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GLITTER



GLITTER

By KATHARINE BRUSH



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FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER

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BOOK ONE

Jock

GLITTER

Book One

I

KISS me again!" said Jock, because it was the thing to say.

"Won't!" said Molly.

But she did. That was the trouble with women, Jock reflected drearily during the kiss. If one of them would only just once decline and stick to it, he felt that the whole status of the sex would be considerably elevated and life made much more piquant. . . .

They were seated in a limousine parked outside the Country Club. The owner of the limousine, a lady much too old to be pleasant, was parked inside the Country Club, engrossed in meditations anent the letter she was going to write to the House Committee the next morning on "what goes on at these dances!" She was fortunately unaware of what went on in her automobile; of the pressure of lip to lip under its shadows; of the cigarette ashes that had been tossed upon its velvet carpet; and of the fact that Jock would, upon leaving, filch the single perfect rosebud from the little glass cornucopia and tuck it into his coat lapel. . . .

"You going to miss me this winter, Jock?"

"Of course."

"Much?"

"Frightfully."

Molly shook her head. "You won't, though," she said sadly. "You'll forget all about me the minute you get back to college."

Jock thought that in all probability she was quite right, but he refrained from saying so. He replied instead, "Now don't be a little idiot—how could I?"

"Then you care a tiny bit about me?" persisted Molly.

"Sure," said Jock. But his mind groaned. He was that slightly unhappy creature, a young man whom girls loved too easily and too well and much too long. He developed fragmentary fascinations, wearied of them soon, and then invariably found to his dismay that their objects clung on with a sort of feverish desperation. Like Molly now. "Then you care a tiny bit about me?"—why, good Lord, couldn't she *tell* that he didn't, any longer? Couldn't she have told weeks ago? Girls were so obtuse. Or were they merely stubborn, refusing to see anything which they preferred not to see?

"Let's go in," he suggested after a pause. "We've ditched three or four dances as it is, and that music is too mean to miss."

They went, walking slowly along the gravel driveway. Jock knew that Molly was hurt because he had terminated the tête-à-tête, knew without looking that her mouth would be pursed into that pout he had once thought so adorable, which now he longed to smack with the flat of his hand whenever he saw it. He kept his eyes straight ahead, and said nothing. Molly likewise said nothing. Doubtless she was ruminating on the faithlessness of man and the cruelty of life in general.

An arc light on the porte-cochère of the clubhouse picked them out of the darkness as they approached. By its glare, Molly was revealed as daintily blonde, and Jock——

He was tall. And he moved as some tall people do with a leisurely loose-jointed grace. You could imagine that he danced well. In fact you could imagine that he did most things well—there was a jauntiness and an assurance about him that told you so. His shapely head was set arrogantly on big shoulders, and he had sleek black hair, brown eyes, a straight, short nose, and a mouth that slanted up at one corner lopsidedly when he smiled. Everything about him fitted everything else except that mouth. It was a sensitive, artistic, dreamy sort of mouth. It belonged to the boy Jock Hamill was really, but it did not in the least belong to the boy he requested the world to believe that he was.

“Darn!” said Molly suddenly.

She had paused below the arc light and was peering at such atom of her countenance as a vanity-mirror the size of a quarter reflected. “Look at me!” she continued. “I’m a wreck. I’ll have to run around to the lockers and fix up a little, Jock, or everybody’ll know where I’ve been. You go on in and wait for me.”

Inside, in the club’s spacious living room, it was dim and shadowy again. There were frosted electric bulbs around the walls, but they shed no illumination; merely bit orange holes into the curtain of gloom. The dancers were a close-packed huddle, swaying now this way, now that, as if the floor were afloat on ocean waves that rocked it just a little. Jazz beat against the eardrums . . . in the blood . . . everyone, everything, moved to its beating . . .

One Benny Webber, a fat youth faintly redolent of gin, came and paused beside Jock in the doorway.

"What do you think of her?" he demanded without preamble.

"Who?"

Benny's eyes widened. "Good goat, man, haven't you seen her? Where've you been the last half hour? Look—look over there—no, *there*—dancing with Bill Parks——"

"Who is she?" queried Jock in a new tone.

"Her name's Yvonne and she's from New York," said Benny. "That's all I know about her. I've cut in four times now, but every time I no more than pop off a cordial 'hello' before some fathead cuts in on *me*. Did you ever see a smoother job, though, no kidding?"

Jock was forced to admit that he never had. The girl was more than lovely; she was spectacular. Red hair, tight black gown; ornamented solely by a diamond bar pin and the faultless figure of the wearer—she compelled the eye, seemed to dare you not to stare at her and to laugh at you because you couldn't help it. Intently he watched her progress around the room . . . so intently that he failed at first to hear the voice of the club steward at his ear. "Mr. Hamill! Message for you, Mr. Hamill!"

A scrap of paper, folded twice, and addressed to him in Molly's writing. "I've gone home, Jock," it ran, "with Alice and her husband. You were so cool to me—and on our last evening together, too—that I just couldn't stand coming back and dancing around as though nothing had happened."

Jock thrust this missive into the pocket of his dinner coat, his sole sensation one of relief. An instant later he was bearing down upon the girl named Yvonne, the girl named Molly dismissed from his mind as completely as though she had never had a place there.

"May I cut, please?"

Another instant, and he was dancing with her. "Look here," he began abruptly, "who are you, anyway?"

"Don't you read the papers?"

Jock would have reason to remember this reply in future, but at the time he judged it to be only a part of her line. "Tell me," he begged.

"My name is Yvonne Mountford. And yours is Jock Hamill, isn't it?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

He could not hear her laugh, but he could feel it—a swift exhalation of breath against his neck. "I came to this dance with Toby Jennings," she explained, "and on the way out from New York he said, 'There'll be a man here you'll like. Jock Hamill.' I said, 'Why will I like him?' and Toby said, 'Because all women do.' The minute I saw you I knew you must be the one."

If this had been intended to flatter Jock, it missed fire. He said nothing, and presently Yvonne allowed her head to droop backward so she could look up at him quizzically. "You hate that, don't you?" she observed. "I'm glad you hate it. Toby said that men liked you too—does that make you feel any better?"

"Much," Jock told her truthfully. "Fellows that women like and other fellows don't are always—well, I wouldn't want to think I was one of them. You dance," he added, "just the way you look."

"And that is——?"

At this point they were interrupted by a person who whacked Jock upon the back and gathered Yvonne into his arms in one determined swoop.

Jock repaired to the wall and fumed there through an impatient interval. Then he cut in again. "You're invited to a football game."

"I accept," said Yvonne promptly. "What football game is it?"

He told her, and then on second thought invited her to another. He would have included the autumn prom as well had it not been for Molly, whose presence at that noteworthy event he had requested in a moment of aberration weeks ago. Molly was angry tonight, but he reflected mournfully that she would not be angry by the time prom was due. Experience had taught him that girls always chirked up considerably then, like children behaving themselves just before Christmas.

He relinquished Yvonne again, this time at the plaintive behest of Benny Webber. When next he danced with her she said, after a moment, "Where are we going? Not that it matters."

"We're going out," announced Jock, who had steered her in a straight line to the nearest doorway. "I want to talk to you, and I don't want any more interruptions."

He rather expected her to protest. Most girls would have, at least a little, as a coy preliminary to giving in. But this girl did not. She accompanied him through the doorway and into the night without a murmur.

"For another thing," Jock continued, en route, "there's an arc light out here that tells no lies. I want to find out if you can possibly be as beautiful as you seem."

Under the arc light he tilted her chin with his forefinger and scrutinized her gravely and at some length. Heart-shaped face, with the firm little chin for its point and the V into which her hair grew on her forehead to form its dipping upper line. White skin, white as white flower petals, and as soft, and as fragrant. Long wise eyes, slanting. Feathery lashes. A small

full mouth, open just a trifle now so that her teeth could catch the lower lip—like ivory on scarlet satin——

“You are,” he concluded at last.

They chose a car from the many standing empty along the driveway and climbed into it. The car was not a limousine; certainly not *the* limousine. Jock had an instinctive delicacy in such matters. This was a touring car with its top down, so that they were canopied only by stars and a thin blonde eyebrow of moon.

Yvonne slid low in her seat and, locking her fingers behind her head, stared upward thoughtfully. “I’m glad you brought me out,” she remarked. “I was tired of being jerked around by twenty or thirty different partners, most of them drunk. It’s a hard life for a girl.”

“It must be!” Jock scoffed. “No doubt you have a hell of a time of it.”

“I do.” She sounded entirely serious. There was a pause, after which she continued. “For instance, take the present circumstance. I came out here with you because I wanted to rest, but you brought me out because you thought you could kiss me. Didn’t you?” Her slanting eyes, trained on him suddenly, were challenging.

“Maybe,” said Jock, a bit nonplussed but resolved not to betray it.

“You can’t.”

“Why can’t I?”

“Because I’m not such a fool as to let you.”

“I’m not such a fool as not to try!” retorted Jock. And did try. And was increasingly charmed because he did not succeed.

“Now that we have that settled,” Yvonne said after another pause, “change seats with me, will you?”

He obeyed, wonderingly, and she took his place

under the steering wheel and stepped on the starter. "Suppose I can get any speed out of this?"

"Say, but it's not mine, you know! Mine's parked over there."

"Who cares whose it is? Don't be dull, Jock Hamill."

She threw the car into gear and pointed it down the drive. As they fled past the clubhouse the saxophones from within seemed to be jeering at them—"Yah-yah-yah"—like impudent urchins with their thumbs at their noses. Jock looked to see whether anyone watched their departure, but apparently did no one. Swiftly they reached the main road, swung into it with a backward spatter of gravel, and headed south.

He said, "Now it's my turn to say 'Where are we going? Not that it matters.'"

"Nowhere in particular," answered Yvonne. "We're just going. Don't talk, Jock Hamill. I don't like to talk when I'm riding. I like to sing, though," she added.

She had a strange voice, haunting, with a sob in it. It made you think of things. Plantation nights. Wind in pine trees. Plaint of a restless sea. Things you had lost. Things you had forgotten. Things you were groping for blindly and would never quite achieve. . . . Jock closed his eyes as he listened. Gradually he lost the world, in a sort of way, and became conscious only of breathless motion and of Yvonne, beside him, singing into the dark . . .

They rode for half an hour. Not until they were back at the club again, and the machine was resting precisely over the puddle of oil that marked its original stand, did either of them speak. Then Jock said, "Where in the world did you learn to sing like that?"

Yvonne disregarded the question. "The only kick I get out of life any more," she said, "is driving seventy miles an hour. You love it, too, don't you?" Then, as Jock nodded, "You would, of course. You're like me. Mad. All the people worth knowing are a little mad."

She thrust a hand down the front of her gown and brought forth a powder puff and an eyebrow pencil wrapped in a scented handkerchief.

"Now don't do that!" Jock commanded quickly.

"Don't do what?"

"Don't make up when someone is looking. Other girls can if they want to, but you ought not to, ever. It spoils the illusion."

"I'm not going to make up, silly! I'm going to give you my address."

She wrote it with the eyebrow pencil on Jock's cuff, well up, so that the sleeve of his coat covered it. "That's for *you*, remember. Not solely for the benefit of some Chinese laundryman."

"Tomorrow," said Jock, "I'm going back to college. I'll stop in New York on my way through and take you to lunch—if I may."

She said that he might.

II

Retrospection is here necessary:

Jock Hamill had been born on a February night in the second year of the twentieth century. He was extremely deliberate and troublesome about it, and succeeded in so terrifying his mother that he became not only the first child she ever had, but the last. His early

life was quite normal. It included the drooly period, the crawly period, and the thrilling period of walk-versus-tumble. It included kindergarten, mumps, the public school, Horatio Alger, stamp-collecting, measles, circuses, and a complete disregard of the rules of personal cleanliness, all in the natural juvenile order. The Santa Claus theory was duly exploded, and Jock had learned with excitement and dismay that storks do not occupy the position of exceeding importance in the world that is so often attributed to them. He became aware that gentlemen like his father might put their feet on desks if they so desired but that ladies like his mother must not, and puzzled a good deal over the reason for such unseemly partiality.

The fact that he had no brothers was a source of intense annoyance to him throughout his childhood. He observed that his friends had brothers (sisters, of course, did not count) and he desired greatly to possess a few of his own. At the age of seven, having been carefully imbued with faith in the efficacy of prayer, he besought God to send him a twin. When God neglected to comply, Jock became a rabid atheist. Into the ears of chosen contemporaries he whispered arguments against the probability of there being such a personage as God, and for a long time maintained a deep conviction that the Supreme Being was just another myth, like Santa, devised by parents for the general befuddlement of the rising generation.

When he was eight his father died. He found this very curious, and pondered at length upon it. First you *were*; and then all of a sudden you *were not*, and they put you in a box and hid you somewhere. He missed his father at first, but not for a great while. In time he recalled him only as a big man who had known a lot about baseball but who now dwelt somewhere

where there would be no baseball. It hardly seemed right, but there it was.

Not very long afterward—possibly a year—there had taken place a change in his small world, a tremendous Cinderella sort of change. He and his mother moved from a little house in Pennsylvania to a great house in northern New Jersey, and had many servants to wait upon them and many motor cars in which to ride. He was young enough at the time to take this quite for granted. The things that happened to you that were not good were the things you asked questions about; the things that were good spoke for themselves. Besides, the new home came soon to be to him merely a stopping-off place between seasons. He spent his summers at a camp beside a birch-shored lake, where he lived in a tent with ten other boys, and swam three times a day, and was sunburned a dusky gold, and worshiped his counselor because he played end for Dartmouth. In the winter he attended a boarding-school in Massachusetts, quite a famous boarding-school with ivy-clad buildings and ancient traditions. Here he mingled with the sons of the great and of the merely wealthy, and through them became acquainted with divers things not mentioned in the curriculum—notably slang, Latin trots, risqué jokes, profanity, hair-slickum, salacious literature, and the hitherto quite unsuspected importance of the opposite sex.

In due time he graduated, and went to a certain University, where he spent a bewildered first year, a rather uproarious second, and a busy third . . .

Surely there had been little in these twenty-two years of living to cause Jock to differ from other young men. And unless you were a keen analyst you probably would not have perceived that he did differ, for he concealed it well under the mask he wore before the world. Out-

wardly he typified Modern Youth; he was gay, unthinking, uncaring. Inwardly he was intensely emotional, visionary, an idealist. This made him ashamed. He was ashamed of the verse that he wrote sometimes in secret, and of the things he thought about, and of the things he enjoyed. He preferred Beethoven to Irving Berlin, Henry James to Ring Lardner, Leonardo da Vinci to Coles Phillips, Pavlova to Gilda Gray—but such tastes would have earned the withering scorn of his contemporaries, and not for anything would he have acknowledged them.

Where girls were concerned his romanticism reached its apex. He had an Ideal, long cherished in his heart. She must be *thus*. And *thus*. He was forever seeking her, forever thinking briefly that he had found her, forever learning at last that he was wrong—that he had mistaken glitter for gold. It had been so with Molly, and with a long succession of previous Mollys, now relegated to that sorry corner of the memory where human beings pigeon-hole their disappointments.

III

At two o'clock in the morning Jock reached home. He entered through the kitchen door, having left his machine in the garage at the rear. "Company, Bennett?" he asked of the butler, whom he found in the act of loading a tray with sandwiches and bottles.

Bennett looked aggrieved. His expression said plainly, "Isn't there always company?" His lips said "Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Phelps and Mr. Barbour, sir. They're playing bridge."

Jock was displeased. He wanted to talk with his mother, and he knew that if she had a bridge game on he might quite possibly have to postpone the talk for hours, late though it already was. Mrs. Hamill made a religion of bridge. She played it with a passionate intensity that amounted almost to fever, often from dinner until dawn, and she would under no circumstances allow herself to be interrupted.

"I think they'll quit soon, sir," added Bennett hopefully. "I heard Mr. Barbour say he had to go after the next rubber."

Jock scooped up a handful of sandwiches and made his way to the front of the house, munching as he went. By the door of the den he stopped and stood hesitant. He could hear the little swishing slap of thin pasteboards on a patent leather table-top; aside from that, the silence was absolute. When a sudden outbreak of voices told him that the hand was over, he sauntered in.

"But Henry, my *dear!*" Mrs. Hamill was expostulating. "Why on earth play the *eight spot* in a case like that, when you knew very well I had—" She broke off. "Hello, Jock," she said, and smiled at him. "Do sit down, my dear, and observe the peculiar maneuvers of Mr. Henry Barbour. I want you to learn from him how *not* to play bridge!"

Mrs. Hamill was the kind of woman who can make such remarks and, in the modern parlance, get away with them. No one ever waxed wroth at Mrs. Hamill. No man, that is. She was too altogether exquisite. She had great brown eyes, dark brows and lashes, astonishing silver hair, which she wore cut in a shingle bob, a small slim figure, and hands as soft and appealing as a baby's. Hands to be kissed, those. Hands to

be caught and held in bigger hands, intensely. Hands to reach out in pretty supplication and to close tight like little white bars across what was given. . . . Her age was problematical. It seemed to vary with her gowns, with her moods, with her companions, until it ran the whole scale of the years between twenty-five and forty-five. What it actually was Jock never knew. Once, long ago, he had asked, and Madelaine Hamill had answered him almost savagely, "I have forgotten. *On purpose.*" This served to whet his curiosity, so that thereafter he watched and wondered, and came in time to the confusing realization that his mother was young with men, middle-aged with women, and old when she was alone.

Jock sat down as she had directed, greeting the three men each in turn. They were frequent visitors to the house and he knew them all well—Saunders Lincoln, of the iron-gray hair and the still-athletic figure, so particularly well that he had called him "Uncle Link" and received from him rather breath-taking checks at Christmas almost ever since he could remember. "Uncle" was here merely a term of familiarity, however; Saunders Lincoln was not a relative. "Why don't you marry him?" Jock had demanded of his mother on a former occasion, and had learned that he was already married to, and separated from, a woman who, on account of her religion, would not agree to a divorce.

"Marriage," Mrs. Hamill had added, "is a mistake for one of my temperament, anyhow. I'm too fond of men in general." Which was quite true. Her Utopia was a world peopled solely by men, with herself a gorgeous goddess before whom all did obeisance—not too impersonally. She could not bear women and women, of course, could not bear her. She made young

ones feel too young, awkward, gauche; and older ones envious and faintly antagonistic.

"When's college start up again, Jock?" asked Saunders Lincoln now.

"I'm leaving tomorrow, sorry to say."

"Not anxious to get back, eh?"

"Not at all, no."

"Jock," announced Jock's mother casually, "is a liar. He's quite wild to get back, as a matter of fact. I'll bid one no trump."

This was the signal for all conversation to cease, so Jock had no opportunity to debate the point. He sprawled in his chair, sipping at a highball that had been handed him, and followed the play languidly with his glance. Presently he took a pencil and began to scribble on the back of a bridge-score. This absorbed him for some moments, after which he left the room, taking the paper with him. It was a poem to Yvonne, a poem beginning, "*Oh voice that sings a song in the night, For the wind to carry forever—*"

Upstairs in his own quarters he read it aloud to himself. Then he said, "Punk!" rather sheepishly, and locked it away in a strong-box.

Later, when Mrs. Hamill ascended the stairs and tapped at his door, she found him stretched out across his bed in a fantastic green-and-black dressing-gown, reading *Perfect Behavior* by Donald Ogden Stewart. His reaction from exhibitions of sentiment on his own part was always humor on the part of others. "Makes me snap out of it," he would have said.

He grinned sociably at his mother. "Rover Boys gone home at last?"

"Yes, they've gone."

"Good game?"

"Excellent, except for Henry Barbour. The man is

a perfect nitwit and persists in leading from the ace, despite my frenzied and perpetual protestations." She seated herself on the edge of the bed, took one of Jock's cigarettes and smoked it thoughtfully. "What's on your mind, Jocky?"

"Nothing."

"Nonsense! I knew there was something, the minute you came into the room."

Jock remained silent, and Mrs. Hamill, after a long glance at him, concluded that she must by indirections find directions out. "Have a good time at the dance?"

"Wonderful."

"How's Molly?"

"All right, I guess. She went home about ten o'clock." Jock's voice was noncommittal, but to his mother, who knew him very much better than mothers usually know their twenty-two-year-old sons, he told volumes.

"Who was there?" she inquired.

"The usual mob. And—and a girl from New York."

Mrs. Hamill was quietly triumphant. "Oh, so Molly went home at ten o'clock and there was a girl from New York!" She shook her head reprovably. "Jock dear, must I remind you that ninety-nine per cent of this world's hapless husbands are gentlemen who permitted themselves inadvertently to be caught on the rebound?"

"I'm not 'caught'," Jock protested, but without conviction.

"What's her name?"

"Yvonne Mountford."

Between Mrs. Hamill's eyes there appeared a wrinkle—promptly erased, because wrinkles are vicious things with a tendency to stay where they're put. "That name

sounds familiar," she mused, "but I can't think—well, what does she look like?"

"Red hair," said Jock succinctly.

"Oh."

Jock got up, with a conclusive air of having disposed of the topic to everyone's satisfaction, and began to pack the silver-lettered bowl of his pipe with tobacco. "Now!" he said. "How 'bout my allowance for this year?"

She mentioned a generous sum. Sums in that household were always generous. "That's the berries," approved Jock, "but can you afford it?"

"I think so."

"It's a lot of money."

"I have a lot of money, Jock," said Mrs. Hamill. "More than I can spend by myself."

Jock knew that this was so. Had you asked him where the money came from he would doubtless have said, "Oil, or something," rather vaguely; but that it did come, in large quantities, he was well aware. His understanding was that investments made by his father years ago had since proved unexpectedly prosperous, putting his mother and himself on easy street. Beyond a certain gratitude and a fleeting mental tribute to his father's business acumen, he gave the matter no thought whatever.

Yvonne was not again mentioned in the conversation. But when Mrs. Hamill had gone to her own room and was seated before her dressing table, gazing at her reflection over a corps of assorted bottles and jars, she repeated the name over. "Yvonne Mountford. Now where have I heard that before?" Bye and bye she sighed, "Poor Molly!"

Mrs. Hamill had more than the usual maternal conviction that if she were younger, and if Jock were not

her son, she would be violently and utterly in love with him; hence she could sigh, at times, for girls he did not love.

IV

He leaned his elbows on the ferry-boat's rail and contemplated New York as he approached it. He was thinking of many matters. Of Yvonne. Of college. Of that girl—young school teacher, wasn't she?—who had once slipped off the front of one such ferry as this in her car, with only ripples and a scattering of white flowers on dark Hudson waters to mark her final resting-place. "Tough," he told himself. "Tough!" Still, it had been rather an impressive way to die. . . .

The boat bumped into place at a landing, and from its capacious maw spat vehicle after vehicle into New York. Jock headed his roadster uptown. As always, the city disappointed him. When he was away from it he thought only of its splendor, its magnificence, its capacity for romance and odd happenings. But when he was actually in it, as now, moving along between walls that reached upward toward infinity, the glamour was gone; and in its place there was only the stark reality of noise, and hustle, and endless faces that were never the same yet somehow always the same, hard and tired and over-painted.

