutter two or three feet deep and not a hundred yards long.

“But 'Frisco was the place, you could see it spread in a day with warehouses on the water and tents climbing up every hill. Happy Valley, on the beach, couldn't hold another rag house. The Parker House rented for a hundred and seventy thousand a year, and most of it paid for gambling privileges — monté and faro, blazing lights and brass bands everywhere and dancing in the El Dorado saloon. At first the men danced with each other, but later ——”

He stopped, an awkward silence followed. Olive was rigid with inarticulate protest, a sense of outrage — gambling, saloons and dancing. All that she had feared about Jason became more concrete, more imminent. She saw California as a modern Babylon, a volcano of gold and vice; already she had heard of great fires that had devastated it.

“We didn't mine on Sunday, Olive,” Jason assured her; “and all the boys went to the preaching and sang the hymns, standing out on the grass.”

Hester, finally, with a muttered period, rose and disappeared; Jem went out to consult with a man, his nod to Olive spoke of yawls; and Rhoda, at last, reluctantly made her way above. Olive's uneasiness increased when she found herself alone with the man she was to marry.

“I don't like Rhoda and Jem hearing about all that wickedness,” she told Jason Burrage; “they are young and easy affected. Rhoda gives me a lot of worry as it is.”

“Suppose we forget them,” he suggested. “I haven't

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had a word with you yet, that is, about ourselves. I don't even know but you have gone and fell in love with someone else."

"Jason," she replied, "how can you? I told you I'd marry you, and I will."

"Are you glad to see me?" he demanded, coming closer and capturing her hand.

"Why, what a question. Of course I'm pleased you're back and safe."

"You haven't got a headache, have you?" he inquired jocularly.

"No," she replied seriously. His words, his manners, his grasp, worried her more and more. Still, she reminded herself, she must be patient, accept life as it had been ordained. There was a slight flutter at her heart, a constriction of her throat; and she wondered if this were love. She should, she felt, exhibit more warmth at Jason's return, the preservation, through such turbulent years of absence, of her image. But it was beyond her power to force her hand to return his pressure: her fingers lay still and cool in his grasp.

"You are just the same, Olive," he told her; "and I'm glad you're what you are, and that Cottarsport is what it is. That's why I came back, it was in my blood, the old town and you. All the time I kept thinking of when I'd come back rich as I made up my mind to be, and get you what you ought to have — be of some importance in Cottarsport like the Canderays. The old captain, too, died while I was away. How's Honora?"

"Honora Canderay is an ungodly woman," Olive asserted with emphasis.

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"I don't know anything about that," he said; "but I always kind of liked to look at her. She reminded me of a schooner with everything set coming up brisk into the wind." Olive made a motion toward the stove, but he restrained her; rising, he put in fresh wood. Then he turned and again seemed lost in a long, contented inspection of the quiet interior. Olive saw that marks of weariness shadowed his eyes.

"This is what I came back for," he reiterated; "peaceful as the forests, and yet warm and human. Blood counts." He returned to his place by her, and leaned forward, very earnestly. "California isn't real the way this is," he told her, "the women were just paint and powder, like things you would see in a fever, and then you'd wake up, in Cottarsport, well again, with you, Olive."

She managed to smile at him in acknowledgment of this.

"I'm desperately glad I pulled through without many scars. But there are some, Olive; that was bound to be. I don't know if a man had better say anything about the past, or just let it be, and go on. Times I think one and then the other. Yet you are so calm sitting here, and so good, it would be a big help to tell you . . . Olive, out on the American, and God knows how sorry I've been, I killed a man, Olive."

Slowly she felt herself turning icy cold, except for the hot blood rushing into her head. She stared at him for a moment, horrified; and then mechanically drew back, scraping the chair across the floor. Perhaps she hadn't understood, but certainly he had said —

"Wait till I say what I can for myself," he hurried on,

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following her. "It was when the four of us were working with a rocker. I was shoveling the gravel, and everyone in California knows that when you're doing that, and find a nugget over half an ounce, it belongs to you personal and not to the partnership. Well, I came on a big one, and laid it away, they all saw it; and then this Eddie Lukens hid it out on me. He was the only one near where I had it, he broke it up and put it in the cradle, sure; and in the talk that followed I — I shot him."

He laid a detaining hand on her shoulder but she wrenched herself away.

"Don't touch me!" she breathed. She thought she saw him bathed in the blood of the man he had slain. Her lips formed a sentence, "'Thou shalt not kill.'"

"I was tried at Spanish Bar," he continued, "Miners' law is better than you hear in the East, it's quick — it has to be — but in the main it's serious and right. I was tried with witnesses and a jury and they let me off, they justified me. That ought to go for something."

"Don't come near me," she cried, choking, filled with dread and utter loathing. "How can you stand there and — stand there, a murderer, with a life on your heart! What ——"

His face quivered with concern; in spite of her words he drew near her again, repeating the fact that he had been judged, released. Olive Stanes' hysteria vanished before the cold stability which came to her assistance, the sense of being rooted in her creed.

"'Thou shalt not kill,' " she echoed.

The emotion faded from his features, his countenance once more became masklike, the jaw was hard and sharp,

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his eyes narrowed. "It's all over then?" he asked. She nodded, her lips pinched into a white line.

"What else could be hoped? Blood guiltiness. O Jason, pray to save your soul."

He moved over to where his high silk hat reposed, secured it, and turned. "This will be final," he stated hardly. Olive stood slightly swaying, with closed eyes. Then she remembered the buckskin bag of not yellow but scarlet gold. She stumbled forward to it and thrust the weight in his hand. Jason Burrage's fingers closed on the gift, while his gaze rested on her from under contracted brows. He was, it seemed, about to speak, but instead preserved an intense silence; he looked once more about the room still and old in its lamplight. Why didn't he go! Then she saw that she was alone:

Like the eternal rock outside the door.

From above came the clear, joyous voice of Rhoda singing. Olive crumpled into a chair—soon Jem would be back. . . . She turned and slipped down upon the floor in an agony of prayer.

VIII

Honora Canderay saw Jason Burrage on the day after his arrival in Cottarsport: he was walking through the town with a set, inattentive countenance; and, although she was in the chaise and leaned forward, speaking in her ringing voice, it was evident that he had not noticed her. She thought his expression gloomy for a man returned with a fortune to his marriage. Honora still dwelt upon him as

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she slowly progressed through the capricious streets, and mounted toward the hills beyond. He presented, she decided, an extraordinary, even faintly comic, appearance in Cottarsport with a formal black coat open on a startling waistcoat and oppressive gold chain, pale trousers and a silk hat.

Such clothes, theatrical in effect, were inevitable to his changed condition and necessarily stationary taste. Yet, considering, she shifted the theatrical to dramatic: in an obscure but palpable manner Jason did not seem cheap. He never had in the past. And now, while his inappropriate overdressing in the old town of loose and weathered raiment brought a smile to her firm lips, there was still about him the air which from the beginning had made him more noticeable than his fellows. It had even been added to — by the romance of his journey and triumph.

She suddenly realized that, by chance, she had stumbled on the one term which more than any other might contain Jason. Romantic. Yes, that was the explanation of his power to stir always an interest in him, vaguely suggest such possibilities as he had finally accomplished, the venture to California and return with gold and the complicated watch chain. She had said no more to him than to the other Cottarsport youth and young manhood, perhaps a dozen sentences in a year; but whereas the others merged into a composite image of fuzzy chins, reddened knuckles and inept, choked speech, Jason Burrage remained a slightly sullen individual with potentialities. He had never remained long in her mind, nor had any actual part in her life — her mother's complete indifference to Cottarsport had put a barrier between its acutely inde-

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pendent spirit and the Canderays — but she had been easily conscious of his special quality.

That in itself was no novelty to her experience of a metropolitan and distinguished society: what now kept Jason in her thoughts was the fact that he had made his capability serve his mood; he had taken himself out into the world and there, with what he was, succeeded. His was not an ineffectual condition — a longing, a possibility that, without the power of accomplishment, degenerated into a mere attitude of bitterness. Just such a state, for example, as enveloped herself.

The chaise had climbed out of Cottarsport, to the crown of the height under which it lay, and Honora ordered Coggs, a coachman all but decrepit with age, to stop. She half turned and looked down over the town with a veiled, introspective gaze. From here it was hardly more than a narrow rim of roofs about the bright water, broken by the white bulk of her dwelling and the courthouse square. The hills, turning roundly down, were sere and showed everywhere the grey glint of rock; Cottar's Neck already appeared wintry; a diminished wind, drawing in through the Narrows, flattened the smoke of the chimneys below.

Cottarsport!

The word, with all its implications, was so vivid in her mind that she thought she must have spoken it aloud. Cottarsport and the Canderays — now one solitary woman. She wondered again at the curious and involved hold the locality had upon her; its tyranny over her birth and destiny. It was comparatively easy to understand the influence the place had exerted on her father: commencing with his sixteenth year his life had been spent, until his

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retirement from the sea, in arduous voyages to far ports and cities. His first command — the anchor had been weighed on his twentieth birthday — had been of a brig to Zanzibar for a cargo of gum copal; his last a storm-battered journey about, apparently, all the perilous capes of the world. Then he had been near fifty, and the space between was a continuous record of struggle with savage and faithless peoples, strange latitudes and currents and burdensome responsibilities.

Her mother, too, presented no insuperable obstacle to a sufficient comprehension — a noted beauty in a gay and self-indulgent society, she had passed through a triumphant period without forming any attachment. An inordinate amount of champagne had been uncorked in her honor, compliment and service and offers had made up her daily round; until, almost impossibly exacting, she had found herself beyond her early radiance, in the first tragic realization of decline. Stopping, perhaps, in the midst of slipping her elegance of body into a party dress, she remembered that she was thirty-five — just Honora's age at present. The compliments and offers had lessened, she was in a state of weary revulsion when Ithiel Canderay — bronzed and despotic and rich — had appeared before her and, the following day, urged marriage.

Yes, it was easy to see why the shipmaster, desirous of peace after the unpeaceful sea, should build his house in the still, old port the tradition of which was in his blood. It was no more difficult to understand how his wife, always a little tired now from the beginning ill effects of ceaseless balls and wineing, should welcome a spacious, quiet house and unflagging, patient care.

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All this was clear; and, in a way, it made her own position logical — she was the daughter, the repository, of such varied and yet unified forces. In moments of calm, such as this, Honora could be successfully philosophical. But she was not always placid; in fact she was placid but an insignificant part of her waking hours. She was ordinarily filled with emotions that, having no outlet, kept her stirred up, half resentful, and half desirous of things which she yet made no extended effort to obtain.

Honora told herself daily that she detested Cottarsport, she intended to sell her house, give it to the town, and move to Boston. But, after three or four weeks in the city, a sense of weariness and nostalgia would descend upon her — the bitterness of her mother lived over again — and drive her back to the place she had left with such decided expressions of relief.

This was the root of her not large interest in Jason Burrage — he, too, she had always felt, had had possibilities outside the local life and fish industry; and he had gone forth and justified, realized, them. He had broken away from the enormous pressure of custom, personal habit, and taken from life what was his. But she, Honora Canderay, had not had the courage to break away from an existence without incentive, without reward. Something of this might commonly find excuse in the fact that she was a woman, and that the doors of life and experience, except one, were closed to her; but, individually, she had little use with this supine attitude. Her blood was too domineering. She consigned such inhibitions to pale creatures like Olive Stanes.

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IX

The sun, sinking toward the plum colored hills on the left, cast a rosy glow over low-piled clouds at the far horizon, and the water of the harbor seemed scattered with the petals of crimson peonies. The air darkened perceptibly. For a moment the grey town on the fading water, the distant flushed sky, were charged with the vague unrest of the flickering day. Suddenly it was colder, and Honora, drawing up her shawl, sharply commanded Coggs to drive on.