Yvonne's apartment house was an imposing one on Park Avenue. Jock reached it at twelve-fifteen exactly, and having reached it, drove away again with only a momentary pause at the curb. He had decided that twelve-fifteen was too early.

Twelve-twenty-five found him at his own University Club, hailing a jovial ruddy-cheeked individual with

marked enthusiasm. "Pink Davis! Lord, I'm glad to see you! How's the boy?"

The boy, it developed, was in excellent health and spirits. He and Jock shook hands with that weird complication of fingers that betokens a fraternal alliance, then retreated to a divan and called for ginger ale, not because they cared at all for ginger ale but because they cared even less for the acrid taste of bootleg whiskey *au naturel*.

"Didn't expect to see you till four," chattered Pink. "Wasn't that what you wired—four o'clock sharp, here in the lobby? Say, by the way, I ran into Dopey Lane and Bill Olmstead down in the grill a while ago, eating to beat hell so they could catch the noon train, and I told 'em to wait over and you'd take 'em down too in your bus. Hope you've got room."

"Plenty," said Jock promptly. "It's a roadster, but it's held ten in its day. Might as well make this a good trip——"

"Sure," agreed Pink. "That's what I thought. Drink and be merry for tomorrow we compulsory-chapel. Well, ole hoss, what kind of a summer did you have?"

Exchange of confidences, Pink's somewhat lurid, Jock's characteristically restrained, occupied the next hour. Then Jock got into his roadster again and returned to Park Avenue. From believing that twelve-fifteen was too early he now became panic-stricken for fear one-thirty was too late, and began to dart in perilous zigzags through the traffic in an effort to get ahead. He was scolded by a policeman and sworn at by several taxi-drivers. His relief when the man at the switchboard in the imposing apartment house told him Miss Mountford was in and expecting him approached ecstasy.

She met him at the door, wearing a gown of demure color—gray—but of lines very far from demure. Her shoes and stockings matched the gown, and the string of beads tight about her throat were the shade of her hair. Study in gray and red. Even her eyes, which he had observed before only as wise and slanting, were gray, the daylight showed him—an odd blue-gray, like fog on an ocean harbor.

“You’re not late,” she said in response to his hurried apology. “That is, no later than most college men. Come in, Jock Hamill.”

The room into which she conducted him was large, but it seemed small because it was so very full of things. A grand piano, two cushion-littered divans, many deep chairs, smoking stands, tables of all shapes and sizes heaped high with magazines, a spinet desk that oozed letters—all combined to give an effect of cheerful and luxurious confusion. While Yvonne went to don a hat, Jock had opportunity to examine it more in detail. He noted evidences of a bizarre, erotic taste in reading-matter, and the walls reminded him of a theater lobby, so decked were they with photographs of stage and screen celebrities. These were framed, and variously autographed. Yvonne, with love from So-and-So; Yvonne, with every good wish from So-and-So else. “Wonder if she’s an actress herself?” Jock speculated, and became suddenly aware that he knew nothing whatever of this girl save her name and her visible loveliness.

Later, when they were seated face to face across a square of damask in a famous restaurant, he put something of this into words. “You haven’t told me anything about *you*.”

“Why should I?”

“Well, we’re going to be friends, aren’t we?”

"Can't we be friends without swapping biographies?"

Jock smiled. "You're the only woman I ever met in my life who didn't like to talk about herself," he told her.

"I do like to, in the abstract," said Yvonne. "I like to talk about my theories and philosophies. But where I was born, and what I do, and how I live—those things I refuse to discuss. Discussing them bores me."

"Tell me about your ideas, then."

Yvonne put her chin on her hands and looked at him reflectively—almost mockingly, Jock fancied. "You won't like them," she said at last. "They're pagan."

"I'll love them," he retorted. "They're yours."

Yvonne began. "Well, for one thing, I don't believe in God. Nor religion. Nor any hereafter. I put no more faith in the Bible than I would in a—a bedtime story! When I die I expect to be *through*, permanently and positively. Hence—*carpe diem*. I want to try everything once before I die—*everything*, however wicked. As a matter of fact what's wicked and what isn't? Who knows? Do you? Do the smug little men up in pulpits? Why do you think old people's eyes are sad, Jock Hamill? Do you think they're sad with repentance? I think they're sad with uncommitted sins."

All this poured from her lips in short staccato sentences, each one of them a lash across Jock's mind. He was aroused and fascinated.

"And when I do die," she continued, "I want to die the way I've lived. Sensationally." (As the girl on the ferry, thought Jock.) "If I were a man I'd be a racing-driver. I love the way they die. At the wheel. Expecting to, more or less, and not caring. I knew one who was killed a year or two ago. He had one con-

scious minute and all he said was, 'I think I could have gone a little faster.' ”

Yvonne paused again, and traced hieroglyphics on the table cloth with the point of a glistening fingernail. Jock said nothing. Presently she went on. “I always thought it was rather pathetic about George Washington. After all he did, and all he went through, he finally died at home of a sore throat or something. He might at least have caught it at Valley Forge—that would have made it a little better. If I die of a common-or-garden disease like that I hope I catch it in some colorful way. Pneumonia from sitting at an Army-Navy game in the rain, or blood poison from putting lipstick on a cracked lip, or heart trouble from kissing somebody. Am I boring you?”

“I was never less bored in my life.”

“I have a horror of boring people. Speaking of dying, I'd like to have this for an epitaph: 'Here lies the body of one who never bored anybody.' But I dare say it wouldn't be true. Anyway, to go on, I believe in freedom. In everything. I abhor rules and conventions. What right has any human being to tell me what I can and cannot do? Who are they, that they should——”

Her voice ceased so abruptly that Jock glanced up in surprise—then turned his head to follow her wide stare. He saw a man approaching, a large man, perfectly groomed, and handsome in a well-kept, careful sort of way, so that you knew in all probability he carried about him that barber shop odor and was immensely fastidious about his collars and his fingernails.

He inclined his head gravely to Yvonne and raked Jock with cold light-blue eyes. He chose the table next them. As soon as he was seated, Yvonne rose without a word and left Jock to go to him.

She remained a long time. Or so it seemed. Jock sat meditating the things she had said. He disagreed with many of them—the atheistic ones in particular—and yet he rather liked them. They fitted Yvonne, somehow. She looked like a girl who would fear neither God nor man. “Probably she doesn’t believe half of that, though,” he told himself. “It’s probably a pose. ‘Try anything, however wicked’—easy to say, but she wouldn’t, of course.”

He wondered who the man was with whom she talked so intimately at the next table. He could hear the cadences of their voices behind him, but could distinguish no words. Until the very last; then he heard from Yvonne, “—you have me coining epigrams, Parke. Here’s one: A jealous act is the X-ray picture of an inferiority complex——”

When she returned to her own chair she was distrait. “Would you rather not talk?” asked Jock, after two or three unsuccessful attempts to reopen conversation.

“You talk. I’d like to listen.”

To his surprise she did listen, attentively, with a quick shaking-off of her recent preoccupation. He could tell by her eyes that she was interested in what he said, and by the questions she asked that she wanted him to go on. Under this stimulus he found himself talking as he had never talked to any girl in his life; talking as he *thought*. And when they had finished their meal, on an impulse he would have believed impossible an hour before, he rewrote over the back of a menu-card the verse he had composed the previous night and slid it across to her.

She folded it and put it away in her mesh bag. “I’d rather read it when I’m alone,” she said, and Jock liked that.

As they left the restaurant, he was conscious of a

swift little hush and a hundred pairs of following eyes. He attributed such marked display of interest to Yvonne's beauty, and it elated him. He felt an immense superiority over all the men in the room with whom she had not been lunching. "You certainly knock 'em for a loop!" he said in her ear with approval.

"Hum," answered Yvonne, "they *look*, but who knows what they're *saying*?"

Jock dismissed this as being mere idle cynicism, meaning nothing.

He left his machine outside the apartment house and accompanied her up in the elevator to her own door. "You won't come in, Jock Hamill?" she said with her hand on the knob.

"I want to, but I can't possibly—have to meet some fellows at four and it's almost that now."

"You'll come again soon, though." It wasn't a question; it was a statement of recognized fact.

"Of course."

Yvonne stood looking at him a long moment out of her remarkable eyes,—a look that seemed to hypnotize him somehow, making him powerless to move or to say anything. Then without a word she vanished into the apartment and shut the door behind her.

Jock thought, waiting for the elevator to come for him again, how appropriate to herself were even the smallest things Yvonne did. Not commonplace. Not orthodox. Effectively different, like her appearance and her speech. "If she'd said good-bye, and thanked me for the luncheon, the way any other girl would have," he told himself, "I'd have had a let-down feeling, sort of."

After an interval he added more matter-of-factly, "Speaking of let-down feelings, where's the damn elevator?"

One finger punched the bell, and his handsome nose was thrust through the iron grating in an effort to determine what was wrong below, when Yvonne's door opened again. "Come here, Jock Hamill," she called softly.

Jock went, in two strides.

"I've just read the poem," said Yvonne. And rising on her tiptoes, put her lips against his . . .

When she withdrew them, slowly, she said, "Oh, I am sorry for you——"

And was gone again.

V

Sublime to ridiculous was exactly the distance from Yvonne's apartment to the University Club. There Jock found an uproarious trio, who greeted him with huzzahs and immediate earnest requests to "drink up."

"As soon as you acquire as elegant a bun as we've got," said Dopey Lane, "the expedition starts."

The expedition started at quarter of five. It may best be described as seven suitcases, two instrument-cases, three traveling-bags, three bags of golf clubs, a steamer trunk, and four young gentlemen in sardine formation, all moving along in, on and about an equipage of an ilk not to be easily determined because there was little to be seen of itself except the wheels.

For a time the collective mentalities of the four young gentlemen were bent upon the intricate business of getting out of New York. But once they were out, and on the open road, they relaxed and became themselves. They hooted. They sang. Bill Olmstead rode for some time astride the hood, playing his saxophone, so that they might sing the better. Wearying of this,

he perched upon the roadster's door and led a whistling chorus which all voted delightful. "The Four Horsemen of the Puckered Lips," announced Pink Davis in a shout to spellbound spectators.

As they passed through towns they bared their heads and bowed to right and left graciously, like Presidential candidates. Whenever a pretty girl was sighted they did more; they stopped the car, rose to their feet, and emitted a solemn cheer with three long "Momma's!" on the end. Once they were halted by an irate motor-cycle policeman, whom Pink soothed by slipping a flat brown bottle with a label interesting if true into his pocket.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Dopey as they drove away, waving back in a friendly fashion. "We could have talked him out of it, without shedding a pint of our hearts' blood."

"Yes," said Jock, "and besides, some day you'll get into trouble that way, Pink. You've got to remember there are a few honest cops in the world. Suppose he had happened to be a prohibition enforcement officer or something—what then?"

"Nothing then," replied Pink calmly. "That bottle didn't have a thing in it but water."

The total casualties of the trip were one dog, one snake, and fourteen chickens. Of these, only the snake received proper obsequies; he was removed from the dust and entwined in state about the motor-meter.

They had one accident. From a hidden road running perpendicular to the highway, a small tin automobile laden—nay, jammed—with humans, hopped out at them unexpectedly. There was a slight jarring sensation, and Dopey and Bill, gazing back with interest as they dashed around a curve, reported that the small tin automobile was reclining on its side against

the bank—"And heads popping out like Jack-in-the-boxes, by gee!"

When the curve hid them safely from view they braked to a standstill and held consultation. Presently the occupants of the small tin automobile beheld four young men, pedestrians, coming toward them along the road. At sight of their predicament the pedestrians broke into a run and approached them in great concern, crying, "What's happened? Was there an accident?"

"Somethin' hit us," replied the owner of the machine vaguely. He was a rat-like person, little and frightened-looking, and busily engaged in extricating himself from a seething tangle of arms and legs. He addressed these collectively. "Anybody hurt?" And then individually. "Are you all right, Ma? Mary? All right, Joe? All right, Lucy? How're you, Junior? Where's Tom? All right, huh, well, who's got the baby? Baby all right?—"

"The father of his country," whispered Pink to Jock.

When all had been hauled forth and set upright on the road there was found to be nothing amiss except a bump on Junior's forehead and a hole in Mary's stocking, which she lamented as loudly as though she had lost her leg. Ma, a lady twice as big as her biggest child and probably three times as big as Pa, took up the burden of narrative. "We was just comin' along, easy as you please, an' Pa tooted his horn, you did toot your horn, didn't you Pa, he did, an' then first we knew, sudden-like, somethin' hit us an' pushed us into the ditch——"

"It was a otterbile!" shrieked Joe. "I seen it—it was a otterbile full of suitcases——"

The four young men were all compassion. "Do you mean to tell me," demanded the one with the rosy

cheeks, "that a car hit you and pushed you into the ditch and didn't even *stop*? Why, that's an outrage! I tell you, maniacs like that ought not to be allowed to have cars, let alone drive them around the country that way, endangering in that reckless way the lives of innocent people!"

They assisted Pa to right the small tin automobile and saw it wheeze off unharmed, fluttering hands of divers sizes from all sides. "Now warn't they nice?" Ma was sighing gratefully. She would remember them for the rest of her life as a quartet of Good Samaritans.

About seven o'clock, just as they neared a sizable city, hunger assailed them. "Shall we pay?" queried Pink, "or shall we not pay?"

"Not!" chorused the others vigorously.

Their ensuing conduct was a triumph in strategy. First they paused at a second-hand shop and purchased two more suitcases, dilapidated ones, for a pittance. These they packed with empty oilcans and filthy cotton waste begged from the garage where they stored the roadster, until tentative lifting convinced them that the proper degree of heaviness had been attained. Then Jock and Dopey Lane, each carrying one of these suitcases, approached the largest and best hotel of the town and demanded a room in the grand manner. Having registered under the names (but not the titles) of the science professor and the Dean of their college, they were conducted to an excellent double room with bath on the second floor.

Scarcely had they concluded a pseudo battle as to which should be privileged to tip the bellboy—a battle staged for the bellboy's benefit and rendered somewhat anticlimactical by the tip itself, which proved to be a nickel on sight and a plugged nickel on his attempt to

spend it two days later—when the room telephone jangled commandingly. Jock answered.

“What ho?”

“Two gentlemen calling, sir.”

“Who are they? Get their names.”

There was a longish interval. Then the room-clerk’s voice said, “Mr. Haig and Mr. Walker, sir.”

“No! Say, that’s fine—tell them to come right up, please—we’ll be glad to see them.”

Mr. Haig and Mr. Walker, in the persons of Bill and Pink, appeared promptly. There ensued another telephone conversation, this time between Jock and Room Service, and having to do with “four of the best steak dinners you can toss together, served up here as soon as possible.”

These were brought in good time, and the check signed by Jock with a flourish—“William Andrews, Room 239.” “Have them charge it on my final bill,” he said to the waiter.

An hour later, having dined riotously and to the point of actual physical discomfort, the foursome sauntered downstairs, leaving the suitcases and oilcans behind them in token of appreciation. “Want to show you around our town for an hour or so,” Pink was saying as they passed the room-clerk’s desk. “Best little town in the U. S. A.—”

They retrieved the roadster from the garage and proceeded onward rejoicing.

VI

The return to college after a three months’ vacation is always an event. One is pleasantly excited, and not a little surprised to find things looking much the same

as they used to look. It seems incredible that during a period when so much has happened to oneself, nothing apparent should have happened to the University. On the other hand, should anything apparent have happened—a new dormitory rising where once was a vacant lot, a remembered tree cut down—one is highly indignant and cries forth anathemas indicative of a secret feeling that one should at least have been consulted beforehand.

“Here’s Prexy’s house!”

“Why, he’s put on a new porch, the old son-of-a-gun!”

“Look—look there, will you—the Gamma Gammas are building an addition——”

“The hell they are!”

“Law school looks just the same——”

The roadster journeyed through Campus Street, the four heads jerking from side to side attentively. Though it was by this time something after midnight, the dormitories and fraternity houses that lined the thoroughfare were lively with light and moving figures. “Bed? Who thinks of bed on a night like this?” commented Pink.

Jock at the wheel said little. He was staring off over the tree-shaded green that centered this collegiate world, a green criss-crossed with pathways along which the entire student body trudged daily en route from room to classroom and back again. “Think what it *means!*” he meditated, stirred. “Hundreds of years it’s been there—thousands and thousands of forgotten footsteps——” A line he had read once came back to him: “Where endlessly the dead go up and down——”

The voice of Dopey Lane seized upon him like a rude hand and wrenched him from these reveries. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he chanted, “on your right we have the

home of Jock Hamill's inamorata, a lady famed far and wide for her shapely legs and for the broadmindedness of her husband——”

“Soft pedal!” warned Jock, grinning. “She’ll hear you. They must be up—lights on in the living room——”

Throughout his sophomore year he had been heckled unmercifully about Eunice Hathaway. She was a provocative brunette from Tennessee who had come to a fraternity houseparty some years before, married Bradley Hathaway on a dare the second day, and treated him rather dreadfully ever since. Their modest bungalow was less than two blocks from Jock’s fraternity house, and he had acquired a habit of dropping in there at odd hours. Actually, he went to see Bradley, whom he admired, and to find seclusion from the bedlam created by thirty-seven “brothers” bent perpetually on merry-making. But he never attempted to explain this to anyone, realizing the futility of so doing, and it was therefore taken for granted that he was devoted to Eunice—an impression strengthened materially by the behavior of Eunice herself. She was one of those women who want it known that men find them charming. She flaunted Jock in people’s faces. She looked at him languishingly in public; whispered close to his ear; discussed him when he was not present in an intimate “he-and-I” tone that said plainly, “There’s something to this, and don’t make any mistake about it.” She had even talked herself into believing it, and she would have been as astounded as anyone, if not more astounded, had she known that Jock cared nothing whatever for her—that she made him, in fact, not a little weary.

“Lights is right!” Bill Olmstead was saying. “All ablaze in there, to guide the traveler to port. Aren’t

you going in, Jock? Oh, better go in! Oh, *do* go in! Poor girl has probably spent the day with her nose pressed to the window-pane——”

Just at this moment the bungalow's door swung wide and Bradley Hathaway's figure was silhouetted, black against yellow. He bent to place a milk bottle on the porch, then straightened suddenly as Jock howled, "Hul-lo, Brad!"

"Hello yourself! Who is it, anyway?"

"Jock Hamill, and three of the better eggs."

"Jock—why, come in here this minute, you big bum! We've been wondering when you'd be along!"

"You see?" said Bill, *sotto voce*. "Nobody's invited in but Jock. I do admire a husband with some idea of the fitness of things!"

Jock stopped the car and got out. "Shut up, Bill," he said good-naturedly, "and drive along down to the house. I'll be there soon—have to see Brad a minute——"

They met on the porch and entered the bungalow arm in arm, both immensely glad of the reunion. Jock's regard for Bradley Hathaway was easily understandable when you looked well at him. He had force and strength. Strength of character, writ plain in his eyes and the line of his chin; strength of body. He was the type of man of whom no one in the world can make sport except just one woman. . . .

"Eunice!" he called from the hall. "Guess who's here? Jock Hamill!"

"Ooo—really?" A remote little cry of gladness. "Comin' in just a second, soon as I can throw a wrappah on." Eunice had clung persistently to her Tennessee accent through all these years in what she was pleased to call "the raucous No'th"; hence there were no concluding g's or r's in anything she said.

"How is Eunice?" asked Jock politely, as he and Brad sat down.

"Oh, she's fine. Tickled to death to see college reopening, of course—it's devilishly stupid for her here in the summer. She wanted to take a cottage at the shore during July and August, but I couldn't quite make the grade."

There was a silence. Brad was frowning at nothing, and Jock was feeling sorry for Brad. He could imagine precisely the scenes that must have taken place, Eunice pleading, nagging, threatening, Brad gently obdurate. . . . Brad had graduated in 1917, fought in France, and come back to the University as assistant coach, a position accorded him in recognition of his sensational athletic prowess while a student. "It's a great job," he had told Jock once, "and I'd be happy in it if it wasn't for Eunice. She wants more money. She can't bear not to have the things more money would buy, and she knows I'll never make much more—this way. She's right, too, of course," he had amended hastily. "I'll have to get more for her, some way." Everything Eunice thought and did was right in Brad's eyes; love had given him an incurable astigmatism.

The pause became over-long, and to end it Jock said, "How's the football team look?"

"Good!" replied Brad, brightening instantly. "Shaping up better than we expected. Got a corking back-field—same as last year, you know, except for Weatherby—if we just had some more beef in the line, now, we'd be sitting pretty. I swear, Jock, it seems to me college boys get smaller every year! I was down at the registrar's office this morning while the freshmen were filing in, and I give you my word, of all the sawed-off runts——"

A quick clatter of heels on a hardwood floor, and Eunice was with them, darkly picturesque in a yellow negligée. "You'll have to pahdon me, Jock," she said as she entered. "I was just goin' to bed, and I couldn't stop to dress propahly when I knew you were heah. How you, honey? It's mighty good to see you."

Conventional words; but Eunice had a way of saying them that was not conventional at all. She also had a way of shaking hands and smiling that made Jock feel, curiously enough, as though he were being embraced before witnesses.

She seated herself with conscious grace in a chair that had its back to the light. "Tell us everythin'," she commanded. "Did you have a mahvelous vacation? We missed you most awfully, didn't we, Brad?"

"We sure did."

"I reckon you fell in love—oh, many times?"

"Well, not too many," Jock retorted lightly. "I'm true to you, you know, Eunice." This was the sort of remark that Eunice expected, and that one almost had to make to her, just as one has to say, "Why, you don't look a bit sick," to an invalid.

"Prevaricatah!" Eunice cried, but she was pleased. "Then see that you prove it by comin' ovah heah often this yeah—oftenah than you did last. I want to make Brad jealous, to pay him back for givin' me such a perfectly mise'able summah."

She talked on about the miserable summer, with little thrusts at Brad strung along her monologue like barbs on a wire. Jock hated her for it. He saw that Brad maintained an unruffled, even a smiling, composure, as he invariably did under such attacks. "How *can* he?" he thought fiercely for the thousandth time. "I'd *choke* her!"

As soon as he could he took his departure. They

followed him to the door, and Eunice put her small hand into his again. "We want to see a lot of you, Jock," she murmured. She might as well have said "I want to"; it was obvious that that was what she meant.

He went down the street feeling strangely heavy of heart. "Some one of these days," he soliloquized gloomily, "Brad's going to wake up and hear the birdies sing, and then he'll blame *me* for the attitude Eunice takes and I'll lose the best friend I ever had." He became angry. "Oh, *damn* her, anyway!" he muttered. "Damn all silly sloppy women!"