She was going to fetch Paret Fifield from the steam railway station nearest Cottarsport. He visited her at regular intervals — although the usual period had been doubled since she'd seen him — and asked her with un-failing formality to be his wife. Why she hadn't agreed long ago — except that Paret was Boston personified — she did not understand. In the moments when she fled to the city she always intended to have him come to her at once. But, scarcely arrived, her determination would waver, and her thoughts automatically, against her will, return to Cottarsport.

Studying him, as they drove back through the early dusk, she was surprised that he had been so long-suffering. He was not a patient type of man; rather he was the quietly aggressive, suavely selfish, example for whom the world, success, had been a very simple matter. He was not solemn, either, or a recluse, as faithful lovers commonly were; but furnished a leading figure in the cotillions and had a nice capacity for wine. She said almost complainingly:

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“How young and gay you look, Paret, with your lemon verbena.”

He was, it seemed to her, not entirely at ease, and almost confused at her statement. Nevertheless, he gave his person a swiftly complacent glance.

“I do seem quite well,” he agreed surprisingly. “Honora, I’m the next thing to fifty. Would anyone guess it?”

This was a new aspect of Paret’s, and she studied him keenly, with the slightly satirical mouth inherited from her father. Embarrassment became apparent at his exhibition of trivial pride, and nothing more was said until, winding through the gloom of Cottarsport, they had reached her house. Inside there was a wide hall with the stair mounting on the right under a panelled arch. Mrs. Cozens, Honora’s aunt and companion, was in the drawing room when they entered, and greeted Paret Fifield with the simple friendliness which, clearly without disagreeable intent, she showed only to an unquestionable few.

After dinner, the elder woman winding wool from an ivory swift clamped to a table, Honora thought that Paret had never been so vivacious; positively he was silly. For no comprehensible reason her mind turned to Jason Burrage, striding with a lowered head, in his incongruous clothes, through the town of his birth.

“I wonder, Paret,” she remarked, “if you remember two men who went from here to California about ten years ago? Well, one of them is back with his pockets full of gold and a silk hat. He was engaged to Olive Stanes . . . I suppose their wedding will happen at any time. You see, he was faithful like yourself, Paret.”

The man’s back was toward her, he was examining, as

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he had for every visit Honora could recall, the curious objects in a lacquered cabinet brought from over seas by Ithiel Canderay, and it was a noticeably long time before he turned. Mrs. Cozzens, the shetland converted into a ball, rose and announced her intention of retiring; a thin, erect figure in black moiré with a long countenance and agate brown eyes, seed pearls, gold band bracelets and Venise point cap.

When she had gone the silence in the room became oppressive. Honora was thinking of her life in connection with Paret Fifield, wondering if she could ever bring herself to marry him. She would have to decide soon: it seemed incredible that he was nearing fifty. Why, it must have been fifteen years ago when he first ——

“Honora,” he pronounced, leaning forward in his chair, “I came prepared to tell you a particular thing, but I find it much more difficult than I had anticipated.”

“I know,” she replied, and her voice, the fact she stated, seemed to come from a consciousness other than hers, “you are going to get married.”

“Exactly,” he said with a deep, relieved sigh.

She had on a dinner dress looped with a silk ball fringe, and her fingers automatically played with the hanging ornaments as she studied him with a composed face.

“How old is she, Paret?” Honora asked presently.

He cleared his throat in an embarrassed manner. “Not quite nineteen, I believe.”

She nodded and her expression grew imperceptibly colder. A slight but actual irritation at him, a palpable anger, shocked her, which she was careful to screen from

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her manner and voice. "You will be very happy, certainly. A young wife would suit you perfectly. You have kept splendidly young, Paret."

"She is really a superb creature, Honora," he proceeded gratefully. "I must bring her to you. But I am going to miss this," he indicated the grave chamber in which they sat, the white marble mantel and high mirror, the heavy mahogany settled back in half shadow, the dark velvet draperies of the large windows sweeping from alabaster cornices.

"Sometimes I feel like burning it to the ground," she asserted, rising. "I would if I could burn all that it signifies, yes, and a great deal of myself, too." She raised her arms in a vivid, passionate gesture. "Leave it all behind and sail up to Java Head and through the Sunda Strait, into life."

After the difficulty of his announcement Paret Fifield talked with animation about his plans and approaching marriage. Honora wondered at the swiftness with which she — for so long a fundamental part of his thought — had dropped from his mind. It had the aspect of a physical act of seclusion, as if a door had been closed upon her, the last, perhaps, leading out of her isolation. She hadn't been at all sure that she would not marry Paret: today she had almost decided in favor of such a consummation of her existence.

A girl not quite nineteen! She had been only twenty when Paret Fifield had first danced with her. He had been interested immediately. It was difficult for her to realize that she was now thirty-five, soon forty would be upon her, and then a grey reach. She didn't feel any

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older than she had, well — on the day that Jason Burrage departed for California. There wasn't a line on her face; no trace, yet, of time on her spirit or body; but the dust must inevitably settle on her as it did on a vase standing unmoved on a shelf. A vase was a tranquil object, well suited to glimmer from a corner through a decade; but she was different. The heritage of her father's voyaging stirred in her together with the negation that held her stationary. A third state — a hot rebellion, poured through her, while she listened to Paret's facile periods. Really, he was rather ridiculous about the girl. She was conscious of the dull pounding of her heart.

X

The morning following was remarkably warm and still; and, after Paret Fifield had gone, Honora made her way slowly down to the bay. The sunlight lay like thick yellow dust on the warehouses and docks, and the water filled the sweep of Cottar's Neck with a solid and smoothly blue expanse. A fishing boat, newly arrived, was being disgorged of partly cured haddock. The cargo was loaded into a wheelbarrow, transferred to the wharf, and there turned into a basket on a weighing scale, checked by a silent man in series of marks on a small book, and carried away. Beyond were heaped corks and spread nets and a great reel of fine cord.

When Honora walked without an objective purpose she always came finally to the water. It held no surprise for her, there was practically nothing she was directly in-

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terested in seeing. She stood — as at present — gazing down into the tide clasping the piles, or away at the horizon, the Narrows opening upon the sea. She exchanged unremarkable sentences with familiar figures, watched the men swab decks or tail new cordage through blocks, and looked up absently at the spars of the schooners lying at anchor.

She had put on a summer dress again of white India barége, a little hat with a lavender bow, and stood with her silk shawl on an arm. The stillness of the day was broken only by the creak of the wheelbarrow. Last night she had been rebellious, but now a lassitude had settled over her: all emotion seemed blotted out by the pouring yellow light of the sun.

At the side of the wharf a small warehouse held several men in the office, the smoke of pipes lifting slowly from the open door; and, at the sound of footfalls, she turned and saw Jem Stanes entering the building. His expression was surprisingly morose. It was, she thought again as she had of Jason Burrage striding darkly along the street, singularly inopportune at the arrival of so much good fortune. A burr of voices, thickened by the salt spray of many sea winds, followed. She heard laughter, and then Jem's voice indistinguishable but sullenly angry.

Honora progressed up into the town, walked past the courthouse square, and met Jason at the corner of the street. "I am glad to have a chance to welcome you," she said, extending her hand. Close to him her sense of familiarity faded before the set face, the tightly drawn lips and hard gaze. She grew a little embarrassed. He had on another, still more surprising waistcoat, his watch

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chain was ponderous with gold; but dust had accumulated unattended on his shoulders, and dimmed the luster of his boots.

"Thank you," he replied non-committally, giving her palm a brief pressure. He stood silently, without cordiality, waiting for what might follow.

"You are safely back with the Golden Fleece," she continued more hurriedly, "after yoking the fiery bulls and sailing past the islands of the sirens."

"I don't know about all that," he said stolidly.

"Jason and the Argonauts," she insisted, conscious of her stupidity. He was far more compelling than she had remembered, than he appeared from a distance: the marked discontent of his earlier years had given place to a certain power, repose: the romance which she had decided was his main characteristic was emphasized. She was practically conversing with a disconcerting stranger.

"Olive was, of course, delighted," she went resolutely on. "You must marry soon, and build a mansion."

"We are not going to marry at all," he stated baldly.

"Oh —!" she exclaimed and then crimsoned with annoyance at the involuntary syllable. That idiot, Olive Stanes, she added to herself instantly. Honora could think of nothing appropriate to say. "That's a great pity," she temporized. Why didn't the boor help her? Hadn't he the slightest conception of the obligations of polite existence? He stood motionless, the fingers of one hand clasping a jade charm. However she, Honora Canderay, had no intention of being affronted by Jason Burrage.

"You must find it pale here after California, if what

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I've heard is true," she remarked crisply, then nodded and left him. That night at supper she repeated the burden of what he had told her to her aunt. The latter answered in a measured voice without any trace of interest:

"I thought something of the kind had happened, the upstairs girl was saying he was drunk last night. A habit acquired West, I don't doubt. It is remarkable, Honora, how you remember one from another in Cottarsport. They all appear indifferently alike to me. And I am tremendously upset about Paret."

"Well, I'm not," Honora returned. She spoke inattentively, and she was surprised at the truth she had exposed. Paret Fifield had never become a necessary part of her existence. Except for the light he had shed upon herself — the sudden glimpse of multiplying years and the emptiness of her days — his marriage was unimportant. She would miss him exactly as she might a piece of furniture that had been removed after forming a familiar spot. She was more engrossed in what her aunt had told her about Jason.

He had been back only two or three days, and already lost his promised wife and got drunk. The latter was different in Cottarsport from San Francisco, or even Boston; in such a small place as this every act offered the substance for talk, opinion, as long-lived as the elms on the hills. It was foolish of him not to go away for such excesses. Honora wanted to tell him so. She had inherited her father's attitude toward the town, she thought, a personal care of Cottarsport as a whole, necessarily expressed in an attention toward individual acts and people. She wished Jason wouldn't make a fool of himself.

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Then she recalled how ineffectual the same desire, actually stated, had been in connection with Olive Stanes. She recalled Olive's horrified face as she, Honora, had said, "Grace be dammed!" It was all quite hopeless. "I think I'll move to the city," she informed her aunt.

The latter sighed, from, Honora knew, a sense of superior knowledge and resignation.

After supper she deserted the more familiar drawing room for the chamber across the wide hall. A fire of coals was burning in an open grate, but there was no other light. Honora sat at a piano with a ponderous ebony case, and picked out Violetta's first aria from Traviata. The round sweet notes seemed to float away palpable and intact into the gloom. It was an unusual mood, and when it had gone she looked back at it in wonderment and distrust. Her customary inner rebellion re-established itself perhaps more vigorously than before: she was charged with energy, with vital promptings, but found no opportunity, promise, of expression or accomplishment.

The warm sun lingered for a day or so more, and then was obliterated by an imponderable bank of fog that rolled in through the Narrows, over Cottar's Neck, and changed even the small confines of the town into a vast labyrinth. That, in turn, was dissipated by a swinging eastern storm, tipped with hail, which left stripped trees on an ashen blue sky and dark, frigid water slapping uneasily at the water front.

Honora Canderay's states of mind were as various and similar.

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XI

Her outer aspect, however, unlike the weather, showed no evidence of change: as usual she drove in the chaise on afternoons when it was not too cold; she appeared, autocratic and lavish, in the shops of Citron Street; she made her usual, aimless excursions to the harbor. Jem Stanes, she saw, was still a deck hand on the schooner *Gloriana*. Looking back to the morning when he had scowlingly entered the office on the wharf she was able to reconstruct the cause of his ill humor — a brother-in-law to Jason Burrage was a person of far different employment from an ordinary Stanes. She passed Olive on the street, but the latter, except for a perfunctory greeting, hurried immediately by.