VII

The Zeta Kappas were proud of their chapter house, and with reason. It was gray stone, and spacious, and so new that they were still spasmodically careful not to kick its doors nor to burn its mantelpieces with the forgotten ends of cigarettes. Nor was the building the only thing of which they were proud; they were proud to be Zeta Kappas, and would have been had it entailed residence in a barn. The fraternity's reputation was national, its standards high, its pin as sure a symbol of worth and geniality as a buoy in the ocean is of a submerged rock. When you encountered a man with that pin on his vest you knew you could take him home and introduce him to your family with impunity. When you saw a girl with that pin above her heart you felt that she would beyond a doubt be quite worth meeting, since some brother unknown but trustworthy had seen fit to set the seal of his approbation thus upon her.

The fraternity's personnel was apt to include crew captains and baseball pitchers and All-American backs whenever possible; but although predominance in sports was an aid to membership, it was not necessarily a requisite. Save for golf, at which he was extremely proficient, Jock Hamill was no athlete, yet he had been pledged Zeta Kappa speedily and with mutual exultation. He was a gentleman, he had money, he played the banjo, he wrote for *Blah-Blah*, the college humorous publication, and everyone liked him. These were ample reasons; the last in itself would have been ample.

On this night the brothers welcomed Jock into the gray stone house with overwhelming ceremony. They opened the door and *yanked* him in. They surrounded him like bees and buzzed greetings in his ears. They pummeled him joyously. They mentioned Eunice grinning, and elbowed him slyly in the ribs. They thrust at him tall tinkling glasses, and bade him toast the fraternity, the chapter, the college and the world at large.

When the tumult and the shouting had somewhat subsided he separated from the throng one Bones Allen, especially dear to his heart, and together they ascended to the second floor to acquaint themselves anew with the room they were jointly to occupy. Despite the fact that it now resembled a storage warehouse more nearly than anything else, they found much in it of which to approve. It had big windows, and an open fireplace, and the beds in the alcove, they agreed after experimental pokes, were as comfortable as could be expected. "She's a lulu, that room," said Bones as they went downstairs again. "Tomorrow we'll rig her up right." In a sudden ebullience of spirits he threw an arm across Jock's shoulders and hugged him. "Boy, it's going to be a great year!"

"You bet your life it is!" said Jock, his melancholy frown.

He got to bed, finally, at four-thirty. His last drowsy thoughts were of Yvonne. Lord, what a girl! Who *was* she, anyway? She had certainly side-tracked him neatly when he tried to find out. And her kiss! He caught his breath, remembering. . . . But what had she meant by, "Oh, I am sorry for you?" What could she have meant? . . .

Pondering this, he fell asleep.

VIII

Jock himself could not have told why he was so deeply fond of Bones Allen. Certainly they had few traits in common aside from superficial ones. There was no romantic streak in Bones. He built no castles in the air and dreamed no dreams. He was a realist, pure and simple. Jock wondered sometimes if he ever thought, and if so, of what. When he talked, it was of girls and athletics. When he read, he read twenty-cent magazines with flamboyant, semi-nude covers. Occasionally he began frowningly to peruse a book, but he seldom got beyond the first two chapters. In his entire college career to date he had only been known to finish two: *Flaming Youth* by Warner Fabian, and Fitzgerald's *Tales of the Jazz Age*. Both of these he pronounced "corking," though he remarked that some of the stories in the latter volume were "not so hot." (Jock presumed that these were the more superior ones.) He enjoyed poker, the *Follies*, newspaper comic strips, motion pictures—particularly those in which Miss Pola Negri participated—dancing, any kind of sport, and the

companionship of his fellow-men. He could not endure to be alone. He was fond of telling long, detailed stories, and of these he invariably made himself the protagonist. Any event of which he had heard became "a funny thing that happened to me" when Bones told it, or, if this was not possible, he took the viewpoint of the actual eye-witness. "I yelled at him, but he didn't hear me in time" . . . "I just happened to be rounding the corner at that minute" . . . Most of his sentences began with the first person pronoun, like those in a "true tale" publication.

But on the other hand, he was the soul of generosity. He was sincere in his devotion to his friends. He was even-tempered and cheerful always, as human beings are who skim the surface of life and hence encounter little to make them sad. You liked to be with him for, although he said nothing you could carry away with you, he gave you a sense that the world was light and delicious, and existence in it a treat to be appreciated.

Bones' contributions to the decorative scheme of the room he shared with Jock were just what might have been expected. Banners and pennants. Pictures of footlight favorites. Several rather obscene postcards purchased from a porter on a Pullman car. Posters depicting one phase or another of college life. Innumerable photographs of girls. . . . Jock's contributions were similar except for a sparse few choice items, representing the real Jock. These he produced rather shamefacedly and began to hang here and there in not-too-conspicuous places. As he had feared, there was instant protest: "Hey, what's that funny-looking thing?"

"That's a Japanese print, and a darn good one."

"But say, Jock, listen——"

Jock was firm, however; and as a result, the com-

pleted room presented to the eye a series of violent incongruities. The Japanese print tacked close beside a mad red poster entitled *Passion*. A ballet-girl pointing a lofty toe at Rossetti's *Dying Beatrice*. A stein suspended on a string hovering close to the celebrated smile of Mona Lisa. . . . And, in the bookshelf, *Whig Bang* and *The Life of Christ* placed snugly side by side. . . .

IX

College, after the first tremendous to-do and confusion, began slipping along as smoothly and normally as though it had never halted to let its young three thousand play. The first week passed in a swift kaleidoscope of classes and lectures and football rallies and "bull sessions" and busyness. The second week went more slowly. Crawled, in fact. Saturday—the Saturday of the opening game, to which Yvonne was coming—dangled at the end of it tantalizingly, like a prize hard to capture. Jock was amazed at the impatience with which he awaited Saturday. "I must be in love with that girl!" he told himself several times.

He thought of her almost continually, remembering, wondering, puzzling. He longed to know who and what she was, and yet subconsciously he was delighted not to know. She was mysterious—an enigma in a world of transparent women.

Long ago Jock had divided all femininity into six classes, somewhat as follows:

There were the Come-On girls. They were always brushing against you and stroking the lapel of your coat, and lifting their eyelashes slo-o-owly. When you danced with them you were aware of a slight flurry in

the ranks of the chaperones. They walked with their hips, and used overpowering perfume, and talked in low tones about Love. They gave the impression of being divertingly naughty, but somehow you never liked them well enough to bother to find out whether or not they really were.

There were the Mouse girls. Small and ineffective and drab, and always very much embarrassed. They *jumped* when you spoke to them. Jock had written an essay on them once, which he ended with this telling stroke: "I think they must be the girls who eventually marry the men who wear white linen neckties."

There were the Too-Darn-Bright girls. Phi Beta Kappa keys and Ground Gripper shoes. Wrinkles in their foreheads at twenty-five. Terrible clothes, and a striding gait, and eyeglasses. They knew what the Einstein theory was about, and invariably led you in dancing.

Another group he had dubbed the Bull girls. They kept you in touch with all the other colleges. "Great party at New Haven last week" . . . "I was down at Princeton the week before" . . . "the captain of the football team at Michigan has invited me," etc., etc. Jock loathed the Bull girls with a very special loathing, and frequently told them to their indignation that he didn't believe a word they said.

Then there were the Soft girls. Like Molly. You were apt to think you were fond of them at first, but later you knew you were not and could never be. They were so easy. They made such utter asses of themselves.

And lastly, there were *The* girls. The regular girls. They were equally satisfactory on a dance floor, on a tennis court, on the links, anywhere. They had happy dispositions and a smart come-back to everything you

said, and they were shrewd enough never to become serious or sentimental for more than five minutes at a stretch. They were the ones you always liked; the ones who *mattered*.

Jock had believed these six divisions sufficiently comprehensive to include all the girls in the world—until he met Yvonne. She gloriously defied any classification whatever.

He wrote her on Monday, reminding her of the game. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday passed with no word from her, and he took to haunting the University postal station like a restless wraith.

Friday noon, on his way there, he encountered Bradley Hathaway.

“Where you bound, Jock?”

“Post office, where you?”

“Home to lunch,” Brad said, “but I’ll go along with you first. I’ve hardly clapped eyes on you since the night you blew in. Where’ve you been keeping yourself?”

“I’ve been pretty busy, Brad,” Jock equivocated. (How tell a man you haven’t gone to see him because you cannot bear his wife?)

“I suppose so, but you might find a minute to run over now and then. We’re always glad to have you, you know.”

“Yes, I know, Brad. I will.”

They sauntered along, talking football. Brad was dubious as to the outcome of the morrow’s game. “’Fraid it’s going to be bad news. This other team’s too good to take on so early in the season.”

Jock found two letters in his mailbox. One was from Molly. The other he knew at a glance must be Yvonne’s—a huge gray envelope addressed in swooping script, most individual.

"Just a minute till I look this over," he remarked to Brad as they emerged onto the street again.

The letter had no salutation and no signature. It simply began and ended.

"I said I believed no one had any right to tell me what I could and could not do. But people do tell me, just the same, and I am occasionally weak enough to submit to them.

"Which is by way of announcing that I cannot come this time, Jock Hamill."

"What's up?" queried Brad. "You look suddenly sunk."

Jock tucked the gray envelope thoughtfully into his pocket, where it lay close to the unopened lavender one that was Molly's. "I am," he said. "My girl can't come to the game."

"That's too bad."

"Right. I'm sorry as hell."

He made these replies mechanically. His thoughts were absorbed not so much with the fact that Yvonne wasn't coming as with the words in which she had couched her refusal. "People do tell me, and I am occasionally weak enough to submit to them"—now what did that mean? Who could tell Yvonne what to do? Who had the right to dictate to her? A parent? Somehow Jock knew it was not a parent. A husband, then? He became possessed of a dismaying notion that Yvonne might be married.

Brad was speaking. "What did you say?" Jock asked absently.

"I said, you'd better take Eunice to the game, then," Brad repeated.

"Sure, glad to," said Jock. (But if so, wouldn't Yvonne have told him?)

"I can't take her myself, of course, and she hates to go alone. And I thought since you have two tickets and no girl——"

"Sure, Brad." (No, not necessarily; she hadn't told him anything about her life. There was that man with whom she had talked so long in the restaurant—could it be that he—oh, but no! A thousand no's! And yet——)

Once alone in his room at the fraternity house Jock read and reread Yvonne's message a score of times. It left him more bewildered than ever. He could neither imagine her married nor subject to parental discipline. Yet who but a parent or a husband could say "You cannot go," and be obeyed? Perhaps a lover? Thought unthinkable! Jock devised within his mind a hundred reasons why it was not a lover, each one of them emanating from his heart-felt desire to believe that it was not. . . . Eventually he hit upon a solution that pleased him; perhaps she did some work of some sort, and her employer had forbidden her departure. Perhaps she was on the stage (those theatrical photographs on her walls!) and could not miss the Saturday performances. The more he mulled this over the most plausible he made it seem, and it relieved him. Anything that dispelled the fear that she might be married or—or anything, would have relieved him. Mingled with his relief came the belated realization that he wasn't going to see her this weekend after all, smiting him like a pain. He had not known quite how much it meant to him. And hard on the heels of this, the memory of Brad's suggestion that he take Eunice to the game and his own unthinking agreement. . . . He spent the rest of the day in a state of deep depression.

X

"You'ah terribly deah to do this, Jock. I know you don't really want to at all."

"Of course I want to!" Jock lied gallantly. "What could be sweeter than escorting the prettiest girl in town to a football game?"

There was almost a licking of the lips about the way in which Eunice received compliments, a hint of insatiable greed. She would laugh, but it was poor pretense. She laughed now. "Jock, you mustn't spoof an old married lady!"

They were standing in the hallway of the Hathaway's bungalow, Jock with a light topcoat flung over his arm and his hat in his hand, Eunice so close to him that he could catch the fragrance of her black bobbed hair. She patted the topcoat. "Where's yoah raccoon?" she asked.

"In mothballs. First of October's too warm for fur coats."

"Oh!" wailed Eunice. "And I've got a new one—Brad just bought it for me—and I wanted to weah it so badly! Is it really much too wahm out today? Would I die, do you reckon? Wait, I want to show it to you."

She sped away, and returned after a moment bearing a long garment of mink. Jock held it while she slipped into it, giving him meanwhile that arch backward glance such women always give under such circumstances. She held the coat tight around her as a blanket is held 'round a baby and walked to a little distance, where she stood revolving and posturing, model-fashion. "Do you like it?" she asked.

"It's beautiful," said Jock soberly. It was beauti-

ful; he was no connoisseur of furs, but he knew enough about them to know that. It must have cost—well, a good half of Brad's year's salary. How under the sun——

Eunice was stroking the coat rapturously, sliding her hands under the lapels, crossing them at her throat, rubbing her face against their softness. "I don't know what's got into Brad all of a sudden," she said. "He's loosenin' up and shellin' out in a most surprisin' man-nah. Which only proves what I've always claimed—that he could have bought me things if he'd wanted to. Why, I've begged him and begged him for a mink coat for three whole yeahs, and he always said he couldn't affo'd it. And now look! He's probably had the money all the time but just didn't want to spen——"

"Don't be silly, Eunice!" Jock interrupted with some heat. "Of course Brad would have bought you the coat the first time you asked him if he'd had the money. He hasn't a selfish bone in his body, and you know it as well as I do."

Eunice's eyes opened very wide, like a hurt child's. "Well, if he didn't have the money then, how come he has it now?" she defended herself. "He hasn't had a raise or anythin'. No rich uncle died and left him a legacy. And he's nevah saved a cent since we've been married——"

"No, I daresay he hasn't," Jock muttered meaningly.

Eunice giggled. "Oh, you men! You stick togethah so, it isn't even funny. Anybody'd think big horrid Jock didn't want poah little Eunice to have a new fur coat and was actually soah 'cause she got one!"

Jock thought, "If Brad's got to sweat blood to pay for it the way I think he has, I *am* sore." Aloud he

said merely, "We ought to be getting along, Eunice. It's almost two-thirty."

When Eunice had disappeared into her room again and returned, she was still wearing the coat. "I've got to," she declared. "I'll probably wilt, but I can't go without it." She had pinned an artificial orchid on the collar, and her pert felt hat was orchid-colored. She looked extremely well, and knew it. There was a pause while she stood pulling on her gloves and smiling up at Jock—smiling an unmistakable invitation. Jock retaliated somewhat pointedly by opening the front door and awaiting her on the porch, in full view of a dozen passing people.

"Brad's been gone since ten o'clock this mornin'," Eunice remarked as they started for the game in the roadster. "I declare, bein' married to a coach isn't any fun at all durin' football season. He's out most of the day, and when he does get home at night he's too tiahed to take me any place so I just sit at home like a bump on a log." Her voice rasped unpleasantly; a drawl can so easily deteriorate into a whine. She added, "Of course I'm always hopin' my friends will drop in to see me, but they nevah seem to."

"I've been busy as the devil," said Jock, taking this, as it was meant, personally.

"Who's the girl you asked to the game today and who couldn't come? Brad told me you seemed quite broken-hearted."

"Yvonne Mountford, her name is."

"Is she attractive?"

"Wonderful, yes." A desire to annoy Eunice, with whom he was himself more than usually annoyed at the moment, prompted Jock to continue in this strain. "I don't think I've ever seen a more attractive girl in my life. She's unique. She has red hair—sort of a

tiger-lily red, if you know what I mean, and a mouth like—like Cleopatra's kiss. And absolutely perfect features. All the men darn near lose an eye when she walks into the room."

"Well!" said Eunice acidly. "I should like to see this vision!"

"Oh, you will," Jock assured her. "She'll be down here often, I hope. Gosh, Eunice, look at the crowd! And for an opening game, too."

A great crowd, indeed. It swarmed ahead of them, using the whole street as a sidewalk. Jock and Eunice had an impression of thousands—myriads, it seemed—of backs. Broad staunch backs. Little gay backs with syncopating shoulders. Raccoon backs and broadcloth backs and fat backs and lean. "I feel," Jock said, "like a shepherd driving a flock before me." They crawled along, sounding the horn repeatedly—and vainly. Soon they were obliged to park the roadster and proceed on foot with the rest.

The Stadium from without was a high circular concrete wall with a picot edge of small dark heads around its upper rim. At the base there were tunnel-like entrances, into which the crowd streamed ceaselessly. The air was full of a muffled roaring and, nearer, the sharp cries of the gate-keepers: "Hold your own tickets, please! Let the lady hold her own ticket!"

Jock grabbed Eunice's arm. "Come on, let's hurry," he said. The football fever, always an autumn obsession with him, had suddenly taken hold anew.

They pried their way to and through a tunnel, and came out panting into the Stadium proper. A vast cup of people. Parti-colored atoms, these, set into place on the sides of the cup carefully, as though some master artist had put them in with pincers, saying, "We will have a red dot here, we will have a blue dot there,

and there a yellow one." A human cloisonné cup. A cup for a giant to sip from, with the smooth green dregs of a giant's *crème-de-menthe* in the bottom.

"Boy!" breathed Jock softly.

He always had rather a bad time at football games because there was a perpetual lump in his throat of which he was dismally conscious and ashamed. This had nothing whatever to do with the score; if his team was winning he felt it even more acutely than when they were losing. It was his reaction to the spirit of the occasion—to the long low rumble of "Fight! Fight! Fi-i-ight!" and to the tense electric air. When a player was hurt and borne from the field Jock felt no emotion beyond a sporting interest in how badly he was hurt and how much his loss would mean to the team. But when a player was hurt, and lay prostrate, and after a time rose doggedly to carry on—then he could have wept aloud for the thrill that ran all through him. Courage. That was what caused the lump. Grim relentless courage, and flash of glory, and the boom in his ears of forty thousand voices cheering one man.

While the game was in progress he quite forgot Eunice. She became merely a shoulder that braced itself against his and a source of murmured comments, only remotely heard. But between the halves he was made aware of her in a most unfortunate way.

They had risen to their feet to stretch themselves and to gaze down the slope of heads that lay below them. And Jock heard a girl say, "For cat's sake will you look at the coat on Eunice Hathaway!"

The remark came from back of him somewhere. A man answered, "Yeah. Good, isn't it?"

Then the girl: "Good? I should say it *is* good. That's real mink, and worth more money than Brad

Hathaway ever saw! Either he's just struck oil or else——"

Jock looked around. He had no difficulty in identifying the couple. They were in the row behind him, two or three seats to the left, a sophomore named MacLellan and Winifred James, a "college widow" whom Jock knew slightly. Winifred was whispering the rest of her sentence into MacLellan's ear, and the eyes of both were fixed, not on Eunice's coat, but very sharply and sagaciously on Jock himself. As he faced them they drew apart in haste and nodded to him with an assumption of blandest innocence. Winifred even gave a little salute and said, "Hi there, Jock!" But Jock was not deceived. "My God," he told himself, "they think *I* bought Eunice's coat! That's what she was whispering—that *I* bought it—oh my *God!*"

He turned back again, and the instant he had done so instinct told him that Winifred said, "Heavens, do you think he heard me?" He fancied he could almost see her saying it. . . . He shot a quick side glance at Eunice and noted that she appeared quite unconscious. He was glad of this; but the afternoon was utterly ruined nevertheless. Even the team's victory failed to rouse in him more than a fleeting enthusiasm.

He took Eunice home and left her summarily on the bungalow's porch. She implored him to come in. "Why, you must, Jock! Brad will be so disappointed if he gets home and finds you didn't stop! He'll want to talk ovah the game with you—he's always so excited after a victory, and especially today, when he didn't think they'd win. And I've got tea! *Please, Jock!*"

"Sorry," Jock said firmly, "but I absolutely can't, Eunice. Not this time. I've got to see a man."

There was truth in this, and the man whom he felt

he must see was Bones Allen. He wanted to ask Bones many questions. *Now.* Since the episode of the whispering couple there were things that he felt he must find out, not later, but immediately.

The fraternity house was deserted when he reached it—his roadster had beaten pedestrians home from the game. He went on up to his room and there waited. Within five minutes a bang and a thump and a whoop of laughter announced the first arrivals. Within ten, the noise had grown to an uproar. Someone started the Victrola. Girls brought in by their escorts for tea chattered shrilly, all at once, each striving to out-chatter the other, as girls will when there are men to hear them. Then there came a stamp of heavy feet on the stairs, and Bones shouted, "Jock! Hey, Jock, are you up there? How's to bring the ole banjo and tweak us a little tune?"

"Come here!" said Jock.

Bones entered. "All the mommas have been paging you, as usual, and I—why, what's happened? Why the owly look?"

Jock spoke with a quiet force that sobered his roommate instantly. "Look here, Bones, I want you to tell me one thing and tell it straight. Just what's the general attitude on Brad Hathaway's wife and myself?"

"You ought to know. They kid you enough, don't they?"

"Sure, they kid me, and I know they think I like her pretty well and all that, but—why Bones, good Lord, they don't really believe there's anything wrong in it, do they?"

Bones hesitated. "Nobody in the fraternity does," he said at last slowly. "But some of the fellows outside who don't know you so well—well, I guess maybe

some of them think there is." He scowled darkly. "I had to sock one last year," he added.

"Who?"

"Never mind who. He's kept his mouth shut ever since, you don't need to worry about that."

"What did he say?" persisted Jock.

Bones told him.

"He said *that*? Some low-down skunk said *that*?" Swiftly as it had blazed up, Jock's anger sank again. "Oh well, hell," he continued, "he was probably somebody whose opinion isn't worth a hoot anyway. But it makes me sore just the same. Why would *anybody*, no matter who he was, think that? That's what I want to know. Just because I go over there a lot—or used to? Don't they understand that Brad's one of the best friends I've got in the world?"

Again Bones hesitated. "I don't like to razz a woman, particularly one you like, but honest, Jock, if you could hear Mrs. Hathaway talk I think you'd understand a whole lot better. For instance: remember that house dance we had last year in May? She was one of the chaperones, remember? Well, I heard her telling a roomfull of girls and fellows all about how jealous her husband was of you. Boasting about it! Tickled to death about it! And later on I danced with her, and what do you think she said to me? She said, 'I hear you're going to room with *my honey* next year.' Well, now, what I mean, stuff like that from a married woman doesn't go down so good. It gives a wrong impression, and people who don't know you think——"

"Why, she's crazy!" Jock broke in excitedly. "She's crazy as a coot! Why, I've never even kissed the girl, Bones. I've never *looked* at her, hardly. I don't even like her! And as for Brad being jealous, that's a

downright damn lie, and the next time I see her I'm going to——"

"Thing to do," said Bones, "is not to see her. That'll stop the talk quicker than anything else. She can't say much about you if you never go around there, and the minute she quits yapping about it everybody else will. For cryin' out loud what did you take her to the game for?"

"Brad asked me to."

"You were on one side of the cheering-section," Bones went on, "and I was a mile away from you, on the other side. But I'll bet you hadn't been in your seats three minutes before the word came breezing along, 'Jock's got Eunice Hathaway here, and you oughta see the coat she has on!'"

Jock moaned. "That's what started this. Somebody back of us seemed to think I'd given Eunice the coat! At least I'm pretty sure that's what they said. It opened my eyes, I'll tell the world! I'd never thought till that minute that anybody was putting *that* kind of a construction on the thing." He took up his banjo and picked at one string thoughtfully. "Well, I'm cured," he finished. "I'm through going around there. Brad'll have to come here, from now on, if he and I are going to see each other."