The stories of Jason's reckless conduct multiplied — he had consumed a staggering amount of Medford rum and, in the publicity of noon and Marlboro Street, sat upon the now notable silk hat. He had paid for some cheroots with a pinch of gold dust as they were said to do in the far West. He carried a loaded derringer, and shot "for fun" the jar of colored water in the apothecary's window, and had threatened, with a grim face, to do the same for whoever might interfere with his pleasures. He was, she learned, rapidly becoming a local scandal and menace.

If it had been anyone but Jason Burrage, native born and folded in the glamour of his extraordinary fortune, he would have been immediately and roughly suppressed: Honora well knew the rugged and severe temper of the town. As it was he went about — attended by its least

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desirable element, a chorus to magnify his liberality and daring — in an atmosphere of wonderment and excited curiosity.

This, she thought, was highly regrettable. Yet, in his present frame of mind, what else was there for him to do? He couldn't be expected to take seriously, be lost in, the petty affairs of Cottarsport; beyond a limited amount the gold for which he had endured so much — she had heard something of his misfortunes and struggle — was useless here; and, without balance, he must inevitably drift into still greater debauch in large cities.

He was now a frequently recurring figure in her thought. In the correct presence of her aunt, Mrs. Cozzens, in delicate clothes and exact surroundings, the light of an astral lamp on her sharply cut, slightly contemptuous face, she would consider the problem of Jason Burrage. In a way, which she had more than once explained and justified to herself, she felt responsible for him. If there had been anything to suggest she would have gone to him directly, but she had no intention of offering a barren condemnation. Her peculiar position in Cottarsport, while it indicated certain obligations, required the maintenance of an impersonal plane. Why, he might say anything to her; he was quite capable of telling her — and correctly — to go to the devil!

A new analogy was created between Jason Burrage and herself: his advantage over her had broken down, they both appeared fast in untoward circumstance beyond their power to alleviate or shape. He had come back to Cottarsport in the precise manner in which she had returned from shorter but equally futile excursions. Jason had his

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money which at once established necessities and made satisfaction impossible; and she had promptings, desires, that by reason of their mere being, allowed her neither contentment in the spheres of a social importance nor here in the quiet place where so much of her was rooted. Gazing at her Aunt Herriot's hard, fine profile the thought of her, Honora Canderay's, resemblance to the returned miner carousing with the dregs of the town brought a shade of ironic amusement to her countenance.

Honora left the house, walking, in the decline of a November afternoon. She had been busy in a small way, supervising the filling of camphor chests for the winter, and, intensely disliking any of the duties of domesticity, she was glad to escape into the still, cold open. Dusk was not yet perceptible but the narrow, erratic ways of Cottarsport were filling with clear, grey shadow. When, inevitably, she found herself at the harbor's edge, she progressed over a narrow wharf to its end. It had been wet, and there were patches of black, icy film; the water near by was grey-black, but about the bare thrust of Cottar's Neck it was green; the warehouses behind her were blank and deserted.

She had on a cloak lined with ermine, and she drew it closer about her throat at the frigid air lifting from the bay. Suddenly a flare of color filled the somber space, a coppery glow that glinted like metal shavings on the water and turned Cottar's Neck red. Against the sunset the town was formless, murky; but the sky and harbor resembled the interior of a burnished kettle. The effect was extraordinarily unreal, melodramatic, and she was watching the color fade, when a figure wavered out of

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the shadows and moved insecurely toward her. At first she thought the stumbling progressions were caused by the ice: then she saw that it was Jason Burrage, drunk.

He wore the familiar suit of broadcloth, with no outer covering, and a rough hat pulled down upon his fixed gaze. She stood motionless while he approached, and then calmly met his heavy interrogation.

"Honora," he articulated, "Honora Canderay, one — one of the great Canderays of Cottarsport — Well, why don't you say something? Too set up for a civil, for a ——"

"Don't be ridiculous, Jason," she replied crisply; "and do go home — you'll freeze out here as you are."

"One of the great Canderays," he reiterated, contemptuously. He came very close to her. "You're not much. Here they think you. . . . But I've been to California, and at the Jenny Lind . . . in silk like a blue bird, and sing ——. Nobody ever heard of the Canderays in 'Frisco, but they know Jason Burrage, Burrage who had all the bad luck there was, and then struck it rich."

He swayed perilously, and she put out a palm and steadied him. "Go back. You are not fit to be around."

Jason struck her hand down roughly. "I'm fitter than you. What are you, anyway?" he caught her shoulder in vise-like fingers. "Nothing but a woman, that's all — just a woman."

"You are hurting me," she said fearlessly.

His grip tightened, and he studied her, his eyes inhuman in a stony, white face. "Nothing more than that."

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“You are very surprising,” she responded. “Do you know, I had never thought of it. And it’s true; that is precisely what and all I am.”

His expression became troubled; he released her, stepped back, slipped, and almost fell into the water. Honora caught his arm and dragged him to the middle of the wharf. “A dam’ Canderay,” he muttered. “And I’m better, Jason Burrage. Ask them at the El Dorado, or Indian Bar; but that’s gone—the early days. All scientific now. We got the dead wood on gold . . . Cyanide.”

“Come home,” she repeated brusquely, turning him, with a slight push, toward the town settled in darkness. It sent him falling forward in the direction she wished. Honora supported him, led him on. At intervals he hung back, stopped. His speech became confused, then, it appeared, his reason commenced slowly to return. The streets were empty; a lamp shone dimly on its post at a corner; she guided Jason round a sunken space.

Honora had no sense of repulsion; she was conscious of a faint pity, but her energy came dimly from that feeling of obligation; once more she told herself inherited from her father—their essential attitude to Cottarsport. At the same time she found herself studying his face with a personal curiosity. She was glad that it was not weak, that rum had been ineffectual to loosen its hardness. He now seemed capable of walking alone, and she stood aside.

Jason was at a loss for words; his lips moved, but inaudibly. “Keep away from the water,” she commanded, “or from Medford rum. And, some evening

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soon, come to see me." She said this without premeditation, from an instinct beyond her searching.

"I can't do that," he replied in a surprisingly rational voice, "because I've lost my silk hat."

"There are hundreds for sale in Boston," she announced impatiently; "go and get another."

"That never came to me," he admitted, patently struck by this course of rehabilitation through a new high hat. "There was something I had to say to you but it left my mind, about a — a gold fleece; it turned into something else, on the wharf."

"When you see me again," she moved farther from him, suddenly in a great necessity to be home. She left him, talking at her, and went swiftly through the gloom to Regent Street. Letting herself into the still hall, the amber serenity of lamplight in suave spaciousness, she swung shut the heavy door with a startling vigor. Then she stood motionless, the cape slipping from her shoulders in glistening and soft white folds about her arms, to the carpet. 'Honora wasn't faint, not for a moment had she been afraid of Jason Burrage, this was not a rebellion of over-strung nerves, yet a passing blindness, a spiritual shudder, possessed her. She had the sensation of having just passed through an overwhelming adventure: yet all that had happened was commonplace, even sordid. She had met a drunken man whom she hardly knew beyond his name and an adventitious fact, and insisted on his going home. Asking him to call on her had been little less than perfunctory — an impersonal act of duty.

Yet her being vibrated as if a loud and disturbing bell

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had been unexpectedly sounded at her ear; she was responding to an imperative summons. In her room changing for supper, this feeling vanished, and left her usual introspective humor. Jason had spoken a profound truth, which her surprise had recognized at the time, in reminding her that she was an ordinary woman, like, for instance, Olive Stanes. The isolation of her dignity had hidden that from her for a number of years. She had come to think of herself exclusively as a Canderay.

Later her sharp enjoyment in probing into all pretensions, into herself, got slightly the better of her. "I saw Jason Burrage this evening," she told Mrs. Cozzens.

"If he was sober," that individual returned, "it might be worth recalling."

"But he wasn't. He nearly fell into the harbor. I asked him to see us."

"With your education, Honora, there is really no excuse for confusing the singular and plural. I haven't any doubt you asked him here, but that has nothing to do with us."

"You might be amused by his accounts of California. For, although you never complain, I can see that you think it dull."

"I am an old woman," Herriot Cozzens stated, "my life was quite normally full, and I am content here with you. Any dullness you speak of I regret for another reason."

"You are afraid I'll get preserved like a salted haddock. He may not come."

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XII

Honora was in the less formal of the drawing rooms when Jason Burrage was announced. He came forward almost immediately, in the most rigorous evening attire, a new silk hat on his arm.

"You had no trouble getting one," she nodded in its direction.

"Four," he replied tersely.

Jason took a seat facing her across an open space of darkly flowered carpet, and Honora studied him, directly critical. Against a vague background his countenance was extraordinarily pronounced, vividly pallid. His black hair swept in a soft wave across a brow with indented temples, his nose was short with wide nostrils, the lower part of his face square. His hands, scarred and discolored, rested each on a black-clad knee.

She was in no hurry to begin a conversation which must be either stilted, uncomfortable, or reach beyond known confines. For the moment her daring was passive. Jason Burrage stirred his feet, and she attended the movement with thoughtful care. He said unexpectedly:

"I believe I've never been in here before," he turned and studied his surroundings as if in an effort of memory. "But I talked to your father once in the hall."

"Nothing has been changed," she answered almost unintelligibly. "Very little does in Cottarsport."

"That's so," he assented. "I saw it when I came

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back. It was just the same, but I ——” he stopped and his expression became gloomy.

“If you mean that you were different you are wrong,” she declared concisely. “Just that has made trouble for you — you have been unable to be anything but yourself. I am like that, too. Everyone is.”

“I have been through things,” he told her enigmatically. “Why look — just the trip: to Charges on the Isthmus, and then mules and canoes through that ropery woods to Panama, with thousands of prospectors waiting for the steamer. Then back by Mazatlan, Mexico City and Vera Cruz. A man sees things.”

Her inborn uneasiness at rooms, confining circumstance, her restless desire for unlimited horizons, for the mere fact of reaching, moving, stirred into being at the names he repeated. Tomorrow she would go away, find something new —

“It must have been horridly rough and dirty.”

“A good many turned back or died,” he added tentatively. “But after you once got there a sort of craziness came over you — you couldn’t wait to buy a pan or shovel. The bay was full of rotting ships deserted by their crews, a thicket of masts with even the sails still hanging to them. The men jumped overboard to get ashore and pick up gold.”

She thought with a pang of the idle ships with sprung rigging, sodden canvas lumpily left on the decks, rotting as he had said, in files. The image afflicted her like a physical pain, and she left it hurriedly. “But San Francisco must have been full of life.”

“You had to shout to be heard over the bands, and

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everything blazing. Pyramids of nuggets on the gambling tables. Gold dust and champagne and mud."

"Whatever will you find here?" She immediately regretted her query, which seemed to search improperly into the failure of his marriage.

"I'm thinking of going back," he admitted.

Curiously Honora was sorry to hear this, unreasonably it gave to Cottarsport a new aspect of barrenness, the vista of her own life reached interminable and monotonous into the future. And she was certain that, without the necessity and incentive of labor, it would be destructive for Jason to return to San Francisco.

"What would you do?"

"Gamble," he replied cynically.

"Admirable prospect," she said lightly. Her manner unmistakably conveyed the information that his call had drawn to an end. He clearly resisted this for a minute or two, and then stirred.

"You must come again."

"Why?" he demanded abruptly, grasping his hat, which had reposed on the carpet at his side.

"News from California, from the world outside, is rare in Cottarsport. You must see that you are an interesting figure to us."

"Why?" he persisted, frowning.

She rose, her face as hard as his own, but with a faint smile in place of his lowering expression. "No, you haven't changed; not even to the extent of a superficial knowledge of drawing rooms."

"I ought to have seen better than come."

"The ignorance was all my own."

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“But once ——” he paused.