When he went downstairs he was apparently in high spirits. But all the rest of that afternoon his heart was heavy with an odd cold sense of foreboding, insidious, impossible to dispel. "What's the *matter* with me?" he asked himself savagely. "Why should I feel like this? Nothing can happen as long as I stay away from there! Not a damn thing!"

But still the premonition clung, with clammy fingers.

XI

Jock missed the second football game of the season; he spent that afternoon in New York with Yvonne. She had telephoned him the night before, suggesting that he do this. "Really, Jock Hamill, I'm not at all in the mood to travel all the way out there tomorrow. You come here instead."

In any other girl, this calm change of plan without any sufficient reason would have enraged him. In Yvonne it was merely divertingly characteristic. Jock acceded to it with scarcely a protest.

And so they sat together on a huge black velvet divan that faced the fireplace in Yvonne's living room. The window shades were drawn, giving an effect of twilight at three o'clock, and here and there about the room lamps diffused a lovely blushing glow. Yvonne leaned against a pile of cushions that Jock thought must have been chosen just to match her. A russet one, like her hair; a green one, like her tea gown; and one so precisely the hue of her gray eyes that they seemed like sample pieces of its material. She wore tiny tall-heeled slippers with French toes, and no stockings, and her legs were as delicately creamy and flawless as the skin of her neck and arms.

For an hour, while the fire blazed at their feet and their cigarettes filled the room with a thin fine mist, they talked generalities. A long dreamy lazy hour, full of a brooding peace. Jock felt drugged with it. He felt that he wanted it never to end. . . . Firelight and Yvonne. Little quiet-leaping flames, and Yvonne's voice, like a lullaby. And Yvonne's beauty to look at, to drink up with the eyes. . . . Incredible to remember that somewhere men were playing football and

other men were watching them and there was a tumult and a roar and a delirium. He smiled contentedly, thinking this. He would not have parted with this hour for any game that was ever played, or ever would be.

Generalities. Religion again, poetry, music, life and letters. Ever and anon he tried to swing the conversation around to more personal topics. Always Yvonne forestalled him.

Then, unexpectedly, she did it herself. There had been a little silence, and she said, "I have been thinking of you, Jock."

Jock answered, "I was thinking of you, too. I've been thinking of you to the exclusion of everyone and everything else, since the very first instant I saw you."

Yvonne turned her head and regarded him gravely. "Yes, that's true, isn't it," she observed after a while, as though she had made quite sure it was true. "Well, what have you been thinking?"

"Mostly in interrogation-points. Wondering who you are, and—and whether or not you're married."

"I'm not married."

She said this expressionlessly, as a person might say "I'm not tired" or "I'm not hungry." But it rang in Jock's ears like a pæan of happiness. It shook him from his lethargy. He felt of a sudden that he could not sit still—that he must rise and leap about and wave his arms like a madman for the sheer joy of it. "Oh, say that again!" he implored her.

Yvonne smiled at him. "Child!"

"I know—but say it!"

"I am not married."

They stared at one another for a long intense moment. Then Yvonne laid her fingers lightly across Jock's mouth. "Don't tell me what you're thinking

now," she said. "Because I don't want you to tell me."

Jock seized the fingers and kissed them, and the accumulated vague emotions of the past two weeks crystallized all at once, took definite shape, came clamoring to be cried aloud that Yvonne might hear them. He *knew*, now. He was sure, now. "I've got to tell you," he said huskily. "I've got to—Yvonne—I love you, I love you so——"

She broke away from him and stood up, silhouetted against the mantel, gazing at him. "Do you remember the last thing I said to you when you left here the other day?" she queried.

"Of course."

"What was it?"

"You said, 'I'm sorry for you'——"

Yvonne nodded. "This is what I meant."

"You were sorry because you knew I'd fall in love with you? Yvonne——"

"Listen to me!" She had silenced him with a gesture. "Listen, because I shall probably never tell you the truth again. You'll be unhappy if you love me. You'll be miserable. Oh, I know—I know you. You told me more about yourself that day at luncheon than you realize—more, much more, than you actually said. And I've thought about you, and I understand you. You're very young, and sensitive, and you have something precious. You have ideals. Don't you—can't you see how I would *hurt* you? You look at me and think, 'I love that woman.' You don't know. You don't know. Why, Jock Hamill, can't you see there's nothing *here*? Nothing inside that you would love? That's what I'm trying to tell you. I've only beauty. Skin deep. That's a platitude, but it's true with me. I'm nothing but—what was that word you used?"

Glitter. That was it. I'm really nothing but glitter, Jock."

Her earnestness was lost on him. He knew only that she was wonderful and desirable and near, so near that he had but to put out his arms to hold her imprisoned. He fought down his impulse to do this, and answered her impatiently, almost angrily. "Yvonne—don't—you mustn't say things like that! I *love* you, worship you—I'll always love you—do you think love is a thing one can drop like a toy because someone says, 'That isn't what you want'? It *is* what I want! It's what I know now I can't live without—loving you. Yvonne, is there any reason why I can't? Do you love someone else, so that I'm only making myself ridiculous in your eyes? Is that what you want me to know?"

"No," said Yvonne slowly. "No, I don't love anyone else."

Then Jock put out his arms and caught her to him, and a thing like a sob welled up in him so that he could not speak. He touched his hands to her hair, her glorious hair, and to the line of her cheek, and very gently, very softly, he kissed her eyelids, her throat, her mouth. . . . Ethereal kisses, not of the flesh, because he was full of a tenderness and a reverence stronger and greater than passion.

And bye and bye she held herself away, at arms' length, and her eyes seemed to bear down deep into the heart of him. For an age. For an eternity. And at last she shrugged and said, "So be it. But I told you the truth. And sometime, when you learn that it was the truth, I want you to remember that I told you—once—my dear."

BOOK TWO

Eunice

Book Two

I

THE autumn prom came on with a rush. One day the town was purely academic, and the next, by some over-night miracle, it was purely social. All through the forenoon it seethed with the transformation of student into Sybarite. Flannel shirts, hats without crowns, socks that didn't match, sweaters—all the regalia of ordinary life—gave place to gala attire. Lines formed five deep in the barber shops. The swinging doors of bootblack parlors flapped inward and outward ceaselessly, like unlatched gates in a high wind. Tailoring establishments were thick with the steam of hot irons on hundreds of pairs of trousers. Taxicabs tripled their rates and cruised the streets, tempting the opulent and the hurried. The cash register in the store of Beatty the Florist gave forth a perpetual *ping-ping-ping*—for Beatty was a wise man, grown old and wise and wary in the service of collegians, and his law was, “no cash, no corsage.”

Fraternity houses and clubs were in an uproar of preparation and evacuation. Rooms cleaned and set in order for feminine occupancy; certain Rabelaisian volumes pushed under mattresses; certain works of art removed from walls and put away in trunks; pictures of girls other than the prom-girl hidden discreetly; whole armfuls of garments carried off to the dormitories, where boys would room in threes and fours and

sixes, and dress in squads, and sleep, if at all, in Morris chairs, for the next two glamorous nights. . . . Freshmen drifted about the campus, trying hard to look as though they didn't know anything unusual was happening and fervently desiring the coming of the day when they should be sophomores and free to participate. The woman-hating element, clad defiantly in their oldest and worst, circulated in groups, jeering at immaculate contemporaries. "Hey, Bill, where'd you get the hat?" . . . "My God, look at Beany!" . . . "She sure ought to fall for those socks, old man!" . . . "Barber kinda ruined you, didn't he, Jay?" . . . Later they would hang out of windows fronting the street and from this vantage point regard the influx of beauty with a jaundiced eye. Most haughtily critical were the woman-haters. And eagle-eyed. That girl was too fat. That one was too skinny. And oh, boy, look at the bowlegs on *this* one!

II

As Jock had feared, Molly recovered with astonishing ease and celerity from the fit of pique that had marked their parting in September, and was coming to the prom in high feather. Repeatedly he cursed himself for ever having asked her in the first place, and several times he was on the point of retracting his invitation so that he might have Yvonne as his guest instead. No doubt he would have done so had it not been for Yvonne herself. She maintained that nothing on earth could induce her to attend under such conditions. "I wouldn't be as mean as that to anyone," she said.

The sense of fair play inherent in Jock approved

this, even while he strove hotly to combat it. He wanted Yvonne for the prom more than he had ever wanted anything within his memory, but he secretly admitted that he would have been a shade disappointed in her if she had agreed to come at the expense of another girl. As it was, his adoration for her increased by just that much. She was perfect. . . . He had been to New York thrice to see her since that memorable afternoon in her apartment, and each time she became in his eyes more beautiful, more desirable, more beloved. Also, more mysterious, for she continued steadfastly to keep him in ignorance of herself and her life. She would say, "Oh, my dear, you will find out soon enough," and silence his questions with kisses. Love of her, tinged with curiosity, had become an obsession with him. She filled all his waking thoughts and colored all his hours. Prom without her would be cake without flavoring. . . .

Molly's train was due at three in the afternoon. Two o'clock found Jock arraying himself listlessly—a definite contrast to the manner in which he would have arrayed himself had it been Yvonne's train. Dressing to meet Yvonne was an elaborate process, one requiring much thought, much painstaking selection, and ruthless raids upon the wardrobes of his friends. He always set forth for a call on her sartorially representing the fraternity at large . . . in Pink's new suit, Bill's hat, Ken Kennedy's muffler. Somehow one's own clothes, however good, are never quite good enough for the eyes of a girl like Yvonne.

But they do very well for a Molly.

He drew a tie at random out of the bundle of them that drooped from a rack on his chiffonier, and confronted the looking-glass. With the tie around his neck and an end of it grasped ready for action in each

hand he stood a moment, surveying himself. His hair lay flatly, shinily, like a skull-cap of glossy black with a straight white seam in the center. His dark eyes looked back at him with sober brooding. That oblique upward slant of his mouth, that was a smile usually, was something very like a sneer just now. He was thinking of himself not as the extremely slightly young gentleman the mirror reflected, but the unforgivable jackass who was about to be bored to the point of frenzy for two days through nobody's fault but his own."

"Humph!" he snorted.

"What's that?" queried Bones from across the room.

"It's three rousing jeers for myself. I'm the biggest—" He broke off. "Wish the damn prom was over," he finished moodily.

Bones turned a shocked face tufted with shaving lather toward this heretic. "Why?"

"I've told you why, twenty times. Because I don't like the woman I've got coming."

"Then for the luvvagawd why did you ask her?"

"I liked her once," Jock said simply. As he said it he thought, "There! There's the whole trouble with me where women are concerned, in four words—'*I liked her once!*' Every darn time it evolves into that. I must be fickle as hell." Then came another idea. "Wonder if I'll ever say about Yvonne, 'I liked her once'?" This seemed to him impossibly absurd, and he grinned into the mirror. "Never," he assured himself. "I'll always love Yvonne. She's the one I've been looking for all my life."

Bones was talking on. "You and Dopey Lane ought to get together. Have you heard the sob-stuff about his girl?"

"No. What's the matter with her?"

"Everything but St. Vitus dance, to hear Dopey tell it. He says she's a complete zero. Just out of the cradle, and no stuff at all. He's running around telling everybody how she's the little girl who lives next door and his family roped him into asking her down, so nobody'll make a mistake and take her for his sweetie or anything. He'll have a fine weekend," Bones predicted as an afterthought.

"Seems to me the girl will have a worse one," answered Jock.

III

Five minutes of three.

The railroad station houses a gathering strictly stag. The platform groans with the tramp and stamp of young masculine impatience, and is animate with trouser-legs as wide as bolster-cases. Hundreds of boys are there, collegians, recognizable anywhere by their clothes, and the tilt of their hats, and their just-tubbed look, and their air of insouciance and irresponsibility and "what-the-hell-do-we-care-now." One senses light hearts and heavy hip pockets. They stand in groups, talking, or sit on baggage-trucks and swing their red-shod feet, or lean against posts and stare raptly into space, or rush about with such busy haste that their unbuttoned coats curve out on the air behind them like raccoon wigwams. They laugh, and whistle, and bawl forth jibes and aphorisms. The only thing they do not do is the thing they unanimously want to do—walk out on the tracks and peer for the train. They do not do this because they deem it "kid stuff," the natural trick of a youngster about to be taken on the choo-choo to see Grandma. He who succumbed,

and did it, would "get the razz." A number of them have cornered the ticket agent, a nervous individual with a taffy-candy mustache, and are telling him something in low solemn tones. He is listening sheepishly and rather suspiciously, and saying "Aw!" and "Aw, git out!" and "Aw, g'wan!"

Three o'clock.

There is a crackling electric tension in the air—then a cheer, and a general surge toward the platform's edge. The locomotive blows its warm quick breath against their faces, crashes past, stops. Strings of girls begin to spill from every coach. Magazine cover girls, these. Lovely laughing girls in furry coats and bright hats and wee ridiculous slippers. Blonde girls and dark, tall girls and tiny, all shapely and delicately tinted and sweet with perfume. Each poses an instant on the train steps, to look and to be looked at . . . then becomes a part of the crowd, and jostles, and grows breathless, and cries at last, "Oh, *there* you are!" . . . and is hailed happily, and seized, and borne away. . . .

Prom, glittering pageant of a glittering age, has begun.

IV

"And how's Molly?"

"Oh, fine, Jock, and so glad to be here!"

The roadster was parked at the rear of the station. Jock assisted Molly to it and into it, stowed away her luggage, then slid in himself over the side and slouched down beside her. "We'll have to wait a minute," he remarked. "I promised Bones we'd take him and his girl up with us."

They smiled at one another, Molly meaningly and

personally, Jock in a casual sort of way. "She's all right for a prom," he told himself. "Clothes, and looks, and an awfully good dancer. If only she doesn't start talking like an idiot—Oh Lord, she's going to!" he finished. He knew that preliminary flicker of the lashes.

"Jock," said Molly softly, "there were a million girls on that train, and I felt so superior to all of them, you can't imagine, because they were coming to the prom with just any old boy and I was coming with *you*. Oh, Jock, I'm so glad to be here—say you're a little glad to have me——"

The timely reappearance of Bones at this instant spared the necessity of a reply. He wore a fatuous grin, and by one arm he guided a slender, graceful girl with greenish eyes and commas of yellow hair sweeping out onto her cheeks below a green hat. Jock identified her as the original of the favorite photograph in Bones' collection.

"Norma, this is the roommate, Jock Hamill—don't believe anything he tells you about me. Miss Norma Knight, Jock. You know—the one I talk in my sleep about——"

Jock completed the mutual introductions, and observed that the two girls met with an instant hostility, only thinly veiled. "All prom-girls hate all other prom-girls," he made a mental note.

The ride up the hill to the fraternity house was accomplished in short order, and the girls escorted inside. There was a momentary pause in the lower hall while they squealed admiringly, in chorus, "Oh, isn't this *darling!*"—as was expected of them. Then Jock and Bones showed the way upstairs and to their room.

"Don't take long, you two," Bones commanded when they had set down numerous suitcases and were pre-

paring to withdraw. "There's an inter-fraternity tea dance at the Union at four o'clock, and you have to meet everybody and lap up a couple of cocktails apiece between now and then."

"We'll be down in ten minutes," promised Norma Knight.

"I'll be ready in five," added Molly, not to be outdone.

Jock and Bones descended the stairs again and encountered Dopey Lane and his girl just entering. Dopey presented them mournfully.

"Jock Hamill, Cecily Graves. And Bones Allen."

Jock's first thought was that she ought to put cold cream, or whatever it was they usually put, on her hands. The one that he took in greeting was rough and chapped. But it gave a firm pressure, and he liked that. Shaking hands with some girls was like gripping a listless bit of cotton batting.

"Hello, Miss Graves."

"How-do-you-do?"

Tinkling silver voice. But he saw that aside from the voice and the handclasp and a certain fundamental prettiness, Cecily Graves was all wrong. Her clothes were wrong, and the way she wore them was wrong, and even the silence that followed her "How-do-you-do" was wrong. Girls ought to say something more, immediately. When they did not they gave you an impression of timidity and stupidity—of either not knowing anything more to say, or of being too embarrassed to say it, or both. Jock decided that it was embarrassment in Cecily. Whatever else you might think of her, she didn't look stupid. Too bright a glint in the brown eyes for that.

"See you later," Dopey nodded, and conducted her past them toward the stairway.

"Gee, he did pick a quince, didn't he?" muttered Bones.

Jock looked thoughtful. "I believe I kind of like her," he said. And added, as Bones stared incredulously, "Anyway, I'm sorry for the poor little kid."

V

The girls who attend college proms are tabulated neatly within an hour of their arrival. In undergraduate language, they are either knockouts, or else they're dull thuds. There is no middle class. The knockouts enjoy two days of exhilarating popularity and unalloyed bliss. The dull thuds look on and wonder miserably why they had been so awfully excited about coming . . .

Everybody in the Zeta Kappa house—members of the fraternity, visiting young ladies, everybody—knew that Dopey Lane's prom-girl was a dull thud. They knew it the minute she came downstairs to join the group congregated in the living room. By the dark blue taffeta gown that bunched in the wrong places they knew it. By the heavy black stockings in a year of sheer flesh-colored ones, and by the hair that wasn't shingled, and by the face that wasn't rouged, and by the lack of self-confidence they knew it. But being ultra-modern boys and girls, unto whom "Everyone for himself" was the law, they did not care. They stared at her, hard, for a second or two. They summed her up, "No looks, no style, no *pep*." Then they forgot her utterly, the girls because they were not afraid of her, the boys because they were not interested.

Pep! Fuel for the speed of the generation! *Sine*

qua non of the ultra-moderns! The Zeta Kappa living room whizzed with it. The atmosphere was hectic with it. Every damsel strove to prove at once, then and there, that she had it—that she had more of it than any other damsel. You should have seen Norma Knight gulping straight Scotch from a bottle. You should have seen the celebrated Winky Winters, prom-trotter extraordinary, seated atop the piano, beating time on its mahogany with her sharp small heels. You should have seen Gloria Martin, minister's daughter, doing an imitation of Ted Lewis with somebody's derby hat. You should have seen Molly kissing each new man as she met him, saying, "Eventually—why not now?"

Pep! Something a little different, a little conspicuous, a little rowdy, and extremely loud—*pep!*

Through it all, Cecily Graves sat in a great armchair pushed to one side. She seemed literally to be clinging there, as one would cling to a small safe isle in a mad and treacherous sea. She was quite alone. Even Dopey had left her, drawn to the other side of the room by the irresistible pull of something-going-on. She sat speechless and motionless—that is, motionless except for her eyes, which darted here and there and everywhere excitedly. "She isn't missing a trick," Jock told himself.

After a time, meeting her glance over the top of Molly's head, he winked at her in a friendly way. Her reaction was immediate and pathetic. She seemed to shrink even further into the depths of the great chair; and then, an instant later, she smiled. Tremulously. Gratefully. With a look in her eyes like the eyes of a dog when you pat him.

This was quite too much for Jock. He abandoned Molly in the middle of the floor and went across to

her. He seized her wrists and pulled her to her feet. "You've got to dance with me, lady."

Just that. No "You look lonesome," no "why all by yourself"—none of the tactless remarks that another young man, with the best intentions in the world but without Jock's sensitive understanding, might have made. Instead, "You've got to dance with me"—as though he wanted her to tremendously, as though he could not wait.

And the brief glance he had of her face before it tucked itself out of sight against his shoulder told him unmistakably that he had made a friend, for life.

VI

Jock contrived to be seldom alone with Molly during the next two days. He rushed her determinedly from one festivity to the next, and somehow they found no opportunity for the sweet secluded moments that are as important as the prom itself to most prom couples. The shadowy billiard-room, the little corner back of the staircase—all the places known in the fraternity (and with reason) as "necking nooks"—saw them not. No one entered a room and backed out hastily, murmuring apologies, on their account. No one had opportunity to hoot at Molly because her hair was mussed. . . .

"I don't believe you love me any more, Jock."

"What makes you think that?"

"You've only kissed me once since I've been here, and that was just a tiny peck—sort of a sense-of-duty peck——"

"Well, when has there been time, for heaven's sake?"

Look here, Molly, be sensible: you got in yesterday afternoon at three. We met the bunch, hung around here for awhile, went over to the Union and danced till seven-thirty, dashed back to dress for the Dramatic Club show, saw that, and danced afterward till dawn. This morning we didn't get together until nearly noon, and then we had to have lunch, and after that the game, and then the tea dance here at the house, and now——”

“I notice,” broke in Molly, sniffing, “that other people find time. Your roommate and Norma——”

“Oh, well, Bones——” Jock dismissed Bones with a flip of his hand. “He's a glutton for that stuff, of course.”

“Besides,” Molly continued, “you certainly don't seem to have any trouble finding time to talk to that *ash-can*——that Cecily whatever-her-name-is who wears the bargain-basement clothes. What you can see in her is more than I can understand——”

“I'm sorry for her.”

“Well, I'm not! It's a girl's own fault if she's a——”

“It isn't Cecily's fault, Molly. She'd like to be different, but she just doesn't know how to go about it.”

“That's right!” flared Molly. “Stick up for her! Make a nut out of me by cutting in on her all the time, and talking to her, and kidding her——you're the only man who does, I'm sure of that! Can't you look at *my* side, for a change? Do you think it's flattering to me to be brought down here and then neglected for a simp with a shiny nose? Well, it isn't! It's positively *insulting*! People must certainly think I'm good, if I can't interest you any more than *she* does!”

This conversation took place in the roadster, which was bearing them from the fraternity house to the

gymnasium for the final big event of the weekend—the junior promenade. A distance of two blocks only, but Molly had declined to walk because she said she must spare her feet as much as possible. She sat well over in her own seat, the personification of injured pride and self-pity.

Jock said soothingly, "Don't you think you're making a mountain out of a molehill, Molly? Nobody is going to get the idea that you don't interest me. That's absurd. You know, and everybody knows, that I'm not paying any attention to her because she's attractive. It's just that she's so—so darn pitiful, Molly! I—maybe you won't understand this—but I can put myself in her place and feel exactly what she's going through, and it's hell, that's all. Everybody ignores her; even Dopey, who asked her here himself, is taking it out on her now by acting bored to death whenever he's near her, and I think it's a doggone rotten shame!"

"Yes, but why you should consider it's up to you—" Molly's voice broke suddenly, and her little flurry of fury died away. "Oh, Jock, I'm being silly, I know, but I l-love you and I can feel you slipping away from me, and I don't know what to do about it! Last summer—why, do you think you'd have known any other girl was *there*, even, last summer? No matter *how* pitiful she was?" Molly was crying frankly now into her bare ringed hands. "It's not the girl herself—it's everything about this weekend. It's your attitude, and your not wanting to kiss me, and—oh, Jock, what have I done to you—what did I ever do to you that made you stop caring about me any m-m-more——"

He had to guide the machine to the curb and halt there. He had to put his arms around the shuddering shoulders, and pat the bent head, and say, "Now Molly, don't—don't do that, *please*—you're just imagining

things, honestly you are! Dear, listen, your eyes will be all red for the party—" (a heaven-sent inspiration, this; the tears abated instantly). He had to lend her his handkerchief, because "Mine's just l-lace," and sit waiting while she repaired the ravages of grief with powder puff and rouge. "If it wouldn't ruin the whole evening," he thought, "I'd come straight out and tell her. No use trying to keep up a pretense, and I'm not going to do it much longer."

The junior promenade was in full cry when finally they reached the gymnasium. A typical college prom it was. Typical setting of fir boughs and potted palms, of banners and bunting, of Japanese lanterns and shifting searchlights, of polished floor with an orchestra on a raised dais at each end, of booths marked with the letters of twenty fraternities where chaperones sat yawning behind their feather fans. And a typical scene. Gowns of scarlet and green and orange and turquoise and cloth-of-gold, sophisticated gowns, blasé gowns, wise, knowing, faintly wicked gowns. Swirl of rainbow colors streaked with black. Curve of white arms across dark shoulders. Faces close together. Slim girl-bodies swaying backward from the hips. Stag-line in the middle of the hall, a thick wall opening to receive, to give back, elbowing itself, craning its neck, squirming, never still. Whisper of a thousand pairs of shoes along the floor. Croon of jazz. Blended odor of flowers and whiskey and perfume and soap and cigarettes and damp powder and brilliantine—the typical odor, the twentieth century odor.

Someone cut in on Molly before she and Jock had danced half the length of the gym, and Jock, thus freed, joined the stag-line. Here bits of sentences were flying about like missiles. "One in the yellow dress" . . . "and I said" . . . "oiled to the eyes"

. . . "but she's old enough to eat hay" . . . "from Milwaukee or somewhere" . . . "dance like a streak" . . . "pretty hot" . . . "try the strawberry blonde with Fat Hastings" . . . "flask empty already" . . . "fifteen minutes, by God, before anybody came to my rescue" . . .

Presently Jock saw Cecily Graves. She was dancing with Dopey, and both of them looked silently unhappy. Cecily's dress was pale blue, with tiny rosebuds here and there upon it. The sort of dress a little girl might wear to dancing school. When they passed the stag-line—quite close, so that Dopey might send an optical SOS to such of his friends as might be there—the stag-line looked around and above and beyond them, vacantly. All except Jock. He cut in.

"Dizzy go, isn't it?"

"What did you say?"

"I said," translated Jock, "it's a gay party." He beamed down at her. "You don't speak American, do you, Cecily? I've noticed that before."

"I shall by the time I leave here," Cecily said. "I'll know a lot of things by the time I leave here that I didn't know when I came."

"For instance?"

"Oh—things."

"By the way," Jock said, more to keep talking than because he wanted to know. "I meant to ask you—where do you live?"

"East Orange, New Jersey. Right next door to Ronald—Dopey, as you call him."

"And right next town to my town," Jock said. Then, as their feet collided smartly, he added, "Oh, I'm sorry."

"It must be awful to be a man and have to apologize when you know very well it wasn't your fault."

"But it was my fault."

"Oh, no it wasn't. I can't dance worth a cent, and I know it."

This was true; Cecily couldn't. She leaned too heavily, and moved too reluctantly, and grasped her partner's hand too tight. Still——

"You shouldn't have told me," Jock said. "I wouldn't have guessed it. I'm such a hell of a dancer myself, I always think I'm responsible and take the blame as a matter of course."

They danced on, and on, and on. No one cut in. No one even seemed to so much as look in their direction. Jock became alarmed. Good Lord, was he going to have to dance with her all evening? She was a nice little thing and he was sorry for her, sorry as the devil, but even charity should have an end somewhere. He strove to locate Dopey and finally spied him, suspiciously red of face, whirling about with Gloria Martin in his arms. Even while Jock watched, someone else took possession of Gloria, and Dopey, without a thought of his own responsibility, cut in promptly on another girl. The nerve of him! . . . Molly, Jock saw, was well taken care of. Men were cutting in on her with clock-like regularity.

"You're not listening!" complained Cecily's voice in his ear.

"I—pardon me! What was it you said?"

"I asked you to take me to the dressing room. I think my stocking's coming down——"

He conducted her outside to the dressing room in the corridor, and left her at the door. "Don't wait, please," she said. "Please don't wait. I'll find Dopey all right when I come back in."

Jock went blithely back and sought out Molly, who scoffed at him: "I saw you! I saw you playing nurse-

maid for four dances straight! I was tickled to death, too—serves you right for trying to be so doggone *kind* to people!”

“How’ve you been getting along?” Jock inquired amiably.

“Oh, fine. Didn’t miss you at all.”

“I saw you had a bevy of customers.”

“My feet,” announced Molly, “are simply killing me. One more hour of this and I doubt if I’ll be able to even limp. The damn new slippers——”

“In one more hour,” Jock assured her cheerfully, “it’ll be about midnight, and the dance will be not quite one-fourth over.”

Her moan floated back to him over the shoulder of Pink Davis, who had peremptorily snatched her away.

Jock cut in, successively, on Gloria Martin, on a languid brunette with earrings the size of butter plates, on Norma Knight, on a blonde who was mildly intoxicated, on a theatrical-looking girl who called him “big boy,” and on Winky Winters. They all greeted him graciously, and they all said much the same things. Well, it was about time he remembered they were there! They’d been wondering all evening when he was going to look their way. But of course, he’d been so absorbed in that queer little person Dopey Lane brought! . . . Every one of them had noticed him with Cecily, and knew approximately how long he had danced with her. Jock thought this very curious. Being that *rara avis*, a young man almost entirely without vanity, it did not occur to him that girls would always observe and mentally register all his activities, no matter how many other male beings there might be present.

Half an hour passed before he danced with Molly again. “Jock,” she declared then, “I *cannot* stand it, that’s all there is to it! I’ll have to go back to

the frat house and get another pair of shoes. These are brand new, and my feet are tired anyway from dancing constantly for two days, and I'm suffering *agonies*."

"I'll go back and get them. Tell me where they are."

"You never could find them——"

"Sure I could!" A suspicion that if Molly returned to the deserted fraternity house with him there would be another scene similar to the recent one in the roadster made Jock all the more emphatic. "Sure, Molly, I'll find them all right. Where'd you leave them? What do they look like?"

"They're silver," Molly said. "Silver brocade, and they tie on the instep with little tassels. They're in the closet—the only silver slippers in there unless Norma has a pair, in which case you'll know mine because they'll be the smallest. But I'd better go with you——"

Jock turned her over to an approaching stag, and went alone.

VII

The room that Molly and Norma Knight were occupying was the one inhabited in more normal times by Jock and Bones. But even though it belonged to him, Jock entered it almost guiltily, like a furtive intruder. It looked so feminine! Its chairs were festooned with wispy garments in pastel colors. Its chiffoniers supported a miscellany of hairpins and round gilt boxes and pearl beads and perfume bottles and crumpled handkerchiefs and lipsticks, and, over all, a light snowfall of powder. There were suitcases under the beds, suitcases somewhat ajar and foaming lace at the mouth. Jock opened the closet door and

peeped in. Gowns hung there in a row, and below them, innumerable small shoes trod carelessly on one another's toes.

He stooped to search for a pair of silver ones with little tasseled ties for the insteps, and as he did so he heard a sound.

He sat up, listening. He heard it again . . . a queer little muffled sound, rather like a whimper into a pillow. . . .

"Now who—?" he said aloud. But he knew. Of course. Who else, of all the Zeta Kappa guests, would be crying alone in the dark on prom night?

He went into the hall and called, "Cecily!"

No answer.

"Cecily, it's Jock Hamill. Let me talk to you a minute."

Still no answer.

Jock walked straight across to Dopey Lane's room, entered, and pressed the wall switch. Lights sprang out of the pitch blackness, revealing Cecily.

She lay face downward on the bed, in a heap, as though she had been crumpled like paper and flung there. The silk of her gown wrinkled over her like disturbed water, and her head was visible only as a mesh of thick brown hair framed in a triangle of arm. She looked tragic as she lay there, and crushed, and utterly hopeless.

"Why, Cecily!" Jock said. "Why listen—dear little kid—this won't do at all, you know!" She was the second weeping woman he had seen that night, but she did not affect him as Molly had. Instead she wrung his heart.

"Go away!" she mumbled.

"I will not! You sit up here this minute and tell me what it's all about."

Cecily shook her head so violently that tendrils of hair bounced like little springs.

"Then I'm going to wait here till you do," Jock told her firmly.

He waited in silence, and after an interval Cecily said, "Turn out the light."

When the room was in darkness again Jock could hear her stirring, sitting up—blowing her nose, even. Her voice came, still thick, but much more nearly normal. "What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I came over on an errand, and heard you——"

"How did you know it was I?"

"I missed you from the dance," Jock lied. "I was sure you couldn't be in the dressing room all that time. Cecily, tell me why——"

"You know why."

"No, I——"

"Oh, stop!" she wailed. "Don't lie to me—not *now*. Of course you know why I left, and why I'm crying, and just exactly what's wrong—of *course* you do. That's why you've been so wonderful to me ever since I came—because you were sorry for me. Oh, I know! I understood that, even though you acted just as if I was—was—as if you really liked me——"

"I do like you, Cecily."

"Do you really?"

"I really do."

"Enough to be absolutely frank with me?"

"Y-yes."

"Then tell me what to do!" cried Cecily passionately through the dark. "Tell me how to be like the rest of these girls—how to be *popular*! That's what I need—somebody who likes me well enough to be willing to tell me *that*!"

An honest appeal, straight from the heart. Jock

was not the man to resist it. "Sure I'll tell you," he said, "if I can. I don't know much about it, but I'll do my best." He hesitated. "Let's go downstairs, Cecily, don't you want to? Somebody's liable to come in and find us here—not that I care, but it might not look so well for you——"

They went down, Cecily with her rough little hand thrust into Jock's trustingly.

"You see, she said, "my mother has funny ideas about—about things. I'm seventeen, but she still treats me like an infant. She wants to keep me innocent and unsophisticated. Why, she even made me wear a pig-tail down my back until a year ago, and the only reason she finally let me bob my hair was because she thinks it's kind of little-girl-looking this way! She keeps me with her most of the time, and won't let me associate with girls my own age, and won't let me go away to school, although I've begged and *begged*. Goodness knows how she happened to let me come to this prom—I 'spose it's because she likes Ronald—Dopey—so well, and he's an old friend of the family. I—I never really had much of a chance to compare myself with other girls until now. And I know I'm different, and I don't *want* to be—I want to be just *like* them——"

She had flopped into a chair in the living room and sat now looking up at Jock from under swollen eyelids. Her hair was disheveled and her nose was red, and she would have been comical if she had not been so truly touching.

"That's right, *inspect* me!" she continued earnestly. "Just pick me to pieces and tell me every last thing that's wrong. That's what I want you to do!"

"You won't be offended? No matter what I say?"

"*Offended?* I should say not! I'll be grateful to

you till the last day I live, if you'll only—oh," she broke off to add, "you can't, you simply cannot imagine what it's like to come to a place like this and be a—a laughing-stock! Oh, I am—I know it—I can see! Do you think it's any fun not to ever be cut in on except by one man, out of *sympathy*—and then to have to pretend to go to the dressing room finally so's to give that man a chance to get away from you——"

"Oh, was *that* it?"

"Yes, that was it."

"And you ran back here to the house by yourself as soon as I left you?"

"Um-hum." Cecily's chin quivered threateningly, and she controlled it with an effort. "Go on," she urged. "Go on. Tell me everything that's wrong with me and just what I can do to change it——"

Jock pulled a chair up to face hers and seated himself so close that their knees touched. He cleared his throat in a business-like manner. "Well, to begin with," he said, "there're your clothes, Cecily. A woman could tell you just what's wrong with them, but I can't—I only know something is. You'll have to find out for yourself just what. They're not like the other girls' clothes—you can see that, can't you?"

"Yes, of course I can."

"They're—well, babyish. Little puffy sleeves, and high necks. I suppose your mother picks them out. Look here, Cecily, first of all you'll have to get your mother in hand, if she's the way you say she is. You'll have to show some spunk, and be independent—tell her you're going to buy your own clothes from now on. Think you can get away with that?"

"I'll try," said Cecily. "I guess maybe."

"Don't buy any more pinks and blues. They're such—such harmless-looking colors. Wishy-washy. Get

red, or something. Something that knocks 'em in the eye. And get them at a good place—" He halted diffidently. "I'm taking it for granted you have money——"

"I have. Plenty. At least, my father has."

"Oh, if you've got a father—my father is dead and I somehow get in the way of thinking only in terms of mothers—if you have a father, that simplifies matters. Get him in on it. Go back and tell him what an awful weekend you've had at this prom, and why. Tell him what you've told me, and what I'm going to tell you. He'll help you out, I'll bet. Older men understand things like that better than older women do, somehow. Anyway—find yourself a good shop—I'll get the name of a good one in New York for you if you want me to—and put yourself in the hands of some saleswoman that knows her business, and let her *rebuild* you. That's the idea! Let her give you bright colors for evening and snappy dark things for the street—I don't know what I'm talking about, of course, but I know what looks good to me. They ought to fit like a million dollars, but not be too wild. *Modus in rebus*—do you know what that means, Cecily?—everything in moderation, nothing too much. For instance; you know this Molly I have here for prom? Well, her clothes are just right—I'll say that for her. But this Winky Willard, the black-eyed one—hers are wrong. They shriek. They're too much. Do you see the difference?"

"I think so," said Cecily.

"You ought to wear those light whatchacallem stockings," Jock continued, warming to his subject increasingly. "The kind that make people wonder whether you have any on at all. They seem to be the thing this season and you've got good-looking legs—"

you could get away with them. And do you know one of the first things they teach a chorus-girl? To keep the seams of her stockings straight up the back. That goes for the laity as well. And don't wear low-heeled shoes, will you? I know a lot of girls do—fashionable girls, too—but they're ugly. There's no romance in them. Imagine drinking champagne out of a low-heeled mannish-looking shoe—not that anybody does that nowadays except in books, but you get the idea. Besides, high heels make your feet look littler and your ankles slimmer. I heard my very beautiful mother say that once, so I'm darn sure it's true. And more men look at girls' feet than you realize."

Jock paused to consider, and Cecily waited breathlessly.

"Something's the matter with your hair," he said at last critically. "It's bobbed, but it looks different from other bobbed hair."

She helped him out. "The rest of the girls here have theirs shingled. And marcelled. Mine's just an ordinary bob, and put up on kid curlers at night."

"That's it! I knew there was something. Well, go ahead and have it fixed right. And buy some rouge and some powder and a lipstick, and use them a little, but not much. Just enough so you leave a doubt in peoples' minds as to whether it's natural or artificial. And don't let anybody see you put it on. I never could understand why these damn women insist on painting in public. I saw a cartoon about that not long ago—a man shaving on a street car. After all, that would be just about as sensible, when you think of it."

"I'll remember," promised Cecily.

"You've got to learn to dance better," Jock went on. "I wouldn't admit it when I was being polite, but I will now—you're really a bum dancer. You're so

heavy, Cecily! You hang on my left thumb like—like a coat on a peg! You make a fellow feel like pounding you on the back and saying, 'Buck up, there!' all the time. Thing to do is, never lean, but support your own weight, and dance on your toes, and forget yourself and the man and the floor—just remember the music—get that in your ears and you'll dance all right. I'm not making you mad, am I?"

"No," said Cecily. "You're doing me good. Go on."

Jock obeyed. "Now, about talking. You'll simply have to sit down and think out a line for yourself. That's one thing you absolutely can't do without. And by 'a line' I don't mean a string of stereotyped remarks you're going to make to every man you meet, regardless. I mean a—a way of talking. Different words to different men, but the same spirit, if you get me. The same light touch. Try not to say the obvious thing, but say something only a little different from the obvious—if it's too different they'll brand you as brainy, and then you'll be done for for fair."

"Talk about the man you're with, Cecily. Make 'you' your word-of-all-work. And always, when you meet anyone or any group, make a remark during the first minute after you've been introduced. Let them know you're there. It doesn't matter what you say—anything'll do—but say something. For instance; remember yesterday, when Dopey introduced Bones and me to you in the hall? You said 'How-do-you-do' and let it go at that. You should have wise-cracked something or other—something like, 'Oh, *now* I know why I came!'—that's not a very good example but it's the best I can think of right now. It's what I heard Gloria Martin say to somebody yesterday."

"Your girl Molly," put in Cecily at this juncture,

"kissed all the men when you presented them. Was that—is that a good plan? I should think——"

"No!" cried Jock emphatically. "No, it's not. Don't pattern after Molly, Cecily, for heaven's sake, except perhaps in the matter of clothes. She's a trifle—well, don't pattern after her, that's all. Now, this kissing business is another thing. Don't deal 'em out broadcast, so that they're about as hard to procure as—as potatoes, and about as inspiring. Hang onto them. Remember there's a terrific wallop in unattainable things." He stopped meditating. "About pep—I'd say be peppy if you can, but don't *try* to be. I don't think there's anything worse than forced pep. Vivacity is spontaneous, or it's nothing. The things these girls do, for instance—things you've seen them do in the last twenty-four hours around here—are forced, to me. They're stunts, carefully thought out beforehand to attract attention. My idea of pep is always having something to say, and never appearing bored no matter who you're with, and always being ready to step out somewhere at a moment's notice—things like that. Not necessarily jumping around like a maniac, shouting and shimmying and all that exaggerated jazz-baby stuff——"

Sudden commotion interrupted him. Rattle of the front door knob, footsteps and voices in the hall—then Molly and Dopey Lane came in, seemingly blown in on a great frosty sigh of November air. Jock saw in a single glance that Dopey was quite drunk—he swayed from heels to toes and back again like a balancing toy as he stood there—and that Molly was very angry.

"S'big idea?" Dopey demanded, attempting a frown but achieving only a sort of grimace. "Li'l twoshome? "Woman——" he indicated Molly with a jerk of his thumb—"in hysherics about shoes."

Molly's countenance bore out this statement, although she said nothing.

Jock rose hastily. "Wait, I'll get 'em," he said. "Cecily and I were having a little gab session, and I forgot."

He bounded up the stairs, and down again a minute later bearing the silver slippers. Dopey and Cecily were standing in the hall, he with an arm laid across her shoulders in a gesture that appeared intimate but was probably merely for the sake of equilibrium. "She's not going back," he declared to Jock. "She's going bed. She's all in, aren't you, Sheshly?" He was flagrantly gratified about it.

"I am, I'm dead," Cecily said.

She shook hands with Jock, glancing up at him shyly. "Goodnight. And oh, *thank* you!"

"Goodnight," Jock echoed.

He watched her cross the hall and start up the stairs. Half way she hesitated, faced about. "'*Now* I know why I came!' " she quoted softly. . . .

VIII

Jock saw Dopey depart in glee for the gymnasium again. Then he walked back into the living room.

Molly was sitting rigidly in a chair. She had removed the offending slippers, and her slippered toes were sunk for greater comfort into a sofa cushion thrown on the floor. She clenched the arms of the chair convulsively, like a person at the dentist's. Anger had drained all the natural color from her face, so that her rouge resembled circles of rosy paper pasted on.

Jock felt a little penitent. There was something

about those small stockings digging into the cushion that pricked his conscience. "I'm sorry, Molly," he said humbly. "Really I am. I meant to come right back, but I found Cecily bawling her eyes out and I had to stay here until the poor little kid felt better. Come on now, Molly. Forgive me this once, and let's jump back to the gym." He stood beside her, patting her hand.

Now, Molly's feet ached throbbingly. Her head ached. Her back ached from bending at the unnatural dance-angle of the age. She had had five hours' sleep in forty-eight, and she saw herself a woman scorned in favor of a dowdy child. . . . The combination was almost more than flesh and blood could be expected to bear.

"Shut up!" she choked. "Don't speak to me! Don't you ever speak to me *again!*"

Then Jock felt penitent no longer; only wearied and disinterested. He shrugged his shoulders. "Just as you say."

He sat down several yards from her and, picking up a magazine, began to rustle through it. He thought, "She'll snap out of it in a minute or two. She always does." Presently a page of poetry caught his attention. He hunched forward, his elbows on his knees and his head thrust toward it as though he would dive straight into the printed words. He became absorbed. His eyes grew luminous. Now and then his lips moved, and once they twitched up in his crooked smile, murmuring, "This fellow Sandburg!" He had quite sincerely and artlessly forgotten that Molly was there.

She sat watching him.

After a long time she said, "Jock," and he looked up.

"You're pretending, aren't you?" she asked. Begged, almost.

But Jock's eyes were still luminous and faraway. "Humm?" he said.

And she knew he had not even heard her.

"Oh-h!" A queer rattle in her throat. Then swiftly she was leaning over him, striking at him like a little savage, raining small stinging blows on his face and head, on his chest. "I *hate* you—oh—you——"

The blade of indifference, sawing away at the cord, had severed it at last.

Jock caught her wrists and held them. Her frantic words continued. "I hate you—*oh* how I hate you—you asked me here and then treated me like *this*——"

A pause. Molly's face became less livid. Relaxed. She turned away. She picked up the silver slippers Jock had brought, and put them on, and tied the little tassels over the insteps. "All right," she said tonelessly. "We'll go back. A prom's a prom, and I won't let you spoil it for me. But I meant what I said. I do hate you—now. I never want to see you again."

IX

Upstairs, in the quiet dark, Cecily Graves was whispering, "I love him! I love him so! Oh, make me the way he likes girls to be . . ."

X

The prom was madder now. It seemed to rush and to lurch and to romp. It was hectic, hysterical. . . . Searchlights marched over it, dyeing faces purple and red and ghastly green, catching the beads and sequins

on the dresses and making momentary diamonds of them. The music panted. The musicians writhed and gyrated and sang and put on funny hats and beamed at all the prettiest of the girls. Innumerable feet stamped the last two notes of every tune they played. Collars were wilted, coiffures a little rumped now. The stag-line was no longer a line, but a disbanded force roaming at large, grabbing right and left. There was intoxication. And there was another, subtler undertone . . . desirous eyes, fleet touch of mouths in shadowy corners. . . . The chaperones had almost all gone home to bed, after the immemorial manner of chaperones when they begin to be needed.

For a time Jock stood by himself, staring at the dancers, thinking. Molly had danced off with someone, forgetting him. He was glad, glad. *What a relief!* It was all over, then. Ended as affairs of the heart should properly end, by the decree of the lady in the case. He rather reveled in her final display of what he termed "backbone." For that he liked her better than for all the tears and kisses and all the meek devotion that had preceded it. Now if only she didn't repent in the morning and spoil it all—she wouldn't, though. She was past that at last. Funny how the thing had happened! An accident, succeeding where all his calculated hints had failed. He hadn't set out deliberately to irritate her when he picked up the magazine.