“Should be enough,” her smile widened. Yet she was furious with herself for having quarreled with him; the descent from the altitude of the Canderays had been enormous. What extraordinary influence had colored her acts in the past few days?

Mrs. Cozzens, at breakfast, inquired placidly how the evening before had progressed, and Honora made a gesture expressive of its difficulties. “You will create such responsibilities for yourself,” the elder stated.

This one, it suddenly appeared to Honora, had been thrust upon her. She made repeated and angry efforts to put Jason Burrage from her mind; but his appearance sitting before her, his words and patent discontent, flooded back again and again. She realized now that he was no impersonal problem; somehow he had got twisted into the fibres of her existence; he was more vividly in her thoughts than Paret Fifield had ever been. She attempted to ridicule him mentally, and called up pictures of his preposterous clothes, the ill-bred waistcoats and ponderous watch chain. They faded before the memory of the set jaw, his undeniable romance.

Wrapped in fur she elected to drive after dinner; the day was cold but palely clear, and she felt that her cheeks were glowing with unusual color. Above the town, on the hills now sere with frost and rock, the horses, under the aged guidance of Coggs, continually dropped from a jog trot to an ambling walk. Honora paid no attention to the gait, she was impervious to the wide, glittering reach of water; and she was startled to find herself abreast a man gazing into the chaise.

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"I made a jackass out of myself last night," he observed gloomily.

She automatically stopped the carriage and held back the buffalo robe. Jason hesitated, but was forced to take a seat at her side. Honora said nothing, and the horses again went forward.

"I'd been drinking a lot and was all on edge," he volunteered further. "I feel different today. I can remember your mother driving like this. I was a boy then, and used to think she was made of ice; wondered why she didn't run away in the sun."

"Mother was very kind, really," Honora said absently. She was relaxed against the cushions, the country dipped and spread before her in a restful brown garb; she watched Coggs' glazed hat sway against the sky. The old sense of familiarity with Jason Burrage came back: why not, since she had known him all their lives? And now, after his years away, she was the only one in Cottarsport who at all comprehended his difficulties. He was not a commonplace man, strength was never that; and, in a way, he had the quality which more than any other had made her father so notable. And he was not unpleasant so close beside her. That was of overwhelming importance in the formation of her intimate opinion of him. He had been refined by the bitterness of his early failure in California; he bore himself with a certain dignity.

"What'll I do?" he demanded abruptly.

For the life of her she couldn't tell him. Except for platitudes she could offer no solution against the future. Actual living, directly viewed, was like that —

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hopeless of exterior solution. "I don't know," she admitted; "I wish I did; I wish I could help you."

"This money, what's it good for! I can't get my family to burn two small stoves at once; they'd die in the kitchen if they had a hundred parlors; I've bought more clothes than I'll ever wear, four high hats and so on. Not going to get married; no use for a big house, for anything more than the room I have. I get plenty to eat——"

"You might do some good with it," she suggested. The base of what she was saying, Honora realized, was that he would be as well off with his fortune given away. Yet it was unjust, absurd, for him not to get some use, pleasure, from what he had worked so extravagantly to obtain.

"Somehow that wouldn't settle anything, for me," he replied.

Coggs had turned at the usual limit of her afternoon driving, and they were slowly moving back to the town. Cottar's Neck was fading into the early gloom, and a group of men stared at Jason seated in the Canderays' chaise as if their eyes were being played with in the uncertain light.

"Have you thought any more about going West?" she inquired.

They had stopped for his descent at Marlboro Street, and he stood with a hand on the wheel. "I had intended to go this morning."

He held her gaze steadily, and she felt a swift coldness touch her into a shiver.

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"Tomorrow?" this came in a spirit of perversity against her every other instinct.

"Shall I?"

"Would you be happier in San Francisco?"

Jason Burrage made a hopeless gesture.

". . . for supper," Honora found herself saying in a rush; "at six o'clock. If you aren't bound for California."

She tried to recall afterward if she had indicated a particular evening for the invitation. There was a vague memory of mentioning Thursday. This was Tuesday . . . Herriot Cozzens would be in Boston.

XIII

A servant told her that Mr. Burrage had arrived when she was but half ready. She was, in reality, undecided in her choice of dress for the evening; but finally she wore soft white silk, with deep, knotted fringe on the skirt, a low cut neck and a narrow mantle of black velvet. Her hair, severely plain in its net, was drawn back from a bang cut across her brow. As she entered the room where he was standing a palpable admiration marked his countenance.

He said nothing, however, beyond a conventional phrase. Such natural reticence had a large part in her acceptance of him; he did nothing that actively disturbed her hypercritical being. He was almost distinguished in appearance. She had a feeling that if it had been different —. Honora distinctly wished for a flamboyant touch about him, it presented a symbol of her command

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of any situation between them, a reminder of her superiority.

The supper went forward smoothly; there were the welcome inevitable reminiscences of the rough fare of California, laughter at the prohibitive cost of beans; and when, at her direction, he lighted a cheroot, and they lingered on at the table, Honora's aloofness was becoming a thing of the past. The smoke gave her an unexpected thrill, an extraordinary sense of masculine proximity. There had been no such blue clouds in the house since her father's death seven years ago. Settled back contentedly Jason Burrage seemed — why, actually, he had an air of occupying a familiar place.

It was bitterly cold without, the room into which they trailed insufficiently warm, and they were drawn close together at an open Franklin stove. The lamps on the mantel were distant, and they had not yet been fully turned up: his face was tinged by the glow of the fire. An intense face. "What are you thinking about — me?" she added coolly. "Nothing," he replied, "I'm too comfortable to think," there was a note of surprise in his voice, he looked about as if to find reassurance of his present position. "But if I did it would be this — that you are entirely different from any woman I've ever known before. They have always been one of two kinds — one or the other," he repeated somberly.

"Now you are both together. I don't know as I ought to say that, if it's nice. I wouldn't like to try and explain."

"But you must."

"It's your clothes and your manner put against what

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you are. 'Oh hell, what I mean is you're elegant to look at and good, too.'

An expression of the deepest concern followed his exclamation. He commenced an apology. Hardly launched, it died on his lips.

Honora was at once conscious of the need for his contrition and of the fact that she had never heard a more entertaining statement. It was evident that he viewed her as a desirable compound of the women of the El Dorado and Olive Stanes: an adroit and sincere compliment. She wanted to follow it on and on, unfold its every exposition; but, of course, that was impossible. All this she concealed behind an indifferent countenance, her slim white fingers half embedded in the black mantle.

Jason Burrage lighted another cheroot, and put his feet up on the polished brass railing of the iron hearth. This amused her beyond words. She couldn't remember when she had had another such vitalized evening. She realized that, through the last years, she had been appallingly lonely; but with Jason smoking beside her in a tilted chair the solitude was banished. She got a coal for him in the small, burnished tongs, and he responded with a prodigious puff that set her to coughing.

When he had gone the house was hatefully vacant; as she went up to her chamber the empty spaciousness, the semi-dark well of the stair, the high hall with its low turned lamp, the blackness of the third story pouring down over her, oppressed her almost beyond endurance. Her Aunt Herriot, already old, must be dead before very long, there was none other of her connections who

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could live with her, and she would have to depend on perfunctory, hired companionship.

Honora saw that she could never escape from the influence which held her in Cottarsport.

In her room, the door bolted, it was no better. The interior was large, uncompromisingly square; and, though every possible light was burning, still it seemed somber, menacing.

The following day was a lowering void with gusts of rain driving against the windows. Mrs. Cozzens would be away until tomorrow, and Honora sat until evening alone. At times she embroidered, short-lived efforts broken by despondent and aimless excursions through the echoing halls.

She attempted to read, to compose herself with an elaborate gilt and embellished volume called "The Garland." But, at a Lamentation on the Death of Her Canary, by a Person of Quality, she deliberately dropped the book into the burning coals of the Franklin stove. The satisfaction of seeing the pages crisp and burst into flame soon evaporated. The day was a calamity, the approaching murky evening a horror.

At supper she wondered what Jason Burrage was doing. A trace of the odor of his cheroot lingered in the dining-room. He was an astonishingly solid — the only actuality in a nebulous world of lofty, flickering ceilings and the lash of rain. He might as well smoke in her drawing room as in the Burrage kitchen. Paret Fifield would have drifted naturally to the Canderay house, but not Jason, not a native of Cottarsport. . . . With an

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air of determination she sharply pulled the plush, tasseled bell rope in the corner.

XIV

She heard the servant open the front door; there was a pause — Jason was taking off his greatcoat — after which he entered, calm and without query.

“I was tired of sitting alone,” she said with an air of entire frankness. In a minute or so more it was all as it had been the evening before — she held a coal for his cheroot as he tilted back beside her with his feet on the rail. “You are a very comfortable man, Jason,” she told him.

He made no reply, although a quiver crossed his lips. Then, after a little, “It’s astonishing how soon you get used to things. Seems as if I had been here for years, and this is only the third time.”

“Have you thought any more of California?”

He faced her with an expression of surprise. “It had gone clean out of my mind. I suppose I will go back, though — nothing here for me. I can’t come to see you every evening.”

She preserved a silence in which they both fell to staring into a dancing, bluish flame. The gusts of rain were audible like the tearing of heavy linen. An extraordinary idea had taken possession of Honora — if the day had been fine, if she had been out in a sparkling air and sun, a very great deal would have happened differently. But just what she couldn’t then say: the fact alone was all that she curiously apprehended.

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"I suppose not," she answered, so long after his last statement that he gazed questioningly at her. "I wonder if it has occurred to you," she continued, "how much alike we are? I often think about it."

"Why, no," he replied, "it hasn't. Jason Burrage and Honora Canderay! I wouldn't have guessed it, and I don't believe anyone else ever has. I'd have a hard time thinking about two more different. It's—it's ridiculous," he became seriously animated, "here I am—well, you know all about me—with some money, perhaps, and a little of the world in my head; but you're—you're Honora Canderay."

"You said once that I was nothing but a woman," she reminded him.

"I remember that," he admitted with evident chagrin. "I was drunk."

"That's when the truth is often hit on; I am quite an ordinary sort of woman."

He laughed indulgently.

"You said last evening I had some of a very common quality."

"Now you mustn't take that serious," he protested; "it was just in a way of speech. I told you I couldn't rightly explain myself."

"Anyhow," she asserted bluntly, "I am lonely. What will you do about it?"

His amazement turned into a consternation which even now she found almost laughable. "Me?" he stammered. "There's no way I can help you. You are having a joke."

She realized, with a feeling that her knowledge came

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too late, that she was entirely serious. Jason Burrage was the only being alive who could give her any assistance, yes, save her from the future. Her hands were cold, she felt absolutely still, as if she had suddenly turned into marble, a statue with a heart slightly fluttering.

"You could be here a lot," she told him and then paused, glancing at him swiftly with hard, bright eyes. He had removed his feet from the stove, and sat with his cheroot in a poised, awkward hand. She was certain that he would never speak.

"We might get married."

Honora was startled at the ease with which the words were pronounced, and conscious of an absurdly trivial curiosity — she wondered just how much he had been shocked by her proposal? She saw that he was stupefied.

Then, "So we might," he pronounced idiotically. "There isn't any real reason why we shouldn't. That is ——" he stopped. "Where does the laugh start?" he demanded.

Suddenly Honora was overwhelmed, not by what she had said, but by the whole difficulty and inner confusion of her existence. She turned away her head with an unintelligible period. A silence followed intensified by the rain flinging against the glass.

"It's a bad night," he muttered.

The banality saved her. Again practically at her ease she regarded him with slightly smiling lips. "I believe I've asked you to marry me," she remarked.

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"Thank you," said Jason Burrage. He stood up. "If you mean it, I'd like to very much."