Boy, what a dizzy mob this was! Half of them tight. Plenty of headaches abroad in the land tomorrow. Prohibition . . . forbidden jam for children to smear themselves with. Funny how liquor did different things to different people. Some could control their legs but not their tongues, and vice versa. Girls . . . some stupid, blinking like sun-dazed owls,

some hilarious, giggling foolishly at nothing. Girls who sprang up when the music started and shook their shoulders and rolled their eyes and swayed, with their elbows bent and palms outward, to its rhythm. Unofficial performers, aping their sisters of the chorus and the cabaret. You could tell the ones who weren't drinking. Faint lines of distaste and fatigue sketched across their foreheads. . . . Winky Winters over there. With a terrific edge. Hair all ruffled, and shoulder bare where she'd broken a strap, and didn't give a hoot. All she could do to get around. . . .

Jock never acknowledged a notion so old-fashioned, but he really intensely disliked to see girls drink. Not for any ethical reason; merely because it offended his sense of the fitness of things. Raw poison down soft white throats . . . reek of stale whiskey on lips that should be sweet for kissing. . . . Even when he handed over his flask, as he was often called upon to do, and stood by while some pink-and-white maiden partook generously of its contents, a voice inside him cried, "*No!*" wildly, over and over. The thing seemed to him so inappropriate that it was almost sacrilege . . . like stumbling on a cuspidor in a dainty silken boudoir. . . .

Pondering this now, he felt a creeping nausea. So many girls drunk! Revolting, unlovely. Girls were put on earth for men to worship, and look up to, and adore. And you couldn't, in this generation. Idols with clay feet. Even when you shut your eyes you could still see them, moving unsteadily, mouthing the phrases of bar room loafers . . . "Set 'em up!" . . . "Awful thirst tonight" . . . "Wet my whistle." You could fancy them being hideously sick, later.

Jock shook himself. "Snap out of it!" he muttered savagely. "Don't be a doggone prude! Those ideas

went out with hoopskirts. *I drink, don't I? Why shouldn't they?"*

He perceived Dopey Lane, teetering in a doorway, and he hastened toward him. "Got any of that gin left?"

Dopey mumbled something unintelligible but affirmative, and together they retired to the corridor. Jock drank deep. Ah-h, this was the way! This was the way not to mind what you saw—not to see anything you would mind. Conviviality and the spirit of the occasion and death to uncomfortable thoughts, in a few swallows of this sharp white fluid. . . .

He handed the bottle back.

"Keep," said Dopey thickly. "May need. I—Ivadnuf."

Jock spent the ensuing hours in a nebulous haze. warm and vague and very pleasant. Afterward he could recall only three things at all clearly: that Molly refused to dance with him; that he gave the orchestra a twenty-dollar bill to play *Cry Baby* just once more; and that he took a girl he didn't know outdoors for air, and walked her around and around the tennis courts, and was amused rather than disgusted when she gasped, "I can't help it!"—and didn't.

XI

Prom broke up the next morning.

Molly went home still violently enraged at Jock, and rather proud of herself for being enraged. She would even boast about it a little to her friends. "Believe me, I told him where to get off!" And in years to come she would list him among the suitors who had

battered the door of her heart in vain. Women delude themselves so, for their greater conceit and peace of mind.

Cecily went home full of a strong resolve, and happy because Jock had sought her out to say good-bye at the station.

Jock forgot Molly as soon as she was away from his sight. A closed book, Molly. A book that had started well, and ended in a fashion that contented him, but proved too unbearably dull in the interim ever to be opened again. . . . Of Cecily he thought in occasional fugitive moments, during lectures, or when he was alone in his room. He wondered if his advice would be heeded, and if he had given her anything that would prove at all helpful. He very sincerely hoped that he had, but he rather doubted it now. Reminiscences of himself in the rôle of mentor struck him as humorous. He conjured up a vision of an inscription reading, " 'Things a Young Girl Should Know,' by Jock Hamill," and chuckled greatly over it. "I had nerve! What do I know about it, for cat's sake? Why didn't I send her to some other girl to learn her stuff?" . . . He did not realize that no girl living could have made the impression on Cecily's mind that he had made.

After the first few days, he quite forgot her, also.

XII

He was walking down Campus Street, feeling very merry. Yvonne had written that he might come to see her on Saturday, and all was right with the world. He whistled as he went along, and once he shied a

book over the low hanging branch of a tree and caught it again . . .

A little coupé, shiny-new, passed him and stopped close to the curb with a mournful whine of brakes. He saw that Eunice Hathaway was driving it. She sat half turned about in her seat, waiting for him to catch up to her. He thought, sighing, "I've got to go through *this* now, have I?"

He hailed her with what cordiality he could muster and said, "Where'd you get that doggy-looking wagon?"

"Brad," answered Eunice. "It's a Christmas present, a month early. Get in, Jock, and I'll take you to ride."

"Can't," Jock said hastily. "Thanks just the same, Eunice, but I can't to-day. I've got a class in a few minutes." Her eyes made him uneasy, and to stave off if possible what was coming he broke into praise of the machine. "Gee, it's a little beaut, isn't it? Just the thing for you for around town. How's it go? Linden Avenue hill on high, I'll bet money."

But Eunice was not to be diverted by such subterfuge. She put a hand gloved in suede through the coupé's open window and laid it on Jock's coat lapel. "Jock deah, I've been wantin' to see you and talk to you. Why don't you evah come ovah any moah? Do you realize I haven't even seen you since that football game you took me to, neahly two months ago?"

An impulse to tell Eunice exactly why she had not seen him, and wouldn't, if he could help it, from now on, assailed Jock. But thought of Brad prevented him. She might tell Brad, twisting the story in some way so that Brad would be angry with him . . .

"I know it, Eunice," he said. "I'm sorry about it,

too. I've tried to get over several times, but something always comes up. I'm so damned rushed these days." To strengthen this, he lied, "Once I went, and neither of you were home——"

Eunice took him at his word. "Oh, that's too bad! But I'm glad you've tried, anyway. I was beginnin' to think you were mad at Eunice, and I've been lyin' awake nights tryin' to figure out why."

"Yes, I'll bet you have!"

Eunice nodded. "I have, Jock." And looked deep into his eyes until Jock shifted them.

"I'll call you up some day soon," he promised ingratiatingly. "Just as soon as I can get a spare minute."

"Oh, do!" implored Eunice. "I've—we've both missed you so."

A few minutes later Jock watched the coupé wheel away from the curb and down the street. "I'll call her up, yah, the hell I will!" he told himself. And added, "I suppose the next I know they'll be saying I bought her that coupé, too."

He walked on, sober and puzzled. . . .

XIII

On Saturday he cut two classes to catch an early New York train, and spent the hiatus between his arrival and the hour when Yvonne expected him in buying things for her. Assorted small things, chosen because they reminded him of her, or seemed suitable to her, or merely because they chanced to catch his fancy. A looking-glass rimmed in old silver, with a delicately wrought figurine of a woman for its handle.

A pair of jade earrings. A fan made of peacock feathers. An Egyptian carved ivory cigarette box. A pair of high-heeled silken mules trimmed with ostrich and rhinestone buckles. Two thin volumes of poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay. . . . He shopped, as men do, with elaborate boredom and carelessness, so that the salespeople should clearly understand that all this was to him a matter of the most trivial unimportance.

Thought of candy drew him at length into a gay little store where the lights were pink and the air was heavy and sugar-smelling, but he left without making a purchase. Candy was too conventional for Yvonne, too much the sort of thing one gave to girls one didn't care about. Perfume? No, perfume wouldn't do either. The fragrance that hung about Yvonne and stirred when she stirred was a thing not put up in bottles to be sold at random. It was a thing most personally Yvonne's. It told of rare sachets in bureau drawers, and costly crystals of salt in the bath, and a shining exquisite cleanliness. You couldn't buy it. Well, flowers, then. How about flowers? Conventional, too, of course, if you got roses or violets, but there were other kinds. . . . He selected finally a huge sheaf of red poppies. All his other gifts he had had sent, but the poppies he took along, carrying the box under his arm with a lordly air of having not the faintest idea how it came to be there.

Yvonne's maid answered his ring. A musical comedy maid in a black silk gown with short flipping skirts. She eyed Jock deferentially, being a servant, and approvingly, being a woman. "Miss Mountford—" she began.

"—is making herself beautiful for Mr. Hamill," finished Yvonne's voice from an open door a little

down the hall. "Compose yourself and wait, my dear."

Jock thought how strange it was that when you were not in love you could say quite charming things, and then when you were in love, and needed them, they were gone, and only the most utter banalities came to your lips. He could think of nothing now except, "God has already made you beautiful," or "Why gild the lily?"—and these he would not say, and loathed while he thought them for their hackneyed insufficiency.

He sat down on the piano bench to wait; then on second thought moved across to the black velvet divan in front of the fireplace. He had a greater sense of Yvonne's nearness there. Mental associations. . . . He was excited. The moments just preceding a meeting with her were always exciting. You could never tell what her mood would be, and so you had an inward fluttering anticipation comparable to the childhood thrill of a grab-bag at a fair. You didn't know just what you might draw, but you knew that whatever it was you were sure to enjoy it. He said to himself, "In a minute now. In just a minute she'll come in that door—so wonderful—and I'll kiss her——"

This thought made him feel a trifle dizzy, a bit gone inside. He had kissed Yvonne many times now, but the miracle of it seemed never to lessen. It was like holding all the things in the world that were lovely and precious and rare inside the little oval of your arms. A "world-is-mine" emotion it gave you. Her body was so softly pliant, and her lips could send a sort of lightening through the veins.

Footsteps tapped along the hall and he leaped up—then sat down again. It was only the maid. She bore a great flat package wrapped loosely in paper

and bleeding strings of red. "Miss Mountford wants you to look these over," she said, laying the package in Jock's lap. "They're new pictures she's just had taken."

A dozen different Yvones in a paper package. There was a regal Yvonne. Hair twined like a coronet, chin lifted haughtily, standing against a dark background in a gown all pearls, with one hand at her throat, the other on her hip. There was a rakish, mischievous Yvonne, dimpling back at you over her shoulder. There was a boyish Yvonne in a starched Buster Brown collar tied with a bow. There was a pensive Yvonne whose eyes looked straight into yours and said, "I am thinking of you, Jock Hamill." Clever pictures. Triumph of the photographers' art. A dozen moods imprisoned in sepia.

Jock chose the two that especially appealed to him and set them on the mantelpiece, and, standing off with folded arms, surveyed them. And unexpectedly, tears itched at his eyelids and he said, "God." Beauty like that was a physical hurt; it was a shining sword thrust through and through him. "Why?" he thought. "Why should it make me sad?" He knew. Because it was transient. Because some day there would be little wheel-spoke wrinkles beside those eyes, and deep ugly grooves from the nose to the corners of the mouth. Because some day Yvonne would show these pictures to people and hear them say, "My, but you were pretty when you were a girl!" The thought tore him unendurably. There was something heartbreaking in knowing that loveliness like Yvonne's could not always stay the same, and be immortal.

He dismissed this melancholy with an effort. He took one of the photographs and played a little game with it. He held it out as though for an invisible

someone to look at, and then to this invisible someone he announced, "Here's a picture of my wife, if you'd like to look at it . . ." A hot flush stung his face. Partly shame, because he was being ridiculous, and partly happiness because the very words were a delirium. . . .

XIV

"And do you like the pictures?"

They were sitting close together on the divan, Yvonne's head against Jock's arm. He looked down at her, marveling. Her vivid hair, her face, those long gray lazy-lidded eyes. . . . He thought, "*Pictures!* They're nothing. It's like trying to photograph a sunset. You get the lines, but not the glory. It's like me when I try to express her in words. Colorless and dead. A painter or a poet could do her justice, but not a camera-man nor a mute fool like me . . ."

He said, "They're beautiful phantoms of you."

"Which do you like best?"

Jock took one from the pile. "This."

Yvonne sighed, glancing at it. "Of course," she said, as though she spoke to no hearer. "The one that looks the youngest."

"Birdseed!" snorted Jock. "You talk as though you were old."

"And don't you think I am?"

"I think you're about my age."

"And how old are you, Jock Hamill?"

"Twenty-two."

She smiled dreamily. "How nice to be twenty-two!"

Jock thought, "She may be a year or two older."

Perhaps twenty-four. She *can't* be any more than that."

He kissed her fiercely, as though through her lips he would impress her mind with the total irrelevance of comparative ages.

They talked. Or rather, Yvonne talked. Jock sat silent, looking into her eyes. You could write a book from the things in Yvonne's eyes. "Remembered loves," he speculated. "Lost twilights. Music, and wisdom, and sun and shadow, and pain." . . . He held her hands. He laid them flat against his, and folded them into fists and chuckled over their littleness, and buried his nose in their perfumed palms. . . . She had classic hands. Narrow artistic fingers, and a thumb that could be pulled backward until it formed a pinkish-white arch. . . . He stroked her hair. Queer, about her hair. Sometimes it was bobbed, and at other times you were sure it wasn't. She fixed it in so many ways, all of them enchantingly becoming.

His mind was too full of her to concentrate on the impersonal things she was saying. But presently he heard, "—because I'm going away tomorrow—"

He sat up with a start. "You're *what?*"

"I'm going away tomorrow."

"You're not!"

"Yes I am. I'm going to California."

"For how long?" he groaned.

"Oh—I don't know exactly. Several months, I suppose."

Several months! *Several—months!* Jock felt joy ride out of him on those two words like a fairy princess on horseback, leaving only an ache and an emptiness. Several months. . . .

"And do you care so much, Jock Hamill?"

Yvonne was grave and troubled now, looking at him. She put her hands against his face and brought it down to hers. Bitter-sweet, that kiss, and long . . . long . . . because there would not be many more. . . .

"Yvonne, you *can't* go!"

"I must, my dear."

"But why? Why?"

"I have to, that's all."

"You mean you want to!" Jock accused angrily. "You're going because you want to go, and *I—I—*" He broke off, unable to express himself. He drew away, dug his chin into the palm of one hand, and glared ahead of him. He would have been horrified to know how like a sulky little boy he looked. "But of course," he added, "it doesn't make any difference to you how *I* feel."

"It makes a tremendous difference, Jock' Hamill."

He glanced at her sharply. "You mean you won't go after all?"

"I mean that I rather wanted to go, before," said Yvonne, "and now I don't want to go, and I'm sorry I have to, since it hurts you."

"Then don't! Why do you have to! Don't go! Stay here with me—marry me—" He was holding her close again, crushing her. "Yvonne, why won't you marry me? Don't you care a little about me?" Suddenly he reminded himself of Molly. Those words were Molly's, once. That hurt beseeching tone was Molly's. And what a fool Molly had seemed. . . .

His arms dropped away and he put his head in his hands. "God, this world!" he muttered. "No justice. Men love women who don't love them, and are loved in turn by women they don't love——"

"Dear," said Yvonne, "I do love you. Quite a great deal. I told you that the last time you were

here, and it's true. But I also told you I can't marry you, and that's true too. There are reasons why I can't—many excellent reasons—but not caring enough about you isn't one of them."

"Well, what *is* one of them? You're not married already. You say you don't love anyone else any better. What *is* it? This damn vagueness is driving me crazy, Yvonne! Don't you think it's about time you told me a little about yourself?"

For the barest minute Yvonne seemed to waver, and Jock thought, "Now! Now, I'm going to know!" But when she spoke it was to say, "After I come back I'll tell you everything. But not today. I want to leave you thinking of me—sweetly."

"Nothing you could tell me would ever change the way I think of you, Yvonne. You know that."

"I—hope that." She made a noticeable distinction.

There was a silence, and then she rose and went out of the room. Jock remained, brooding. . . . Several months. It had a ghastly sound, incessant and drear, like a prison sentence. Several months without Yvonne. Without beauty, without color, without flame. A stretching nothingness. An æon of misery, to be got through heaven alone knew how. But she cared a little, and that was something. And when she returned she would tell him. . . .

Presently he became restless. His last afternoon with her, and again he was waiting here alone, squandering all too many priceless minutes. "Yvonne!" he shouted.

"Yes?"

"Come back here!"

"I will, in a second. I'm putting a hat and coat on."

"Why, what for?"

"Because we're going to take a walk in Central Park."

And they did. Somehow people always did what Yvonne wanted. Until evening dropped down on New York and the buildings were checkerboards of light and darkness they walked, and talked lightly (because Yvonne wanted it to be lightly) and grew pink with chill, and sparkling-eyed. . . .

"Isn't it glorious?" breathed Yvonne.

"Not as glorious as being back at your apartment."

Her laugh was a chord from a gay sweet song. "Don't you like Central Park?"

"I don't like any public place, with you, on our last——"

She intentionally misunderstood him. "Now *there's* a pretty compliment!" she mocked. "Of course there are men who don't care to be seen about with me, but I didn't think the list included you!"

Sheer nonsense, of course. But Jock wished she would not say such things.

They walked slowly, sauntering. A couple to make tired faces lift and soften as they passed, the boy so young, so good to look at, the girl perhaps not quite as young, but exotic, picturesque, in a chinchilla coat and a hat that cast flattering shadows. . . . Jock held Yvonne's arm tucked close to him, and his eyes never left her. They caressed her, did her homage.

"You mustn't look like that, Jock Hamill."

"Like what?"

"As though you were in love with me."

"Good Lord, I *am*——"

"Yes, but why let everybody know?"

They were nearing a bench on which reposed the shapeless figure of an old ragged man. Jock halted. "Sir," he said politely, "allow me to announce that

I'm in love with this woman, and please tell as many people as you can find to listen."

They went on. "Silly boy!" smiled Yvonne tenderly.

Jock looked sober. "Did you get his expression?" he asked. "Surprised, and after that, wistful? It made him feel old and forlorn—the contrast—I'm sorry I did it——"

XV.

Their parting took place at five-thirty, abruptly. "Do you see that taxicab, Jock Hamill?"

"I do."

"Put me into it and send me home."

Jock stopped dead in his tracks. "Send you home? I'll do nothing of the sort! Why, I thought—aren't you going to have dinner with me? Yvonne! Your last night——"

"I'd rather you'd remember me in Central Park," said Yvonne, "than in an atmosphere of clattering china and planked steaks and—flappers." And to this decision she clung obstinately, though Jock tried almost with desperation to dissuade her. He felt cheated. She had tricked him into talking of inconsequential things when he thought he had hours left in which to talk, and he had said nothing of what filled his mind. Also he felt tortured, as though something inside him was dying a little. . . .

"Don't say good-bye," Yvonne commanded from the taxi. "I abominate that word. Just say something very collegiate and foolish—'See you in church,' or something like that——"

But Jock, stricken, could not even say something like that.

The door slammed.

Portrait of a lady, with a big black hat, with curving red hair, with lips that smiled and eyes that strangely did not smile. . . .

Then she was gone.

XVI

The next day, in the automobile section of a New York Sunday paper, Jock chanced upon a single-column cut of a man whose features were dimly familiar. The caption line conveyed nothing to him. "Parke Demorest, president and general manager of the Demorest Motors Corporation." He looked hard at the picture again, scowling in concentration. Then it came to him. This was the man with the cold blue eyes who had entered the restaurant that first time he and Yvonne lunched together—the man whom Yvonne had joined, and with whom she had talked so long. Jock could almost hear her voice again, saying, "You have me coining epigrams, Parke," and then something about jealousy. . . . So that was who the fellow was? Parke Demorest, of Demorest Motors. Rich as Croesus. . . .

He read the paragraph below the picture, an announcement of the purchase of some other, more obscure make of motor car by Parke Demorest. And finally, at the bottom, this:

"Mr. Demorest is leaving today for a sojourn in California . . ."

XVII

The first two weeks of December were busy, for which Jock was thankful, because they left him little time for thinking and remembering. He wished that he need not think at all; that he might make his mind a blank until such day as Yvonne should return from California and tell him the truth. Plenty of time then to cogitate matters. No use to try to do it now, when all one's suspicions were based on a single line of newspaper type that might possibly prove to be only coincidence, after all.

Numerous activities connived to keep him occupied. For one thing, he suddenly stared wild-eyed into the face of the fact that he had done almost no studying during the term. Midyear exams loomed, a distinct and not far-distant menace. He turned to his subjects and began to absorb them with an avidity that incited Bones to lofty scorn. He took to listening in classes where he had previously only dreamed, and the fly-leaves of his textbooks knew his idly-scrawling pencil no longer.

For another thing, there was "practice." This meant that day after day Jock with his banjo and numerous comrades with instruments of divers sorts sat in informal attitudes around a great barren platform, while before them a frenzied youth in spectacles beat time, and tore his hair, and howled, "Come on, you saxes! What's the matter with the second violin? Louder, louder! Softer! *Slower!* Hey, get into the spirit of this thing, will you, fellows? Quit syncopating, over there—this is one tune that's got to be played as is. Oh, rotten! Lousy. We'll get hissed off the stage—" "We" was the University

Musical Club, a combination of vocalists and instrumentalists, and the occasion of the practice was a concert to be given before the élite of Boston on the first night of the Christmas vacation.

Then additionally, there was *Blah-Blah*. This was a slender booklet of undergraduate wit, which appeared monthly under an invariably pursed-lipped female cover. Jock belonged to its editorial staff. Among other duties, he was expected to contribute assorted items to its pages every month, and he had long since established a reputation as a source of bubbling light verse, short artful skits, and "He: She:" jokes. There was a chuckle in everything of his that appeared in the magazine. He left the sentimental poetry and the really artistic bits of writing to contributors who felt them less deeply than he, and hence could more readily laugh them off. About the campus he was deemed a budding humorist, and no one knew nor guessed the nature of the pages and pages of material he wrote and did not publish, but hid away.

During early December he conceived and executed "The Confessions of a Dormitory Cockroach," to be run in four hilarious instalments. He did three jingles, "Ode to a Wastebasket," "Peter the Petter" and "Girls Who Get None of My Time," and one playlet entitled "The Wages of Gin is Breath." These went direct to *Blah-Blah*. He also composed during this period, twenty-seven poems that did not go to *Blah-Blah*. Of each of these, Yvonne was the *leitmotif*. . . . He wrote her letters also, but futilely, for he knew not where to send them. His first one, mailed to her at the Park Avenue apartment, had been returned marked "Present address unknown." The only communication he had had from her was a package containing the photograph he had said he liked

best. No note accompanied it, but across the back Yvonne had written lines culled from one of the volumes of poetry Jock had given her:

“. . . And I am made aware of many a week
I shall consume, remembering in what way
Your dark hair grows about your brow and cheek
And what divine absurdities you say . . .”

He purchased a costly frame and put the photograph in it. But after a day or two he discarded the frame, so that he could read the writing on the back again and again. That was Yvonne, telling him she would not forget him; that was solace. Whenever he stared into her pictured face, that other face from the newspaper clipping seemed to dance like a demon before him, and laugh at him through Yvonne's eyes. . . . He found himself looking more often at the quotation than at the photograph.

He sought companionship, especially in the evenings. He joined his fraternity brothers in long talk-fests around the living-room fire, where they lounged with that indolent droop of the spinal column peculiar to youth, and smoked pipes, and conversed about women. Women were the perennial topic at the University. All other matters were discussed on schedule—football in the autumn, baseball in the spring—but women held sway at all seasons. . . . One night, after an exhaustive session, Jock sat up late compiling for his own edification a list of “Contents of an Average Undergraduate's Mind.” It ran somewhat as follows: “Four brunettes. Nineteen blondes. Two hundred and twenty telephone numbers. Addresses of seven bootleggers. Probable outcome of Dempsey's next fight. Probable outcome of next world series. Innumerable stories about traveling salesmen, about Pat

and Mike, about honeymoons. Assorted rhymes, most of them beginning, 'Here's to the girl who—.' Babe Ruth's batting-average. Automobiles. Petting. Marilyn Miller. Gloria Swanson. The All-American. The backfield from Notre Dame. Barney Google" . . . When he had completed this he tore it up without reading it over, calling himself a supercilious ass and feeling ashamed of his disloyalty.

He went to movies and vaudeville shows with others of his ilk and sat stuffing popcorn and cheering sonorously at all unnecessary junctures. At Commons, the dining hall for underclassmen and non-fraternity students, he participated in an indignant riot staged principally by boys who, like himself, did not eat there, and hurled biscuits and butter in every direction. Adopting the two favorite fads of the year, he dispensed with garters and slit his hats at the tops of the crowns so that his hair might stick up through, a waving ebony plume. He went twice to New York to see revues, and once, in company with Bill Olmstead and "Cracker" Ferguson, he took three chorus girls to supper. He became a little intoxicated three times, and very intoxicated twice. . . .

In such ways he sought to shut out of his mind Parke Demorest of Demorest Motors.

XVIII

One night, rather reluctantly, he accompanied a quorum of sensation-seeking lads to a "Black-and-Tan" dance hall some fifteen miles away from the college town.

The room was vast, low-ceilinged, and one thought

not altogether clean, though the smoky shadows lay so thickly everywhere that one could not be sure. There had been a rather pathetic attempt at decoration. Loops of cheesecloth, colored crêpe paper bonnets over the lights—things like that. The dance floor had a fence around it, and an orchestra of negroes wearing dinner coats played in the center. Outside the fence there were tables covered with squares of coarse stained linen, and surrounded by weirdly ill-matched couples. Black and tan. Black and white. White and tan. . . . There was something furtive about the place; a sense of wrong-doing. You breathed it in with the atmosphere. You read it in the shifting eyes. It was, in fact, what brought you there and made you stay.

They took a table close to the railing. They were quite uproarious already, and in order that they might continue to be so they ordered drinks from a dark-skinned waitress who put her arms across the shoulders of the nearest two boys as she listened. . . . Jock hoped she would hurry with the drinks. The place filled him with aversion and loathing, and he wanted liquor with which to overcome this feeling before his companions should detect it and begin to "kid" him. He was now, as always, eager to seem to enjoy the things that they enjoyed,—to be a good fellow, no matter what secret shivers of distaste it cost him.

He looked about him, glancing quickly from one table to the next . . . if you let your eyes rest long on any one spot in a place like this you acquired entangling alliances. After a moment he gave a barely perceptible jump and then almost, not quite, cried out.

Brad Hathaway! Sitting alone at a table in a

distant corner. Steady old Brad, who never drank, who never dissipated, alone in this *dive!* . . .

Jock leaned back in his chair, feeling suddenly shaken and tired and a little old. Brad. Alone. When you came to a Black-and-Tan with a crowd, that was one thing. You were sight-seeing, then; being devilish in a different way. You meant no evil. But when you came alone, a sneak in the night, that was something else again. . . . Brad. Of *all* people.

The others were watching a woman dance, a fat black woman in brief striped satin knickers and red stockings. They were making jocular comments among themselves. None of them had discovered Brad as yet, and Jock became determined on the instant that none should discover him. "I'll have to let him know we're here," he told himself. "I'll have to get him out somehow—or the whole college will be talking about it in the morning——"

As though this thought had traveled with incredible swiftness across the dusky air, Brad turned his head and saw them. And if Jock had had any doubts in his mind as to Brad's guilt, he lost them now. Brad rose instantly and moved along the far aisle, his head bent low, his hat on, shading his face. . . . In a moment he had vanished through the outer door.

"Pretended he didn't know me," Jock thought. "Slinking out like a criminal. Brad! If it was anyone else I wouldn't care, but *Brad*—why, it—it's like losing your faith in God!"

He pushed back his chair and stood up. "I'm going," he said gruffly.

Attention centered on him then, and voices pattered against his ears: "What for?" . . . "Going? Why, we just got here!" . . . "What's the big idea?" . . . "What's the matter, Jock, got cold feet or some

thing?" . . . "Yah, the boy is going to go south on us." . . .

They were kidding him, but it didn't matter now. Nothing mattered except Brad. "Got to go," he insisted. "Damn place makes me sick."

But when he was outside he thought, "Now that was dumb! Brad didn't want me to see him—why am I following him like this?" He was relieved for Brad's sake that he did not encounter him anywhere about the building nor in the yard where the cars were parked. "Probably had Eunice's coupé and dashed home in it," he decided.

He would not go back into the dance hall. He felt that he never wanted to see it again. He waited a few minutes, to give Brad a fair head-start; then he drove back to town slowly, his face a drawn white oval above the steering wheel.

When he and Brad met accidentally in a stationery store a few days later, both of them behaved as though they had not seen one another in weeks.

XIX

The Musical Club concert that initiated the holidays went off better than anyone could possibly have expected, and when it was over Jock stayed on for a little visit with Bones Allen, whose parents lived in Boston. He had not wanted particularly to do this, succumbing without enthusiasm to Bones' urgent entreaties, but he was glad afterward that he had. And this was because of Bones' sister.

Not a girl he'd ever fall in love with, he told himself, even if he were not already so much in love with Yvonne that no other girl on earth mattered. Just a

person he enjoyed. Her intimate name was Peg, and her vitality was inexhaustible, and she was famous from Cape Cod to the North Shore as the girl who had once captured a live goldfish from a fountain in a hotel lobby and swallowed it whole (to mention only one of numerous astonishing escapades). She was piquant rather than pretty—"cute" was the adjective invariably applied by contemporaries of both sexes—with light clipped hair, indigo eyes, an up-tilted nose that seemed to be eternally sniffing some delicious odor, and the figure of a little boy.

The Allens dwelt in one of those houses on Beacon Street that look as though only dour-faced, desiccated maiden ladies in black taffeta should come into or go out of them. Bones himself ill-fitted this atmosphere, but Peg fitted it worse. She was to it an unpardonable anomaly, like a saxophone at a funeral. . . . Jock spent five days there, and lively days they were. They began with breakfast at noon, and proceeded thence at a spanking pace through matinées, skating parties, motoring parties, tea dances, dinner dances and road-house dances, back to bed again at three or four or thereabouts. To all festivities Jock escorted Peg, by mutual agreement and with wholesale disregard on her part of "dates" prearranged, and Bones and some lovely moron accompanied them.

Jock liked Peg tremendously for her *diablerie* and recklessness and perpetual high spirits. It was not until the third day of his visit that he discovered a serious side that made him like her all the better.

On the afternoon of that day there fell a slight lull in carnival, and she demanded that he come and talk to her in the Reprobate's Retreat.

The name was, of course, Peg's, and the room was also Peg's—so individually hers that one's clearest

memory of her when one went away was with it as background. It adjoined her bedroom and looked out on Beacon Street, though Beacon Street, providentially, could not reciprocate. Its furniture was shiny black, like patent leather, and decorated with enormous scarlet birds of a genus never known on land or sea (Peg herself had painted them). The walls were scarlet, and about and over them trophies and knicknacks of every description were spilled. Here the perplexed eye beheld photographs, dance programs, pen-and-ink drawings, banners, a battered football, a small blue satin slipper, an oar carved with a thousand initials, a dollar bill in a frame, a tin dipper, the rim of a derby hat, a rubber doll, several empty champagne bottles, a ukulele without strings, a remnant of scarlet bathing suit, an Army Officer's cap—all hung willy-nilly on the wall, as though Peg had stood in the doorway and flung them and they had stuck where they hit. It was a museum of memories, each separate exhibit with its history. Peg adored it, and frequently avowed her intention of living exclusively in it, and never for an instant leaving it, from the age of fifty until she died, at which time the variety was to be stripped from place and buried with her.

In this room she reclined now in a wicker chaise longue, while Jock, who had not been admitted before, made a tour of inspection.

"Sit down!" Peg directed. "I asked you up here to talk, not to stand speechless and pop-eyed."

"Can you blame me?" said Jock. "I never saw such a place." He took a chair. "Well, what'll we talk about?"

"You. Why won't you let yourself be yourself, Jock?"

"Why, I do! I am!"

"You don't, and you're not. Don't try to give me that line, young fella, because I know better. You're a *poseur*. You devote all your ingenuity to making everybody think you're different from what you are. Life's a masquerade to you, and you go wearing a—a clown suit."

"Say!" cried Jock, surprised and alarmed. "Say, why, you're uncanny! How did you guess that? Hardly anyone ever does, unless I tell them."

"I don't know how I guessed it," Peg said. "Call it feminine insight, or whatever you like. Anyway, I knew it as soon as I'd talked to you five minutes. I think I even got wind of it before I ever met you, from things Bones said." She lit a cigarette and added judicially, "Of course Bones doesn't realize it himself, except subconsciously. Bones never realizes anything unless you explain it to him with great care and draw a few little diagrams. He's a dumbbell."

"He's a great guy, though," said Jock.

"One of the greatest," Peg agreed. "I worship him. But he's a dumbbell none the less. I'm a dumbbell too, but not quite such a hopeless one as Bones. I never read, and seldom think, but I've got imagination, which he most decidedly hasn't. And I flatter myself I know a lot about people—boys especially. I ought to, they're the only subject I've ever really studied. Most of them are the same. Cut off the same piece of goods, with the same pattern. But you're not, Jock. You're different. And what I can't understand is, why do you work so hard to cover it up?"

She fastened him with a stern glance. "You make me feel like a beetle squirming on a pin," observed Jock, amused.

"Tell me!"

"How can I tell you? I don't know myself why I cover it up. It's instinctive. I'm afraid to let anyone see what's inside. I—I have an idea they're going to think it's a joke, or something. Inhibited, Peg. That's me all over."

"I think it's a shame," said Peg.

"Why?"

"*Why?* Why not?" She sat bolt upright, excitedly. "Because it isn't fair! It's not fair to you yourself, that's why! If people who don't amount to much can pretend they do and put it over successfully, more power to 'em, I say. But for a person who *does* amount to something to make out he *doesn't* is—is—" She stopped, groping for the word. Not finding it, she relapsed again on to the pillows. "You're just a natural damn fool," she finished.

Jock roared. "Good Lord, Peg, but I *don't* amount to anything! You're——"

"And he won't even admit it to me!" sighed Peg. She sat up again, wagging a denunciatory finger. "Last night at dinner mother said, 'We have tickets for the Symphony, don't you three want to go?' I peeked over at you, and your face was all lit up like a new saloon. And then Bones said, 'Hell, no, we're going with a bunch out to Canter Inn.' Business of glim-dousing, and Mr. Hamill's countenance returns to normalcy. And what happens then? Why, you go to Canter Inn, and foxtrot till three A. M., and drink rotten booze out of a teacup, and pretend you're having the time of your life! Trouble is, Jock, you lack the courage of your convictions. Why couldn't you have come right out and said, 'I'd rather go to the Symphony'?"

"Oh, that," said Jock, "that was just silly. Music happens to be a weakness of mine, that's all." He

grinned suddenly. "Say, you have got my number for sure, haven't you?"

Peg nodded approvingly. "That's right, admit it! It's about time. Take off the old clown-suit, I know you."

"It's off," announced Jock. "Now what?"

"Now," said Peg, burrowing deeper into her chair and leaning her head back, "tell me all about your girl."

Of a sudden this seemed extremely desirable—to tell Peg all about Yvonne. Jock had not known how much he had wanted to tell someone about her ever since the beginning, nor how greatly his heart had yearned for an audience sympathetic and comprehending, as Peg would be.

So he told her. Hesitantly, at first, because confession was an unaccustomed luxury with him, but waxing more loquacious as he went along. He described his meeting with Yvonne, and the hours he had spent with her since, and the things she had done and said. He essayed a description. He told of his wretchedness and the vacuity of his days, now, when she was away. . . . He talked for a long time, and he was boyishly lovable and appealing, and very, very earnest.

When he had finished he felt better than he had felt in weeks. As though a tension had snapped. Telling someone, some outsider, how wonderful Yvonne was seemed to bring back her wonderfulness anew. It was almost like seeing her. "What's been the matter with me?" he wondered, "—thinking the things I have been about her. They're not true. Why, I *know* they're not true!" . . . He was grateful to Peg beyond words. It seemed to him that just by sitting there motionless, watching him as he talked,

she had helped him to rid his mind of presumptions that were unworthy. His eyes wandered over her now, from the expanse of symmetrical silken leg to the bright hair, and the nose. . . . He smiled inwardly at Peg's nose. It was so appropriate to Peg! Impudent, *gamin* . . . and alert and interested looking when she listened. . . .

"Gosh," he said suddenly, "old Bones is lucky. I'd give anything if you were *my* sister."

He left Boston two days later, and spent Christmas and the week following Christmas with his mother. The days at home were exact counterparts of the days at the Allens'—jazz and jubilation—except for Peg. Long after he had returned to college she remained in his mind as the one oasis in an otherwise muddled and meaningless vacation.

XX

"Jock! Hey, Jock! Wake up there, will you?"

Jock opened his eyes and squinted into the gloom. A bulky figure in a bathrobe was standing over him. "Who're you?" he queried sleepily.

"Ken Kennedy. Somebody wants you on the telephone. Wake up, will you, Jock?"

"I'm awake. What time is it, anyway?"

"About one."

Jock leaped out of bed, instantly clear of head. One o'clock . . . somebody wanting him on the 'phone at one o'clock at night. . . . Something wrong with his mother? Or Yvonne home, perhaps?

"Is it long distance?" he asked as he and Ken traversed the upper hall.

"No, local," said Ken. "Sounds like your friend, Mrs. Hathaway. Whoever it is, she's lucky to get you. If I hadn't been boning late and decided to hop down to the kitchen for a bite to eat before I hit the hay nobody'd ever have heard that 'phone. Going back now and finish, too," he added.

They went down the stairs together, and Jock picked up the receiver he found dangling by its cord. "Hello?"

"Jock, is this you?" Eunice, frightened. . . .

"Yes, hello, Eunice."

"Listen, can you come ovah heah right away?"

"Why, what's up?"

"Brad's gone somewheah, and he said he'd be back at nine o'clock, and I don't know what to do——"

"He's not there?"

"No, he's nevah come. I'm worried sick about him."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know, he didn't say. He just said he had to go out but that he'd be back by nine sharp. He went about six-thirty. He took my cah, and he hasn't driven it much yet, and oh, Jock, I'm scahed half to death. I—I didn't know who else to call. Can't you come ovah, or do *somehin'?*"

Her evident panic communicated itself in a measure to Jock. That Black-and-Tan joint—supposing Brad was there again? Things were always happening in places like that. Sinister things. If Brad had promised to return at nine, wouldn't he have done so, or at least sent some message? Brad had always been that sort, a man of his word absolutely. . . . And again, if he had taken the new car, and wasn't used to it . . . slippery out, damn slippery . . . this January ice. . . .

"I'll be over, Eunice. Soon as I can jump into some clothes."

"Hurry, then!"

As Jock dashed up the stairs again he had a glimpse of Ken Kennedy standing in the dining room doorway, crunching crackers. . . .

He dressed with feverish haste, his mind in chaos. Brad. *Could* any ill have befallen Brad? Surely not, and yet it was queer. . . . One o'clock. Said he'd be back at nine. Four hours without any word. A long time, a hell of a long time. Anything could happen in four hours. In four minutes! In four *seconds*, even. . . .

Jock began to wish that he had allowed himself to see more of Brad lately. He had remained away from the bungalow to avoid Eunice, of course, but he might have made an effort to meet Brad somewhere else occasionally. After that night, for instance. He should have gone straight to him and had a talk after that night at the Black-and-Tan, instead of pretending he didn't know a thing about it. There might have been some logical explanation. Perhaps he could have helped Brad in some way. He reproached himself bitterly now. "Fine friend I turned out to be! Passing by on the other side——"

Bones Allen moaned in his sleep, and Jock almost leaped at the sound. That noise! Noise that a man might make if he were hurt, wounded . . . or if he were pinned under an automobile somewhere on a deserted road, locked into a coupé like an animal in a cage. . . . *Brad*. . . .

"Here!" he told himself sharply. "I've got to cut this out, or I'll only upset Eunice more. Brad's all right. Sure he's all right. He probably got drunk or something, and forgot to come home." But this

failed to convince him; Brad had never, to his knowledge, had a drink in his life.

Now. Ready, now. Down the stairs and across the hall. Ken Kennedy still standing there, staring. "Probably thinks I've gone nuts but I can't stop to explain now—*damn* this latch, anyway——"

The outside air was very cold, sharply cold, and the wind had teeth to it. Jack bent his head and hurried along, slipping with every step. He thought he had never seen a more horrible night. Black and bleak and lonely. No living thing. No light but the street-lamps, pale pools of bluish white on the dead white snow. No sound but the dirge of the wind and the rattle of ice-coated branches . . . like skeleton fingers applauding. A graveyard night, unspeakably gruesome.

Suddenly he was terrified. Terrified of the night, and of the solitude, and of the errand. He began to run, and the quick steamy clouds of his breath were laden with fragments of little prayers. "Oh God, don't—don't let it be what I think it is—not Brad—not *Brad*—oh, this infernal night—God—" He fell, sprawled headlong, picked himself up only to fall again. He had a feeling of futility, a fear that he would never reach the place for which he was headed—that the elements would hold him back forever, and mock him, and make sport of him. "Oh, *help me get there.*"

A train in the distance gave an eerie scream, and perversely, it steadied him. There were people, then, in this world. People asleep in two-tiered rows, behind high walls of swaying green curtains. Safe, and warm, and comfortable. He drew a vicarious warmth and comfort from thought of them. He lifted his head and laughed into the whipping wind. "Why, it's all

right!" he said. "Brad's all right! I'm all right!" He laughed at himself, and swore. "Damn *baby!*"

The bungalow's windows threw gold across the sidewalk, visible for half a block, and cheerful, as though there might be a party on. One almost expected to hear voices and the lilt of laughter coming from within. One didn't, though. Only silence. . . . He strode up the stairs and across the porch. The door feel open as his knuckles grazed it. . . .

"Oh, Jock!" cried Eunice. "Oh, *Jock!*"

He led her into the living room and put her down in a chair, disengaging the arms that clutched about his neck. "No word?" he said.

"No, no, nothing——"

Eunice's voice was hysterical. But it would have rung a little truer if her gown had not been so becoming and if her face had not been bright with cosmetics of obviously recent application. Jock had an intuitive flash: "She fixed herself up after she called me!" This filled him with swift cold wrath. Her husband inexplicably missing, possibly in danger, or— or worse, and she could have a thought for her *appearance!* But that was like Eunice. Selfish. Calloused. A really inhuman woman.

"Hang on to yourself, Eunice," he ordered curtly. "You'll have to help me think what to do."

"You can't do anythin', Jock."

"If I can't do anything what did you call me for?"

"Because I was so frightened! I wanted you— somebody—to stay heah with me until he comes——"

Jock stared at her. Then was this all a ruse, cunningly devised to bring him hot-foot to the bungalow? Was Brad's absence not ominous after all, but expected? "Eunice," he said, "tell me the truth. Where is Brad?"

"I don't know wheah he is, Jock," answered Eunice, and her tone was so blank that it was impossible to doubt her. "As I told you, he left heah about six-thirty in my cah. I asked him wheah he was goin' but he wouldn't tell me—just said, 'I'll be back at nine shahp, if not befoah.' I didn't think so much about it then because Brad's been actin' awfully peculiar lately anyhow, but when it got to be one o'clock and he still hadn't come I was afraid and called you."

Jock thought. "That's the truth. *And I'll bet I know where he is!* But why's he staying? Why did he say he'd be back at nine if he didn't intend to be? Why doesn't he telephone? Four hours—dregs of the world in those places——"

Eunice was continuing. "There isn't anythin' you can do but wait heah with me, Jock. If I knew wheah he is we could take yoah cah and go theah, but I don't even know that much." The hysterical note returned, whether premeditatedly or otherwise Jock could only conjecture. "Oh, Jock, you don't know what I've been goin' through lately—you haven't been around heah to see—but Brad's not the same, I tell you! He acts so funny. He leaves me alone all the time, and when he is heah he hardly speaks to me. Just sits and gazes at nothin'. If he didn't give me so many presents I'd think he must be mad at me or somethin'—why, wheah you goin', Jock?"

Jock had started for the door. "I'm going to borrow a car," he said. "My roadster froze up solid this afternoon, but I'll borrow something and have a look around. I—maybe I can find Brad——"

Eunice followed him in a little rush. "Oh, take me—take me, Jock. Don't leave me heah all alo——"

She stopped, listening. They both listened. Remotely, but coming nearer, they could hear an auto-

mobile. Purr of its engine, and repeated *clankety-clank* of a broken tire chain against one of its mudguards. They still listened. "If it goes by—" Jock thought tensely. "If it goes by—" Afterward he recalled that they might have looked out of the window, but at the time this did not occur to either of them.

"He's turnin' in," breathed Eunice. "It must be Brad."

Then relief so poignant that it was pain ran all through Jock, and his forehead was wet with beads of sudden perspiration. He dropped into a chair, and for the first time he spoke the Thing that had moaned to him in the wind and chattered at him from the tree branches. "I thought he was dead," he said. "Christ! I thought he was dead."

Eunice stood still, and he could feel her eyes. He glanced up. She was looking at him oddly, inquisitively, as though there was something there she could not understand. "Oh, but you adoah him, don't you," she murmured.

And then Brad came in.

He wore an old brown overcoat, frayed at the cuffs, and his hat was the battered felt that Jock remembered as far back as freshman year. His hands were bare and crimson with cold, and they hung at his sides limply. His whole body seemed limp. And his *face*. . . . You shuddered away from the sight of it. Face of a man haunted, with eyes that saw things where there were no things. . . .

"Why, Brad—" Jock stammered.

Brad had apparently not perceived that anyone was there. At the sound of Jock's voice his chin jerked up, and for a few seconds he was the old Brad, cordial and carefree. "Hello there, Jock! Mighty good to

see you." Then, quick as the closing of a door on a lighted room, the gladness went out of his face again.

"What's the trouble, Brad?" Eunice asked. "Are you sick?" Jock could have slain her for the way she asked it. Matter-of-factly, and with a trace of irritation.

"No, just tired," said Brad. He crossed to the davenport and slumped down. "Had a—bad evening," he appended, low.

Eunice echoed him. "Bad evenin'? Well, what kind of an evenin' do you think *I* had, sittin' all alone heah wonderin' if you'd smashed into a tree, or what? I stood it as long as I could and then I called Jock and made him come ovah. You said you'd be heah at nine, Brad! And it's almost two!"

"I know," said Brad. "I'm sorry. I was detained."

"Wheah were you?"

(Oh, that hunted, haunted look! Those inanimate hands! Those *eyes*. . . .)