"You'd better sit down," she went on in an impersonal voice; "there ought to be a lot of things to arrange. For instance, hadn't we better live on here, for a while anyhow. It's a big house to waste."

"Honora, you'll just have to stop a little," he asserted, "I'm kind of lost. It was quick in California, but that was a funeral procession compared with you."

Now that it was done, she was frightened. But there was time to escape even yet. She determined to leave the room quickly, get away to the safety of her bolted door, her inviolable privacy. She didn't stir. An immediate explanation that she hadn't been serious — how could he have thought it for a moment! — would save her. But she was silent.

A sudden enthusiasm lighted up his immobile face. "I'll get the prettiest diamond in Boston," he declared.

"You mustn't ——" she commenced, struggling still to retreat. He misunderstood her.

"The very best," he insisted.

When he had gone she remained seated in the formal chamber. At any rate she had conquered the emptiness of her life, of the great square house above her. It was definitely arranged, they were to marry. How amazed Herriot Cozzens would be! It was probable that she would leave Cottarsport, and her, Honora, immediately. Jason hadn't kissed her, he had not even touched her hand, in going. He had been extremely subdued, except at the thought of the ring he would buy for her.

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There were phases of the future which she resolutely ignored.

Mrs. Cozzens came back as had been planned and Honora told her at once. The older woman expressed her feeling in contained, acid speech. "I am surprised he had the assurance to ask you."

"Jason didn't," Honora calmly returned.

"It's your father," the elder stated; "he had some very vulgar blood. I felt that it was a calamity when my sister accepted him. A Cottarsport person at heart, just as you are, always down about the water and those low docks."

"I'm sure you're right, and so it's much better for me to find where I belong. I have tried to get away from Cottarsport, and from the sea and the schooners sailing in and out the Narrows, a thousand times. But I always come back, just as father did, back to this little place from the entire world — China and Africa and New York. The other influences weren't strong enough, Aunt Herriot; they only made me miserable; and now I've killed them. I'll say good-bye to you and Paret and the cotillions," she kissed her hand, but not gaily, to a whole existence irrevocably lost.

With Jason's ring blazing on her slim finger she drove, the day before the wedding, for the last time as Honora Canderay. The leaves had been stripped from the elms on the hills, brown and barren against the flashing, steely water. She saw that Coggs was so impotent with age that if the horses had been more vigorous he would be helpless. Coggs had driven for her father, then her, for thirty years. It was too cold for the old man

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to be out today. His cheeks were dark crimson, and continually wet from his failing eyes.

Herriot Cozzens had left her; Coggs . . . all the intimate figures of so many years were vanishing. Jason remained. He had almost entirely escaped annoying her, and she was conscious of his overwhelming admiration, the ineradicable esteem of Cottarsport for the Canderays; but a question, a doubt more obscure than fear, was taking possession of her. After all she was supremely ignorant of life; she had been screened from it by pride and luxurious circumstance; but now she had surrendered all her advantage. She had given herself to Jason; and he was life, mysterious and rude. The thunder of large, threatening seas, reaching everywhere beyond the placid gulf below, beat faintly on her perception.

XV

In an unfamiliar, upper room of the Canderays' house Jason stood prepared for the signal to descend to his wedding. The ceremony was to occur at six o'clock; it was now only five minutes before—he had absently looked at his watch a great many times in a short space—and he was striving to think seriously of what was to follow. But in place of this he was passing again through a state of silent, incoherent surprise. This was the sort of thing for which a man might pinch himself to discover if he were awake or dreaming. In five, no, four, minutes now Honora Canderay was to become his, Jason Burrage's, wife.

A certain complacency had settled over him in the past

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few days, something of his inborn feeling of the Canderays as a house apart seemed to have evaporated; and, in addition, he had risen — Honora wouldn't take any just happen so: Jason was never notable for humility. Yet who, even after he had returned from California with his riches, would have predicted this evening? His astonishment was as much at himself, illuminated by extraordinary events, as at any exterior circumstance. At times he had the ability to see himself, as if from the outside; and that view, here, was amazing. Why, only a short while ago he had been drinking rum in the shed back of "Pack" Clower's house, perhaps the least desirable shed in Cottarsport.

Of one fact, however, he was certain — no more promiscuous draughts of Medford. He recognized that he had taken so much not from the presence of desire, but a total absence of it as well as any other mental state. "Pack" and his associates, too, were now a thing of the past, a bitterly rough and vacant element. The glass lamp on a bureau was smoking, he stepped forward to lower the wick, when a knock fell on the door. A young Boston relative of Honora's — a supercilious individual in checked trousers and lemon-colored gloves — announced that they were waiting for Jason below. With a determined settling of his shoulders and tightly drawn lips, the latter marched resolutely forward.

The marriage was to be in the chamber across from the one in which he had generally sat. Smilax and white Killarney roses had been bowed over the mantel at the farther end, and there Jason found the clergyman waiting. The room was half full of people occupying chairs

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brought from other parts of the house; and he was conscious of a sudden silence, an intent, curious scrutiny, as he entered. An instinctive antagonism to this deepened in him: he felt that, with the exception of his father and mother, he hadn't a friend in the room. Such other local figures as were there were facilely imitating the cold stare of Honora's connections. He stood belligerently facing Mrs. Cozzens' glacial calm, the inspection of a man he had seen driving with Honora in Cottarsport, now accompanied by a pettish, handsome girl, evidently his wife. His father's weathered countenance, sunken and dry on its bones, was blank, except for a faint doubt, as if some mistake had been made which would presently be exposed, sending them about face. His mother, however, was triumphant pride and justification personified. Then the music commenced — a harp, violin and double bass.

The wedding ring firmly secured, Jason stirred with a feeling of increasing awkwardness. He glared back, with a protruding lip, at the fellow with the young wife, at the small, aggressive group from Boston; and then he saw that Honora was in the room. She was coming slowly toward him. Her expression of absolute unconcern released him from all petty annoyance, any thought of the malicious onlookers. As she stopped at his side she gave him a slight nod and smile; and at that moment a tremendous, sheer admiration for her was born in him.

Honora had chosen to be unattended — she had coolly observed that she was well beyond the age for such sentimentality — and he realized that the present would

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have been a racking occasion for most women; while it was evident that she was not disturbed in the least. He had a general impression of sugary white satin, of her composed, almost disdainful face in a cloud of veil with little waxen orange flowers, of slender still hands, when they turned from the room to the minister.

They had gone over the marriage service together, he had read it again in the kitchen at home; he was fairly familiar with its periods and responses, and got through with only a slight hesitation and half prompting. But the thickness of his voice, in comparison with Honora's open, decisive utterance, vainly annoyed him. He wanted desperately to clear his throat. Suddenly it was over, and Honora, in a swirl of satin, was sinking to her knees. Beside her he listened with a feeling of comfortable lull to a lengthy prayer.

Rising, he perfunctorily clasped a number of indifferent palms, replied inanely to gabbled expressions of good will and hopes for the future unmistakably pessimistic in tone. Honora told him in a rapid aside the names of those approaching. She smiled radiantly at his father and mother, leaned forward and whispered in the latter's ear; and they followed the guests streaming into the dining room.

There champagne was being opened by the caterer's assistants from Boston. There were steaming platters of terrapin and oysters and fowl. The table bore pyramids of nuts and preserved fruit, hot Cinderellas in cups with sugar and wine, black case cake, Savoy biscuits, pumpkin paste and frothed creams with preserved peach leaves. A laden plate was thrust into Jason's hand, and he

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sat with it in a clatter of voices and topics that completely ignored him. He was isolated in the absorption of food and wine, in a conversational exchange as strange to him as if it had been spoken in a foreign language.

Honora was busily talking to young Mrs. Fifield — he remembered the name now. Apparently she had forgotten his existence. At first this annoyed him; he determined to force his way into their attention, but a wiser realization held him where he was. Honora was exactly right, he had nothing in common with these people, probably not one of them would come into his life or house again. While his wife, in the fact of her marriage, had clearly signified how little important they were to her. His father joined him.

“You made certain when the New York packet leaves?” he queried.

“Everything’s fixed,” Jason reassured him.

“Your mother wanted to see you. But she got set and is kind of timid about moving.” Jason rose promptly, and, with the elder, found Mrs. Hazzard Burrage. “I’d like to have Honora, too,” the latter told them, and Jason turned sharply to find her. When they stood facing the old couple his mother hesitated doubtfully, then she put out her hand to the woman in wedding array. But Honora ignored it; leaning forward she kissed the round, bright cheek.

“You have to be patient with them at times,” the mother said, looking up anxiously.

“I’m afraid Jason will need that warning,” Honora replied; “he is a very imprudent man.”

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XVI

Jason's mind returned to this later, sitting in the house that had been the Canderays', but which now was his too. Honora's remark to his mother had been clear in itself, but it suggested wide speculations beyond his grasp. For instance — why, after all, had Honora married him? He was forced to acknowledge that it was not the result of any overwhelming feeling for him. The manner of their wedding, the complete absence of the emotion supposed to be the incentive of such consummations, Honora herself, all denied any effort to fix such a personally satisfactory cause. That she might have had no other opportunity — Honora was not as young as she had been — he dismissed as obviously absurd. Why ——

His gaze was fastened upon the carpet, and he saw that time and the passage of feet had worn away the design. He looked about the room, and was surprised to discover a general dinginess which he had never noticed before. He said nothing, but, in his movements about the house, examined the furnishings and walls, and an astonishing fact was thrust upon him — the celebrated dwelling was grievously run down. It was plain that no money had been spent on it for years. The chaise, too, and the astrakhan collar on Coggs' coat, were worn out.

He considered this at breakfast — his wife behind a tall Sheffield coffee urn — and he was aware of the cold edge of a distasteful possibility. The thought enveloped him insidiously, like the fog which often rolled through

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the Narrows and over the town, that the Canderays were secretly impoverished, and Honora had married him only for his money. Jason was not resentful of this in itself, since he had been searching for a motive he could accept, but it struck him in a peculiarly vulnerable spot — his admiration for his wife, for Honora. The idea, although he assured himself that the thing was readily comprehensible, somehow managed to diminish her, to tarnish the luster she held for him. It was far beneath the elevation on which Cottarsport had placed the Canderays; and he suffered a distinct sense of loss, a feeling of the staleness and disappointment of living.

The more he considered this explanation the more he was convinced of its probability. A great deal of his genuine warmth in his marriage evaporated. Still — Honora had married him, she had given herself in return for what material advantage he might bring; and he would have to perform his part thoroughly. He ought to have known that —

What he must do now was to save them both from any painful revelation by keeping forever hid that he was aware of her purpose, he must never expose himself by a word or act; and he must make her understand that whatever he had was absolutely hers. It would be necessary for her to go to the money with entire freedom and without any accounting.

This, he found, was not so easy to establish as he thought. Honora was his wife, but nevertheless there was a well marked reticence between them, a formal nicety to which he was both susceptible and heartily in accord. He couldn't just thrust his fortune before her on the

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table. He hesitated through the day, on the verge of various blunders; and then, in the evening, said in a studied casuality of manner:

“What do you think about fixing some of the rooms over new? You might get tired of seeing the same things for so long. I saw real elegant furniture in Boston.”

She looked about indifferently. “I think I wouldn’t like it changed,” she remarked, almost in the manner of a defense. “I suppose it does seem worn to you; but I’m used to it; there are so many associations. I am certain I’d be lost in new hangings.”

Jason was so completely silenced by her reply that he felt he must have shown some confusion, for her gaze deliberately turned to him. “Is there any particular thing you would like repaired?” she inquired.

“No, of course not,” he said hastily. “I think it’s all splendid. I wouldn’t change a curtain, only—but——” he cursed himself for a clumsy fool while Honora continued to study him. He endeavored to shield himself behind the trivial business of lighting a cheroot; but he felt Honora’s query searching him out. Finally, to his extreme dismay, he heard her say:

“Jason, I believe you think I married you for money!” Pretense, he realized, would be no good now.

“Something like that did occur to me,” he acknowledged desperately.

“Really,” she told him sharply. “I could be cross very easily. You are too stupid. Father did wonderfully well on his voyages, and his profit was invested by Frederic Cozzens, one of the shrewdest financiers of his

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day. I have twice, probably three times, as much as you."

She confronted him with a faintly sparkling resentment. However, the pleasure, the reassurance, in what he had just heard made him indifferent to the rest. It was impossible now to comprehend how he had been such a block! He even smiled at her, which, he was delighted to observe, obviously puzzled her.

"Perhaps I ought to tell you, Jason, and perhaps it is too late already, that I thought I married you because I was lonely, because I feared the future. Anyhow, that's what I told myself the night I sent for you. You might have a right to complain very bitterly about it."

"If I have I won't," he assured her cheerfully.

"I thought that then; but now I am not at all sure. It no longer seems so simple, so easily explained. I used to feel that I understood myself very thoroughly, I could look inside and see what was there; but in the last month I haven't been able to; and it is very disturbing."

"Anyhow we're married," he announced comfortably.

"That's a beautiful way to feel," she remarked. "I appear to get less sure of things as I grow older, which is pathetic."

He wondered what, exactly, she meant by this. Honora said a great many little things which, their meaning escaping him, gave him momentary doubts. He discovered that she had a habit of saying things indirectly, and that, as the seriousness of the occasion increased, her manner became lighter and he could depend less on the mere or-

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der of her words. This continually disconcerted him, put him on the defensive and at small disadvantages: he was never quite at ease with Honora.

Obversely — the ugly shade of mercenary purpose dispelled — close at hand his admiration for her grew. Every detail of her living was as fine as that publicly exposed in the drawing room. She was not rigidly and impossibly perfect, in, for instance, the inflexible attitude of Olive Stanes; Honora had a very human impatience, she could be disagreeable, he found, in the morning, and she undoubtedly felt herself superior to the commonalty of life. But in the ordering of her person there was a wonderfully exact delicacy and fragrant charm. Just as she had no formal manner so, he discovered, she possessed no "good" clothes; she dressed evidently from some inner necessity, and not merely for the sake of impression. She had, too, a remarkable vigor of expression; Honora was not above swearing at contradictory circumstance; and she was so free of small pruderies that often she became a cause of embarrassment to him. At times he would tell himself uneasily that her conduct was not quite ladylike; but at the same instant his amusement in her would mount until it threatened him with laughter.

There was a great deal to be learned from Honora, he told himself; and then he would speculate whether he were progressing in that acquisition; and whether she were happy; no, not happy, but contented. Ignorant of her reason for marrying he vaguely dreaded the possibility of its departure, mysterious as it had come, leaving her regarding him with surprise and disdain. He tried des-

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perately, consciously, to hold her interest and esteem. That was the base of his conception of their married existence, which, then, he was entirely willing to accept.

XVII

However, as the weeks multiplied without bringing him any corresponding increase in the knowledge of both Honora and their true situation, he was aware of a disturbance born of his very pleasure in her; an uncomfortable feeling of insecurity fastened upon him. But all this he was careful to keep hidden. There was evidently no doubt in the minds of Cottarsport of the ennobledness of his position — with all that gold, wedded to Honora Canderay, living in the Canderay mansion. The more solid portion of the town gave him a studied consideration denied to the mere acquisition of wealth; and the rough element, once his companion but now relentlessly held at a distance, regarded him with a loud disdain fully as humanly flattering. Sometimes with Honora he passed the latter, and they grumbled an obscure acknowledgment of his curt greeting; when he was alone, they openly disparaged his attainments and qualified pride.

There were "Pack" Clower, an able seaman whose indolent character had dissipated his opportunities of employment without harming his slow, powerful body. Emery Radlaw, the brother of the apothecary and a graduate of Williams College, a man of vanished refinements and taker of strange drugs; as thin and erratically rapid in movements as Clower was slow. Steven, an in-

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credibly soiled Swede. John Vleet, the master and part owner of a fishing schooner, a capable individual on the sea but an insanely violent drunkard on land. There were others, all widely different but alike in the bitterness of a common failure and the habit of assuaging doubtfully self-placed opinion, of ministering to crawling nerves, with highly potential stimulation.

Jason passed "Pack" and Emery Radlaw on a day of late March, and a mocking and purposely audible aside almost brought him to an adequate reply. He had disposed of worse men than these in California and the Isthmus. His arrogant temper rose and threatened to master him; but something more powerful held him steadily and silently on his way. This was his measureless admiration for Honora, his determination to involve her in nothing that would detract from her fineness and erect pride. Brawling on the street would not do for her husband. He must give her no cause to lessen what incomprehensible feeling, liking, she might have for him, give life to no regrets for a hasty and perhaps only half considered act. After this, in passing any of his late, temporary associates, he failed to express even the perfunctory consciousness of their being.

XVIII

In April he was obliged to admit to himself that he knew no more of Honora's attitude toward him than he had on the day of their wedding. He recognized that she made no show of emotion, it was an essential part of her to seem at all times unmoved. That was well enough for

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the face she turned toward the world; but directed at him, her husband, its enigmatic quality began to obsess his mind. What Honora thought of him, why she had married him, became an almost continuous question.

It bred an increasing sense of instability that became loud, defiant. More than once he was at the point of self-betrayal: query, demand, objection, would rise on a temporary angry flood to his lips. But, struggling, behind a face as unmoved as Honora's own, he would suppress his resentment, the sense of injury, and smoke with the appearance of the greatest placidity.

His regard for his wife placed an extraordinary check on his impulses and utterance. He deliberated carefully over his speech, watched her with an attention not far from a concealed anxiety, and was quick to absorb any small conventions unconsciously indicated by her remarks. She never instructed or held anything over him; he would have been acutely sensitive to any air of superiority, and immediately antagonized. But Honora was entirely free from pretensions of that variety; she was as clear and honest as a goblet of water.

Jason's regard for her grew pace by pace with the feeling of baffling doubt. He was passing through the public square, and his thoughts were interrupted by a faint drifting sweetness. "I believe the lilacs are out," he said unconsciously aloud and stopping. His surrounding was remarkably serene, withdrawn — the courthouse, a small block of brick with white corniced windows, flat Ionic portico and slatted wood lantern with a bell, stood in the middle of the grassy common shut in by an irregular rectangle of dwellings with low eaves and gardens.

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The sun shone with a beginning warmth in a vague sky that intensified the early green. It seemed that he could see, against a house, the lavender blur of the lilac blossoms.

Then his attention was attracted by the figure of a man, at once strange and familiar, coming toward him with a dragging gait. Jason studied the other until a sudden recognition clouded his countenance, filled him with a swift, unpleasant surprise. He had never believed that —

“Thomas!” he exclaimed. “Whenever did you get back?”

“Yesterday,” said Thomas Gast.

Well, here was Thomas returned from California like himself. Yet the most negligent view of the latter revealed that there was a vast difference between Jason and this last Argonaut — Thomas Gast’s loosely hung jaw, which gave to his countenance an air of irresolution, was now exaggerated by an aspect of utter defeat. His ill conditioned clothes, sodden brogans and stringy handkerchief still knotted miner-fashion about his throat, all multiplied the fact of failure proclaimed by his attitude.

“How did you strike it?” Jason uselessly asked.

“What chance has the prospector today?” the other heatedly and indirectly demanded. “At first a man could pan out something for himself; but now it’s all companies, all capital. The state’s interfered too, claims are being held up in court while their owners might starve, there are new laws and trimmings every week. I struck it rich on the Reys, but I was drove out before I could get my stakes in. They tell me you did good.”

“At last,” Jason replied.

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“And married Honora Canderay, too.”

The other assented shortly.

“Some are shot with luck,” Thomas Gast proclaimed; “they’d fall and skin their face on a nugget.”

“How did you come back?”

“Worked my passage in a crazy clipper with moon-sails and the halliards padlocked to the rail. Carried away the foretopmast and yard off the Horn and ran from port to port in a hundred and four days.”

The conversation dwindled and expired. Thomas Gast gazed about moodily, and Jason, with a tight mouth, nodded and moved on. His mind turned back abruptly to Eddie Lukens, the man who had robbed him of his find in the early days of cradle mining, the man he had killed.

He had said nothing of this to Honora; the experience with Olive Stanes had convinced him of the advisability of keeping past accident where, he now repeated, it belonged. He despaired of ever being able, in Cottarsport, to explain the place and times that had made his act comprehensible. How could he picture, here, the narrow ravines cut by swift rivers from the stupendous slopes and forests of the Sierra Nevada, the isolation of a handful of men with their tents by a plunging stream in a rift so deep that there would be only a brief glimmer of sunlight at noon? And, failing that, the ignorant could never grasp the significance of the stillness, the timeless shadows, which the miners penetrated in their madness for gold. They’d never realize the strangling passion of this search in a wilderness without habitation or law or safety. They could not understand the primary

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justice of such rude courts as the miners were able to maintain on the more populous outskirts of the region.

He, Jason Burrage, had been tried by a jury for killing Eddie Lukens, and had been exonerated. It had been months since he had reiterated this dreary and only half satisfying formula. The inner necessity filled him with a shapeless concern such as might have been caused by a constant, unnatural shadow flickering out at his back. He almost wished that he had told Honora at the beginning; and then he fretfully cursed the incertitude of life — whatever he did appeared, shortly after, wrong. But it was obvious that he couldn't go to her with the story today; the only time for that had been before his marriage; now it would have the look of a confession of weakness, opportunely timed; and he could think of nothing more calculated to antagonize Honora than such a crumbling admission.

All this had been re-animated by the mere presence of Thomas Gast in Cottarsport; certainly, he concluded, an insufficient reason for his troubling. Gast had been a miner, too, he was familiar with the conditions in the West. . . . There was a great probability that he hadn't even heard of the unfortunate affair; while Olive Stanes would be dragged to death rather than garble a word of what he had told her: Jason willingly acknowledged this of Olive. He resolutely banished the whole complication from his mind; and, walking with Honora after supper in the garden back of their house, he was again absorbed in her vivid delicate charm.

The garden was deep and narrow, a flight of terraces connected by a flagged path and steps. At the bottom

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were the bergamot pear trees that had been Ithiel Canderay's especial charge in his last, retired years. Their limbs, faintly blurred with new foliage, rose above the wall, against a tranquil evening sky with a white slip of May moon. The peace momentarily disturbed in Jason Burrage's heart flooded back, a sense of great well-being settled over him. Honora rested her hand within his arm at an inequality of the stone walk.

"I am really a very bad wife, Jason," she said suddenly; "self-absorbed and inattentive."

"You suit me," he replied inadequately. He was extraordinarily moved by her remark: she had never before even suggested that she was conscious of obligation. He wanted to put into words some of the warmth of feeling which filled his heart, but suitable speech evaded him. He could not shake off the fear that such protestations might be displeasing to her restrained being. Moving slightly away from him she seemed, in the soft gloom, more wonderful than ever. Set in white against the depths of the garden, her face, dimly visible, appeared to be without its customary, faintly mocking smile.

"Do you remember, Jason," she continued, "how I once said I thought I was marrying you because I was lonely, and that I found out it wasn't so; I didn't know why——" she paused.

He was enveloped by an intense eagerness to hear her to the end: it might be that something beyond his greatest hopes was to follow. But disappointment overtook him.

"I was certain I'd see more clearly into myself soon, but I haven't; it's been useless trying. And I've de-

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cided to do this — to give up thinking about things for myself, and to wait for you to show me.”

“But I can’t do that,” he protested, facing her; “more than half the time I wonder over almost that same question — why you ever married me?”

“This is a frightful situation,” she observed with a return of her familiar manner; “two mature people joined for life, and neither with the slightest idea of the reason. Anyhow I have given it up. . . . I suppose I’ll die in ignorance. Perhaps I was too old ——”

He interrupted her with an uncustomary incivility, a heated denunciation of what she had been about to say.

“So you are not sorry,” he remarked after a little.

“No,” she answered slowly, “and I’m certain I shan’t be. I’m not that sort of person. I would go down to ruin sooner than regret.” She said no more, but went into the house, leaving Jason in the potent spring night.

There was no longer any doubt about the lilacs, the air was laden with their scent. An entire hedge of them must have blossomed as he was standing there. He moved to the terrace below: there might be buds on the pear trees. But it was impossible to see the limbs. How could Honora expect him to make their marriage clear? He had never before seen her face so serene. He thought that he heard a vague stir outside the wall, and he remembered the presence of a semi-public path. Now there was a cautious mutter of voices. He advanced a step, then stopped at a scrambling of shoes against the wall. A vague form shouldered into view, momentarily clinging above him, and a harsh voice cried:

“Murderer!”

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XIX

Even above the discordant clash of his startled sensibilities rose the fear, instantaneously born, that Honora had heard. All the vague uneasiness which had possessed him at Thomas Gast's return solidified into a recognizable, leaden dread — the conviction that his wife must learn the story of his misadventure told with animus and lies. Then a more immediate dread held him rigidly attentive: there might be a second cry, a succession of them shouted discordantly to the sky. Honora would come out, the servants gather, while that accusing voice, indistinguishable and disembodied by the night, proclaimed his error. This was not the shooting of Eddie Lukens, but the neglect to comprehend Honora Canderay.

Absolute silence followed. He made a motion toward the wall, but, oppressed by the futility of such an act, arrested himself in the midst of a step and stood with a foot extended. The stillness seemed to thicken the air until he could hardly breathe; he was seized by a sullen anger at the events which had gathered to betray him. The crying tones had been like a chemical acting on his complexity, changing him to an entirely different entity, darkening his being; the peace and fragrance of the night were destroyed by the anxiety that now sat upon him.

Convinced that nothing more was to follow here, he was both impelled into the house, to Honora, and held motionless by the fear of seeing her turn toward him with her familiar light surprise and a question. However,

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he slowly retraced his way over the terraces, through a trellis hung with grape vines, and into the hall. As he hoped, Honora was on the opposite side of the dwelling. She had heard nothing. Jason sat down heavily, his gaze lowered and somber.

The feeling smote him that he should tell Honora of the whole miserable business at once, make what excuse for himself was possible, and prepare her for the inevitable public revelation. He pronounced her name, with the intention of doing this; but she showed him such a tranquil, superfine face that he was unable to proceed. Her interrogation held for a moment and then left him, redirected to a minute, colorful square of glass beads.

A multiplication of motives kept him silent, but principal among them was the familiar shrinking from appearing to his wife in any little or mean guise. It was precisely into such a peril that he had been forced. He felt, now, that she would overlook a murder such as the one he had committed far more easily than an intangible error of spirit. He could actually picture Honora, in his place, shooting Eddie Lukens; but he couldn't imagine her in his humiliating situation of a few minutes before.

He turned to the consideration of whom it might be that had called over the wall, and immediately recognized that it was one of a small number, one of "Pack" Clower's gang: Thomas Gast would have gravitated quickly to their company, and their resentment of his, Jason Burrage's, place in life must have been nicely increased by Gast's jealousy. The latter, Jason knew, had not washed an honest pan of gravel in his journey and search for a mythical, easy wealth; he had hardly left the

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littered fringe of San Francisco, but had filled progressively menial places in the less admirable resorts and activities.

With so much established beyond doubt he was confronted by the necessity for immediate action, the possibility of yet averting all that threatened him, of preserving his good opinion in Honora's eyes. Clower and Emery Radlaw and the rest, with neither the balance of property nor position, lawless and inflamed with drink, were a difficult opposition. He repeated that he had mastered worse, but out in California, where a man had been nakedly a man; and then he hadn't been married. There he would have found them at once, and an explosion of will, perhaps of powder, would have soon cleared the atmosphere. But in Cottarsport, with so much to keep intact, he was all but powerless.

Yet, the following day, when he saw the apothecary's brother enter the combined drug and liquor store, he followed; and, to his grim satisfaction, found Thomas Gast already inside. The apothecary gave Jason an inhospitable stare, but the latter ignored him, striding toward Gast. "Just what is it you've brought East about me?" he demanded.

The other avoided the query, his gaze shifting over the floor. "Well?" Jason insisted, after a pause. Thomas Gast was leaning against a high counter at one side, behind which shelves held various bottles and paper boxes and tins. The counter itself was laden with scales and a mortar, powders and vividly striped candy in tall glass jars.

"You know well as I do," Gast finally admitted.

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"Then we're both certain there's no reason for name calling over my back wall."

"You shot him, didn't you?" the other asked thinly. "You can't get away from the fact that you killed a pardner."

"I did," said Jason Burrage harshly. "He robbed me. But I didn't shout thief at him from the safety of the dark; it was right after dinner, the middle of the day. He was ready first, too; but I shot him. Can you get anything from that?"

"You ought to realize this isn't San Francisco," Radlaw, the drug taker, put in. "A man couldn't be coolly derringered in Cottarsport. There's law here, there's order." He had a harried face, dulled eyes under a fine brow, a tremulous flabby mouth, with white crystals of powder adhering to its corners, and a countenance like the yellow oilskins of the fishermen.

Jason turned darkly in the latter's direction. "What have you or Clower got to do with law?"

"Not only them," the apothecary interposed, "but all the other men of the town are interested in keeping it orderly. We'll have no western rowdyism in Cottarsport."

"Then hear this," Jason again addressed Thomas Gast, "see that you tell the truth and all the truth. My past belongs to me, and I don't aim to have it maligned by any empty liar back from the Coast. And either of you Radlaws — I'm not going to be blanketed by the town drunkards or old women, either. If I have shot one man I can shoot another, and I care this much for your talk — if any of this muck is allowed to annoy Mrs. Bur-

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rage I'll kill whoever starts it, spang in the middle of day."

"That's where it gets him," the ex-scholar stated.

"Just there," Jason agreed; "and this Gast, who has brought so much back from California, can tell you this, too — that I had the name of finishing what I began."

But, once more outside, alone, his appearance of resolution vanished: the merest, untraceable rumor would be sufficient to accomplish all that he feared, damage him irreparably with Honora. He was far older in spirit and body than he had been back on Indian Bar; he had passed the tumultuous years of living. The labor and privation, the continuous immersion in frigid streams, had lessened his vitality, sapped his ability for conflict. All that he now wished was the happiness of his wife, Honora, and the quietude of their big, peaceful house; the winter evenings by the Franklin stove and the spring evenings with the windows open and the candles guttering in the mild, lilac-hung air.

XX

Together with his uncertainty the pleasure in the sheer fact of his wife increased; and with it the old wonderment at their situation returned. What, for instance, did she mean by saying that he must explain her to herself? He tried again all the conventional reasons for marriage without satisfaction, the sentimental and material equally failed. Jason felt that if he could penetrate this mystery his grasp on actuality would be enormously improved; he might, with such knowledge, successfully defy Thomas

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Gast and all that past which equally threatened to reach out destructively into the future.

His happiness, in its new state of fragility, became infinitely precious; a thing to dwell on at nights, to ponder over walking through the town. Then, disagreeably aware of what overshadowed him, he would watch such passersby as spoke, searching for some sign of the spreading of his old fault. Often he imagined that he saw such an indication, and he would hurry home, in a panic of haste — which was, too, intense reluctance — to discover if Honora yet knew.

He approached her a hundred times determined to end his misery of suspense, and face the incalculable weight of her disdain; but on each occasion he failed as he had at the first. Now his admittance seemed too damned roundabout; in an unflattering way forced upon him. His position was too insecure, he told himself. . . . Perhaps the threat in the apothecary's shop would be sufficient to shut the mouth of rumor. It had not been empty; he was still capable of uncalculating rage. How closely was Honora bound to him? What did she think of him at heart?

He couldn't bear to remember how he had laid open her dignity, the dignity and position of the Canderays in Cottarsport, to whispered vilification. Connected with him she was being discussed in "Pack" Clower's shanty. His mind revolved endlessly about the same few topics, he elaborated and discarded countless schemes to secure Honora — he even considered giving Thomas Gast a sum of money to repair what harm the latter had wrought. Useless — his danger flourished on hatred and envy and

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malice. However exculpable the killing of Eddie Lukens had been, the results were immeasurably unfortunate, for a simple act of violent, local justice.

They were in the chaise above Cottarsport; Coggs had died through the winter, and his place been taken by a young coachman from the city. The horses rested somnolently in their harness, the bright bits of rubbed silver plate shining. Honora was looking out over the harbor, a gentian blue expanse. "Good Heavens," she cried with sudden energy, "I am getting old at a sickening rate. Only last year the schooners and sea made me as restless as a gull. I wanted to sail to the farthest places; but now the boats are—are no more than boats. It fatigues me to think of their jumping about; and I haven't walked down to the wharves for six weeks. Do I look a haggard fright?"

"You seem as young as before I went to California," he replied simply. She did. A strand of hair had slipped from its net, and wavered across her flawless cheek, her lips were bright and smooth, her shoulders slimly square.

"You're a marvelous woman, Honora," he told her.

She gazed at him, smiling. "I wonder if you realize that that is your first compliment of our entire wedded life?"

"Ridiculous," he declared incredulously.

"Isn't it?"

"I mean I'm complimenting you all the time. I think ——"

"You can hardly expect me to hear thoughts," she interrupted.

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He silently debated another — it was to be about the ribbon on her throat — but decided against giving it voice. Why, like the reasons for so much else, he was unable to say; they all had their root in the blind sense of the uncertainty of his situation. Throughout the evening his thoughts shifted ceaselessly from one position to another. This, he realized, could not continue indefinitely; soon, from within or out, Honora and himself must be revealed to each other. He was permeated by the weariness of constant strain; the peace of the past months had been destroyed; it seemed to him that he had become an alien to the serenity of the high, tranquil rooms and of his wife.

He rose early the following morning, and descended into a rapt purity of sunlight and the ecstatic whistling of robins. The front door had not been opened; and, as he turned its shining brass knob, his gaze fell upon a sheet of paper projecting below. Jason bent, securing it, and, with a premonition of evil, thrust the folded scrap into his pocket. He turned through the house into the garden; and there privately scrutinized a half sheet with a clumsily formed, disguised writing:

“This,” he read, “will serve you notice to move on. Dangerous customers are not desired here. Take a suggestion in time and skip bad consequences. You can’t hide back of your wife’s hoops.” It was signed “Committee.”

A robin was thrilling the air with melody above his head. Jason listened mechanically as the bird ended his

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song and flew away. Then the realization of what he had found overwhelmed him with a strangling bitterness: he, Jason Burrage, had been ordered from his birth-place, he had been threatened and accused of hiding behind a woman, by the off-scouring of the alleys and rum holes. A feeling of impotence thrust its chilling edge into the swelling heat of his resentment. He would have to stand like a condemned animal before the impending, fatal blow; he was held motionless, helpless, by every circumstance of his life and hopes.

He crumpled the warning in a clenched hand. How Cottarsport would point and jeer at him, at Jason Burrage who was Honora Canderay's husband, a murderer; Jason, who had returned from California with the gold fleece! It wasn't golden, he told himself, but stained — a fleece dark with blood, tarnished from hellish unhappiness, a thing infected with immeasurable miseries. Its edge had fallen on Olive Stanes and left her — he had passed her only yesterday — dry-lipped and shrunken into sterile middle age. It promised him only sorrow, and now its influence was reaching up toward Honora, in herself serenely apart from the muck and defilement out of which he thought he had struggled.

The sun, rising over the bright spring foliage, filled the garden with sparkling color. His wife, in a filmy white dress, called him to breakfast. She waited for him with her faint smile, against the cool interior. He went forward isolated, lonely, in his secret distress.

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XXI

This communication, like the spoken accusation of a previous evening, was, apparently, without other consequences. Jason's exterior life progressed without a deviation from its usual, smooth course. It was clear to him that no version of the facts about the killing of Eddie Lukens had yet spread in Cottarsport. This, he decided, considering the character of Thomas Gast, the oblique quality of his statements, was natural. He could not doubt that such public revelation, if threat and intimidation failed, must come. Meanwhile he was victimized by a growing uncertainty — from what direction would the next attack thrust?

He smiled grimly to himself at the memory of the withdrawn and secure aspect of the town when he had first returned from the West. To him, striding across the hills from the Dumner stage, it had resembled an ultimate haven. The seeming harmony and peace of the grey fold of houses about their placid harbor had concealed possibilities of debasement as low as California's worst camps. Now, successful, when he had looked for the reward of his long years of brutal toil, the end of struggle, he was confronted by the ugliest situation of his existence.

He was glad that he had always been a silent man, or Honora would have noticed and demanded the cause of the moroseness which must have settled over him. They sat no longer before the stove in the drawing room, but on a side porch that commanded an expanse of lawn

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and a high privet hedge, while he smoked morosely at the inevitable cheroots, gloomily searching for a way from the difficulty closing in upon him.

Honora had been to Boston, and she was describing lightly an encounter with her aunt, Herriot Cozzens. He was only half conscious of her amused voice. Clouds had obscured the evening sky, and there was an air of suspense, like that preceding a thunder storm, in the thickening dark. A restlessness filled Jason which he was unable to resist; and, with a short, vague explanation, he rose and proceeded out upon the street. There, his hands clasped behind his back and head lowered, he wandered on, lost in inner despondence.

He turned into the courthouse square, dimly lighted by gas lamps at its outer confines, and paced across the grass, stirring a few wan fireflies. It was blacker still beyond the courthouse. He stumbled slightly, recovered himself, and wearily commenced a return home. But he had scarcely taken a step when a figure closed in upon him, materializing suddenly out of the darkness. He stopped and was about to speak when a violent blow from behind grazed his head and fell with a splintering impact on his shoulder. He stood for a moment bewildered by the unexpected pain; then, as he saw another shape, and another, gather around him, he came sharply to his senses. His hand thrust into a pocket, but it was empty — he had laid aside the derringer in Cottarsport.

His assailants grappled with him swiftly, and he swayed struggling and hitting out with short blows in the center of a silent, vicious conflict. A rough hard palm was crushed against his mouth, a head ground into his throat,

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and a heavy, mucous breath of rum smote him. There was muttered cursing, and low, disregarded commands. A cotton handkerchief, evidently used as a mask, tore off in Jason's hand; strained voices, their caution lost in passion, took unmistakably the accents of "Pack" Clower and the Swede, Steven. A thinner tone outside the swirling bodies cried low and urgent, "Get it done with." A fist was driven against Jason's side, leaving a sharp, stabbing hurt, a heavy kick tore his thigh. Then he got his fingers into a neck and put in the grip all the sinewy strength got by long years with a miner's pan and shovel. A choked sob responded, and blood spread stickily over his palms.

It seemed to Jason Burrage that he was shaking himself free, that he was victorious; with a final supreme wrench he stood alone, breathing in gusts. There was a second's imponderable stillness, and then the entire night appeared to crash down upon his head . . .

XXII

He thought it was the flumed river, all their summer's labor, bursting over him. He was whirled downward through a swift course of jagged pains, held under the hurtling water and planks and stones. He fought, blind and strangled, but he was soon crushed into a supine nothingness. Far below the river discharged him: he was lying beside a slaty bank in which the gold glittered like fine and countless fish scales. But he couldn't move, and the bank flattened into a plain under a gloomy ridge, with a camp of miners. He

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saw that it was Sunday, for the men were all grouped before the tents singing. There was Eddie Lukens gravely waving a hand to the beat of the melody:

“ ‘Don’t you cry for me.
I’m going to Calaveras
With my wash bowl on my knee.’ ”

It was undoubtedly Eddie, his partner, but he had never seen him so white and — why, he had a hole over his eye! Eddie Lukens was dead; it wasn’t decent for him to be standing up, flapping his hands and singing. Jason bent forward to remonstrate, to persuade him to go back — back to where the dead belonged. Then he remembered, but it was too late: Eddie had him in an iron clutch, he was dragging him, too, down.

Jason made a convulsive effort to escape, he threw back his head, gasping; and saw Honora, his wife, bending over him. The tormenting illusion slowly perished — this was Cottarsport and not California, he was back again in the East, the present, married to Honora Canderay. An astounding fact, but so. Through the window of his room he could see the foliage of a great horse-chestnut tree that stood by the side walk; it was swelling into flower. Full memory now flooded back upon him, and with it the realization that probably his happiness was destroyed.

It was impossible to tell how much Honora knew of the cause of the assault upon him. She was always like that — enigmatic. But, whatever she knew now, soon she would have to hear all. Even if he wished to lie it would be impossible to fabricate, maintain, a convincing cover

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for what had happened. The most superficial, necessary investigation would expose the story brought home by Thomas Gast.

The time had come when he must confide everything to Honora; perhaps she would overlook his cowardice. About to address her, he fell into a bottomless coma, and a day passed before he had gathered himself sufficiently to undertake his task. She was sitting facing him, her chair by a window, where her fingers were swiftly and smoothly occupied. Her features were a little blurred against the light, and — her disconcerting scrutiny veiled — he felt this to be an assistance.

“Those men who broke me up,” he began disjointedly, surprised at the thin uncertainty of his voice, “I know pretty well who they are. Ought to get most of them.”

“We thought you could say,” she rejoined in an even tone. “Some guesses were made, but it was better to wait till you could give a statement.”

“Am I badly hurt, Honora?” he asked suddenly.

“Not dangerously,” she assured him. “You have splendid powers of recuperation.”

“I’ll have to go on,” he added hurriedly, “and tell you the rest — why I was beaten.”

“It would be better not,” she stated. “You ought to be as calm as possible. It may quiet you, Jason, to hear that I know now.”

“You know what the town has been saying,” he cried in bitter revolt, “what lies Thomas Gast spread. You’ve heard all the envy and malice and drunken vileness of sots. It isn’t right for you to think you know before I could speak a word of defense.”

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“Not only what the town says, Jason,” she replied simply, “but the truth. Olive Stanes told me.”

“Then —” an excited weakness broke his voice in a sob, and Honora rose, crossing the room to his bed. “You must positively stop talking of this now,” she directed. “If you attempt it I shall go away and send a nurse.”

He was helpless against her will, and sank into semi-slumberous wonder. Honora knew all, Olive Stanes had told her. She was as non-committal, he complained to himself, as a wooden Indian. She might have excused him without a second thought, and it might be that she had finished with him entirely, that she was merely dispensing a charity and duty; and, moving uneasily, or lying propped up in a temporary release from suffering, he would study her every movement in an endeavor to gain her all-important opinion of him as he had been lately revealed. It was useless; he was always, Jason felt, in a state of disturbing suspense.

He determined to end it, however, in spite of what Honora had said, on an afternoon when he was supported down to the street and the chaise. His wife took her place at his side, and they rolled forward into the expansive warmth of summer. Jason was impressed by the sheer repetition of life; and, it seemed to him, that this was the greatest happiness possible — such a procession of days and drives, with Honora.

Her throat rose delicately from ruffled lace, circled by a narrow black velvet band with a clasp of remarkable diamonds; and he smiled at the memory of how he had once thought she was marrying him for money. That seemed years ago, but he was no nearer the solution of her

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motive now than then. Her slim hands were folded in her lap — how beautifully they were joined at the wrists, her tapering fingers were like ivory. As he studied them he was startled at their suddenly meeting in a rigid clasp, the knuckles white and sharp. He looked up and saw that they were drawing near a small group of men outside the apothecary's shop.

A curious silence fell upon the latter as the chaise approached: there were the two Radlaws, one saturnine and bleak, the other greenish, shattered by drugs; Thomas Gast, Vleet, the fishing schooner's master, and a casual, familiar passerby. Jason Burrage stared at them with a stony ominous countenance, at which Gast made a gesture of combined insolence and uncertainty. Jason had sunk back on the cushions when he was astonished by Honora's commanding the coachman to stop. It was evident that she was about to descend; he put out a hand to restrain her, but she disregarded him. His astonishment increased to incredulity and then fear; he rose hurriedly, but relaxed with a mutter of pain.

Honora, a Canderay, had taken the carriage whip from its holder, and was walking direct and composed toward Thomas Gast. She stopped a short distance away: before an exclamation, a movement, was possible she had swept the thong of the whip across Gast's face. The blow was swung with force, and the man faltered, a burning welt on the pallor of his countenance. The coachman and Jason Burrage in the chaise, the men together on the sidewalk, seemed part of an inanimate group of which the only thing endowed with life was the whip flickering again, cutting and wrapping, about a face.

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There was a curiously ruthless impersonality about Honora's erect presence, her icy cold profile. Memories of old stories of Ithiel Canderay, the necessary, salt cruelty of punishment in ships, flashed through Jason's mind. An intolerable weight of time seemed to drag upon him. Thomas Gast gave a hoarse gurgle and lurched forward, but the relentless lash drove him back.

"You whisperer!" Honora said in her ringing voice, "you liar and slabbering coward! It's necessary to cut the truth out of you. When you talk again about Mr. Burrage and the man he shot in California don't leave out the smallest detail of his exoneration. Say that he had been robbed, the other broke one of the first laws of miners and should have been killed. You'd not have done it, a knife in the back would be your thought, but a man would!"

She flung the whip down on the bricks.

Thomas Gast pressed his hands to his face, and slow red stains widened through his fingers. The apothecary stood transfixed, his brother was shaking in a febrile and congested horror. The woman turned disdainfully, moved to the chaise; the coachman descended and offered his arm as she mounted to the seat. The reins were drawn and the horses started forward in a walk.

Honora's gaze was set, looking directly ahead; her hands, in her lap of flowered muslin, were now relaxed; they gave an impression of crushing weariness. Jason's heart pounded like a forge hammer; a tremendous realization was forced into his brain—he need never again question why Honora had married him; his doubts were answered, stopped, forever. He turned to her to speak an

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insignificant part of his measureless gratitude, but he was choked, blinded by a passion of honor and homage.

Her gaze sought him, and there was a faint tremor of her lips; it grew into the shadow of an ironic smile. Suddenly it was borne upon his new, acquiescent serenity that Honora would always be a Canderay for him, he must perpetually think of her in the terms of his early habit; she would eternally be a little beyond him, a being to approach, to attend, with ceremony. The memory and sweep of all California, the pageant of life he had seen on the way, his own boasted success and importance, faded before the solid fact of Honora's commanding heritage in life, in Cottarsport.

THE END

The following pages contain an announcement of
Mr. Hergesheimer's

THE THREE BLACK PENNYS

which was regarded by many critics as the best
American novel published in 1917.

THE THREE BLACK PENNYS

By Joseph Hergesheimer

This is the story of three dark men of the Penny family; three men, and yet, in youth, middle and old age, one man and one unbroken narrative. There are, too, primarily, three women—Ludowika, a passionate woman, Susan Brundon, a spiritual woman, and Mariana, in whom both passion and spirit meet and are interpreted in a smiling disdain of small prejudices and conventions.

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