"Just—out," Brad answered vaguely. "Out seeing a—a man——"

"A *man!*" Eunice made a little dagger of the word, and plunged it in and twisted it, so that Brad writhed. "A man! It was some *woman*——"

Jock got to his feet. "You—shut—*up!*" he commanded. Then, as Eunice turned to him, stunned, he said more calmly, "I beg your pardon. It's none of my affair, of course, but I couldn't sit here and hear you ride Brad like that. Don't you see he's ill, Eunice? He's not himself."

"I'm just tired," Brad repeated. "It's all right, Jock. Eunice doesn't mean anything."

Then Jock felt foolish. He saw himself as a third party who had butted unasked into a domestic argu-

ment. Absurd, to take up cudgels for a man against his wife! After all, Brad understood Eunice. "I'd better go," he said aloud. "I'm sorry I lost my head. You'll forgive me, won't you, Brad? I was worried as all hell about you, and then when you got here safe and sound, the reaction—I guess I didn't know what I was saying."

This apology was to Brad, not to Eunice. Brad answered it without lifting his head. "That's all right, old man. I understand. Forget it."

Jock did not look at Eunice. He neither knew nor cared what her attitude might be. He stood a moment turning his hat around and around in his hands. He wanted to say something more, something to cheer Brad up a little, but no adequate words would come. He thought, "I'll see him in the morning." He reiterated, "I'd better go." And went.

Eunice overtook him in the hall. "You were right, Jock," she said. "I was mean. But he's been havin' so funny for weeks, and it's gettin' on my nerves so——"

"I'm going to see him tomorrow," Jock stated, "and have a long talk with him. I'll find out what the matter is."

XXI

In the morning, when he descended to an eight o'clock breakfast, they told him that Brad Hathaway had put a bullet through his brain three hours before.

BOOK THREE

Yvonne

Book Three

I

TO THE last day Jock lived he would remember that scene, even in its minutest, most trifling details. The Zeta Kappa dining room, oak paneled. Long tables gowned in white, covered with plates and silverware and bowls of shredded wheat, pitchers of milk and platters of eggs on toast. Above the tables, rectangular lines of sober faces, looking . . . looking at him . . . lifting to look at him, turning to look at him, as though they had never seen him before. Bill Olmstead with a spoonful of cereal arrested half way to his mouth. Ken Kennedy's eyes, hotly intent above the rim of his coffee cup. A panting hush over everything. . . .

"*What* the hell?" Jock said. And the question seemed to fall hollowly, shockingly, like a shriek in a church.

Then they told him. Carey Brown told him, dabbing at his lips nervously with a napkin. "Brad Hathaway's dead, Jock. He committed suicide at five o'clock this morning."

At first, it wasn't true. He wasn't hearing right. It was a ghastly delusion, a throwback to his terror of the night before. That terror returned now, and he became momentarily a little insane. All the intervening happenings slipped away into a mist, and he fancied

that Brad needed him—that Eunice had called—that if only he could get there soon enough——

He whirled about wildly. "I'll go look for him——"

They caught him at the door and dragged him back and made him sit down. Someone said, "You don't understand, Jock. Brad's dead. He shot himself. You can't do anything now."

Then there came a sort of crashing, as though the words were being driven into his brain with big hammers, syllable by syllable. Brad is dead. He shot himself. Can't do anything now. Brad is dead. . . . And he knew that it was true. He could see Brad's face as he had seen it last, tormented, and he thought he must have known all along that this was what it inevitably portended. A groan tore from his lips. "Yes—I know—but *why?* *Why?*"

After a time he was calmer. He looked up and saw them all. . . . They were doing such silly things. Talking to him gently, and bringing him water to drink, and fussing about him like a bunch of old women. "Let me alone," he said. "I'm all right." Fools! Did they think to ease this agony with pats upon the back? Suddenly he could not bear them. Their faces, and their eyes glued to his face. He stood up, shrugging away the hands that sought to detain him, and moved off from them, upstairs, to his room. He locked the door and lay down on his bed and stared up at the ceiling. . . .

Why?

II

Afterward he went to the bungalow. A tall young man in a fur coat, walking slowly along, his hatless head bowed, his somber eyes on the ground. He did

not see the glances that were trained on him as he passed, nor the people who started to speak to him but changed their minds, nor the heads that twisted to look after him curiously. Sorrow had made him alone, so that he saw no one and nothing.

When he reached the driveway that led to the rear of Brad's house he raised his eyes for the first time. The garage doors were shut. Brad's hands had shut them. And there were footprints across the snow to the house. Brad's footprints. Big oval holes, far apart, and so alive . . . so alive . . . they unnerved him, those oval holes. Just last night, a mere few hours ago, Brad had trod in them . . .

"And he knew," Jock thought. "He knew then what he was going to do." He could have wept. His face knotted into a hundred wrinkles, like the face of one who has run a long way, and between clenched teeth he muttered, "Why didn't I stay? Oh, God in heaven, *why didn't I stay?*"

He became aware of other things. Sunshine, garish-bright. Blue sky, and wind. Children playing on the street, and automobiles whizzing by, taking men to work and women to shop. People smiling. How *could* people smile? . . . so unimportant a life was. So few cared. The world went right on, no matter who lay still and cold in the house next door or the house across the street. A phrase Yvonne was fond of saying recurred to him: "Nothing matters very much." At times like this you knew nothing did. Men were born, and lived a little, and then lay still and cold . . . and people smiled and children with red sleds shouted for glee in the streets . . .

The thing on the door! A circle of flowers, and a trail of lavender gauze that danced up the wind like a sprite. It whipped his heart, that lavender gauze,

with its every flutter. It looked so blithe. Horribly, incongruously blithe. It seemed to say, "I belong to life and light and laughter, I wreath the golden hair of pretty girls in the evening." And yet it was there, nailed to the portal, so that passersby might know that within was a man who hadn't cared to live any longer . . .

Why?

III

His knock was answered by a gaunt gray woman who said, "Yes?"

"I—I just came—" he stammered. The sight of this stranger confused him oddly. Somehow he had expected Eunice to meet him at the door, as she always did. He had felt all along that this was his tragedy, not Eunice's . . . idiotic of him . . .

"I'm a friend of *his*," he explained to the gaunt gray woman. "Jock Hamill."

She let him in then. "Oh, yes—Mrs. Hathaway said if you should come she wanted to see you."

He waited in the living room. Not sitting down. Pacing about, almost on tiptoe, so that he should make no noise. He had to keep moving. When you sat down you saw too many things that stabbed you. The place where Brad had sat the night before. His beloved pipe lying on its side in a glass ash tray. His hat, his battered brown hat, just where he had taken it off. . . . When you walked you did not see these things so clearly.

The house was very still. Footsteps and murmuring voices came from the back somewhere, but they seemed stiller than the silence. Once a solemn-faced man passed the door . . . professionally solemn, paid to

look like that . . . probably thinking of something else. . . . There was Brad's radio. Jock tried not to look at it; then looked hard at it. He paused and touched the dials with his fingers. Brad had loved so to fumble with them! To cry delightedly, "Listen, people, this is *good!*" . . . And Eunice had always complained: "Come away from that thing, Brad. It makes me blue. I feel as though everybody in the world was dancing in some gay café except me and I had to sit home and listen out of a box" . . . Eunice. How would she be? How would she take it? He wondered if Eunice *knew why*. If Brad had told her, or left some message.

The gaunt woman returned and said, "Mrs. Hathaway is lying down. Will you step this way, please?"

They had shut the sun from Eunice's bedroom, and in the semi-dark Jock could distinguish her only as a wave down a silken coverlet and a pale face haloed with black hair. And hands. Hands that picked at the silk of the coverlet ceaselessly, like little white rats nibbling.

He went to the side of the bed and took one of the hands in his. "Eunice——"

Her voice was a breath that hardly stirred. You had to strain your ears to catch it. "Jock—I'm—glad you came."

"Of course I came," he said, "as soon as I heard. Eunice, you know what this means to me——"

"I know, Jock."

He pulled up a chair and sat down. He felt helpless, trying to think of something to say. His mind was full of questions—but not now. He must say something comforting now. Poor Eunice, oh, poor little girl! . . . All his antagonism toward her fled away now, beaten off by the sight of her suffering.

"She loved Brad," he told himself, and marveled that he could ever have thought she did not.

He held her hand tight, and once he reached awkwardly and stroked her forehead . . .

She began to cry then. As though his touch had given anguish a release. Great dry sobs, like coughs, shook her from head to foot. She flung an arm across her face, and below it Jock could see her lips writhing grotesquely. They were saying things, those lips. Hoarse incoherent things. He leaned closer. "I was asleep, and—oh, my God, I can hear it yet!—and I ran in—on the floah, lyin' theah on the floah—" She sat up suddenly and faced Jock and screamed, "I was a good wife to him—I was—I *was*——. You must say I was, Jock."

"Of course!" Jock said. "Of course you were. Don't, Eunice—you mustn't let yourself go like this——"

The strange woman came hurrying in, and between them they quieted her. She lay back again, gasping, rolling her head from side to side on the pillows. The woman mixed up something in a glass and gave it to her, and she drank it, spilling some.

"I'll go," Jock mumbled. "I'll come again later."

A cry from Eunice halted him. "Wait, Jock! I have somethin' to give you——"

He turned quickly. "Did he——"

"He left you a lettah." She pointed. "Theah. On the bureau."

Jock picked it up, not looking at it. Cold . . . cold it was to the fingertips. . . . He crumpled it in his palm. He strove not to think of it, yet, but to fix his mind on Eunice. He bent down and brushed his lips across her cheek. "Eunice dear, try to rest, won't you? He'd want you to."

"I know. I will, Jock." She was passive now—broken. "Come back soon," she whispered.

"In an hour or two," he promised.

On his way out they let him pause in the quiet room across the hall for a little while . . .

Back at the fraternity house Bones Allen met him at the door and demanded immediately, with mingled fear and curiosity in his wide eyes, "Did you see him?"

And Jock said a queer thing, which he afterward never quite understood. He said, "No. He wasn't there."

IV

Brad had written:

"Jock old man, I couldn't go without leaving you some word. You'll wonder why I'm doing it, and I want to try to make you see.

"I had to have money. I *had* to, to make Eunice happy. She was miserable married to a poor man, having to do without things. She stood it for years, but this fall she began saying she was sick of it, and that she was going to leave me. I didn't blame her for that, but I loved her so, Jock, I couldn't have stood it if she'd gone away. I had to think of something. I had to have money, and there was only one way to get a lot of it quick, and that was bootlegging. People were making fortunes at it, and nobody knew. That was the part that appealed to me. It was sure-fire, and nobody would know.

"So I started. I had another man working with me, out of town. He did all the dirty work, and I backed him and took my share of the proceeds. I had a little money, enough to start on. It doesn't take much to start in that game. I won't pretend I liked it. I didn't, I hated it. But if they didn't get it from me they'd get it somewhere else. That was what I tried to think of. Remember that night you saw me at the nigger joint, Jock? I was wait-

ing to talk to the proprietor about a bill he owed me. I knew you wondered.

“Well, Eunice got a fur coat, and a machine, and other things she’s wanted ever since she married me and never had, and she was happy—just watching how happy she was made it pretty nearly all right. Then, how it happened I don’t know, but we got hold of some rotten stuff. Wood alcohol. Bought it from a boat off the coast, and thought it was o.k.—we’d gotten stuff from the same fellow before. Tonight I learned that a man we’d sold a quart of it to had died. I went out to see him. Jock, he had a wife and four little children, all under eight years old. And no money. None of them looked as though they got enough to eat. Jock, when I saw those kids—crying, and not knowing what they were crying about except that their dad was gone and wasn’t ever coming back any more—well, they opened my eyes, that’s all. I knew then. I’d killed their father myself, just as sure as though I’d stuck a knife into him. Do you think I could live on after *that*?

“I thought I’d do it on the way home, but I couldn’t, I had to see Eunice just once more and say good-bye. She wouldn’t know it was good-bye, of course, until afterward, but I had to see her. That’s why I came back. She’s asleep now. With her hair spread out over the pillow and her eyelashes curling on her cheeks. I love her so, Jock. I love her better than anything in heaven or earth. You be good to her, won’t you? You’re the best friend I ever had. Oh, Jock, take care of her, help her forget!”

V

The next few weeks were freighted with a melancholy so heavy that his whole inner being seemed to droop with the weight of it. And mingled with the melancholy there was a protest, violent and strong.

Brad's going had been so futile! So unnecessary! It wasn't right that a man like that should go for a thing like that. . . . After the first chaotic hours he had reduced the situation to its fundamentals: Brad had died so that Eunice might drive a shiny new coupé and wrap about herself the skins of little animals.

In the white heat of this realization, pity for Eunice shriveled instantly, and he looked upon her with contempt and loathing. If Brad had not said, "Take care of her, be good to her," he would never voluntarily have seen her again. As it was, he paid punctual duty calls at the bungalow, and pretended to comfort a grief that seemed to him now as false as was his solicitude for it. Inwardly, he was unmoved and angry. Everything she did and said he thought smacked of the theatrical . . . a widow in a movie, weeping glycerin tears. He wanted to cry, "Hypocrite!" all the time. He wanted to snarl it into her face. "Hypocrite! Go ahead and bawl because he's gone. *You sent him!*"

Her mourning particularly infuriated him. It was so *chic*. Bereavement made enticing. She affected black gowns cut to hug the breast and hips suggestively, and little black hats with abbreviated veils that made her eyes look big and wistful and her lids transparent. Bones Allen summed her up one day in a single sentence: "She may be sad, but she's nifty about it."

Between Jock and Eunice the cause of Brad's suicide was tacitly understood but never discussed. Jock was aware that Brad had written her a letter also, and that she knew. But she never mentioned it and he, taking his cue from her, refrained also from mentioning it. Nor did he divulge it to anyone else. When they asked him—and many asked him—why Brad had killed himself, he replied only, "I don't know." Nothing could have dragged the secret from him. It was Brad's

secret; to tell it would be to betray a sacred confidence and to cast shadow on Brad's blameless memory. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. The papers had said, "Despondency over financial matters." That was nearly enough true. Let it go. He kept Brad's letter locked away, and now and then when he was alone he took it out and read it over . . .

VI

In the beginning he was grateful to his fraternity brothers because they left him alone when he most wanted to be alone. Later, he became a little worried. It seemed to him that there were undertones to their attitude . . . manifest in the sharp stop of conversation when he came unannounced into a room, in eyes that dropped when he looked at them steadily. . . . This grew more marked as time went on, until finally, one day a month after Brad's funeral, he was moved to ask his roommate about it.

"What's wrong with the boys?"

"What do you mean, what's wrong with 'em?"

"Giving me the high hat——"

"No, they're not!" Bones said vehemently—so vehemently that Jock's suspicions were confirmed. "They are not. Why, why the devil should they? They've simply got the idea that you feel too bad to be bothered for awhile. What do you want, anyway? You don't want them mauling you over all the time, telling you how sorry they are, do you?"

Jock smiled wearily. "Be yourself, Bones. You're talking applesauce. I know there's something up—now what is it?"

Bones, caught, changed his tone abruptly. "Don't pay any attention to them," he begged. "They're a bunch of half-wits." He got up and began to stalk about the room aimlessly as he talked. "I suppose I may as well tell you, because as soon as you felt a little less low in your mind Carey Brown was going to have a talk with you about it, anyway." Carey Brown was head of the fraternity. "The fact is, Jock—well, remember what I told you back in the fall about you and Mrs. Hathaway?"

"I sure do," said Jock, and felt queerly chilled all of a sudden.

"Well, there's an impression around college now that you're connected with Brad's death in some way—oh *hell*, Jock, don't look like *that*! Don't get me wrong. Nobody thinks you—what I mean, everybody knows he shot *himself*, there's no doubt about that. But they think he did it on account of jealousy, because he came in late at night and found you there with his wife. You see, Ken Kennedy answered the 'phone when she called you—he recognized her voice. And then he heard you say, 'He's not there? All right, I'll be right over'—or something like that. And he's gone blabbing it around. And nobody knew what time you came in—" Bones was painfully embarrassed, his face on fire. "Jees, I hate to tell you this, Jock! It's a stinking shame——"

"Oh well," Jock said, striving for a light tone, "that's the breaks you get." His perceptions were coldly clear. Of course. Circumstantial evidence. Ken had called him to the 'phone that night. Ken had said, meaningly, 'Sounds like your friend Mrs. Hathaway.' Ken had listened while he talked to Eunice. . . . It seemed to Jock that he could see Ken yet with the eyes of his recollection, standing in the dining-room

doorway, crunching crackers. . . . And naturally the fraternity resented the implication. Scandal in college was not an individual affair, it was a fraternity affair. This, a scratch on the cherished escutcheon of Zeta Kappa.

His determination to shield Brad never wavered. But a little instinct for self-preservation made him say, "As for that, you can tell Ken Kennedy—or I'll tell him myself—that Eunice telephoned me that night to tell me Brad was missing, and to ask me to try to find him. He had said he'd be back at nine, and at one he hadn't come, and she was scared. That's why I went over there. I was going out to look for him, but he came in just a few minutes after I got there."

"Where had he been?" Bones interrogated.

This required a lie. "I don't know, he didn't say. He'd had engine trouble somewhere—that was what made him so late."

"Well," Bones said drearily, "you ought to talk to the boys about it. You ought to stick up for yourself. This damn talk that's going around—there's no sense to it—and it would only take a few words from you to set it straight, with the fraternity at least. They don't *want* to think the things they're thinking, Jock! If you only knew *why* Brad did it, some logical reason that would let you out—but you don't, do you?" His voice was pleading.

"No," said Jock, looking him straight in the eyes. "No, I haven't any idea."

Following this conversation, he considered having a talk with Ken Kennedy and some of the others. But in the end he decided against it. "I can't tell 'em the truth," he reflected, "and anything less wouldn't do any good. Hell, let 'em think what they want to."

Still, he felt somewhat bitter. "Brothers." There

was irony in that term now. The pledges they took to stand by one another, and then when something like this happened they were as quick as any outsider to lose faith! . . . He assured himself he didn't care what they thought, but in reality he cared tremendously; he cared so much that at times he was sorely tempted to tell them the truth about Brad and show them the letter. An impish voice in his ear would whisper, "Brad's dead. It couldn't hurt him. It can hurt you. It's hurting you now. You've got your life to live. Go ahead and tell them, you fool" . . .

But week succeeded dragging week, and he did not.

VII

The Zeta Kappa staircase was so constructed that anyone descending came into sight piece by piece, like a sectional postcard opened lengthwise. At noontime of a mild spring-like day in late February Jock Hamill's feet appeared at the top of these stairs and proceeded to bring the rest of him slowly down. Handsome legs in golf stockings of a blue-and-gray diamond pattern. Knickers, voluminous and drooping low. Coat that matched the knickers, bisected by an oblong of white linen shirt. Surmounting this oblong, a soft collar with a neat bow tie. And finally, the sculptured brunette head that made all young women and some old ones catch their breaths a little.

At the foot of the stairs the head ducked forward in an attitude of listening, and Jock stood still. A medley of excited voices drifted to him from the living-room.

". . . If that's not hot I'm crazy!" . . . "Yes, and look at the bus, will you? She must be Mrs. Rolls

Royce" . . . "Say, they're stopping here!" . . .
"Probably got the wrong place, no luck, boys, no luck"
. . . "Well, don't tell her if she has. Let's kill the
fatted calf and have her in" . . .

Upon entering the room whence emanated these peculiar comments, Jock perceived a group of his mates struggling for points of vantage at the front windows. He joined them.

A monstrous limousine, painted creamy white and agleam with polished nickel, was drawn up at the curb outside. A chauffeur in uniform presided at the wheel, and in the tonneau, like a glittering jewel in a showcase, sat Yvonne. She was leaning forward, looking inquiringly at the house, and she wore garments that matched her equipage . . . a white wrap of ermine, and a white toque against which her hair flamed conspicuous as blood on snow . . .

These things Jock noted in the fraction of a second. Another second, and he was yanking the front door open, taking the porch steps in one jump, crossing the sidewalk. "Yvonne!"

For a while that was all he could say; her name, over and over again. So many words beat at his lips at once, and impeded each other, and locked each other in. "Yvonne!" . . . He took both her white-gloved hands and held them in a grip that must have hurt her. He devoured her with his eyes. "Oh, *Yvonne*——"

She smiled at him, that remembered smile that carved a long, dreamy dimple deep in one cheek. "You didn't forget me, Jock Hamill?" And presently she laughed aloud and said, "Why don't you say something?"

"I can't," Jock told her. "I'm too crazy-happy. I just want to *look* at you——"

Then questions came in a swift stream. When had

she returned to New York? Why hadn't she let him know? How did she happen to be here? . . .

"Day before yesterday," she retorted. "And I thought, instead of letting you know, I'd drive down here and see for myself whether or not you still *cared* about knowing——"

"You're finding out, all right!"

"Um-hum. You are glad to see me, aren't you?"

"Well—*roughly speaking!*" he almost shouted.

Her great gray eyes wandered past him then, to the Zeta Kappa façade. "I don't think I ever beheld quite so many heads," she observed.

Jock turned. The windows were indeed full of heads, still staring with unashamed interest. As he looked, the heads bobbed and grinned, and one youth lifted his right hand, clasped it with his left, and shook it vigorously in token of wholehearted approbation. It came to Jock that they had not shown him such friendly attention for weeks. "Look!" he said. "Right now I'm the most popular man in the fraternity, because I'm the only one who knows you." Pride swelled in him, and he tugged at Yvonne's little hand. "Come on, darling—come in a minute and let me introduce them."

"Mountain to Mohammed?" began Yvonne. But something about Jock's face made her yield. She got out of the limousine and stood, straight and slim and dazzling, on the pavement. "You just want to *parade* me," she accused, dimpling up at him, "—like a little trick puppy on a leash!"

"You bet your sweet life I do!" he admitted joyously. "I want to walk in there with a 'yah-see-what-I-found' look in my eye, and watch you mow 'em down like—say, what are you laughing at, woman?"

"You. You're so adorably naïve."

"You mean I'm so idiotically in love——"

He had never loved her more than during the ensuing few minutes in the fraternity house. She sat enthroned on a window-seat, her gorgeous coat spread out around her like the background of a painting, her head tilted sideways—and without any visible effort whatever made a dozen blasé young collegians her slaves. Her first faint lazy smile from the doorway had caught them, and the tentacles of her beauty and personality held them fast. "I knew it!" Jock gloated secretly. "She's knocking 'em cuckoo!" Every admiring glance that fastened on her, every guffaw elicited by things she said, every small compliment added its tithe to his exhilaration.

He said little. Talk effervesced around him, and he stood silent for the most part, looking and listening, and thinking, "Lovelier than ever. She caught a tan in California and it's becoming. *Gosh*, what a smooth get-up! That white fur. She always looks like a million dollars, anyway. And maybe she doesn't know her groceries! Poise. Says just the right things. Look at Fat Hastings, gawking. Bet he never saw such a girl in his life. Well, who has, for that matter? There never *was* such a girl! For God's sake, what did I do all these weeks without her? How did I *stand* it?" . . .

Suddenly he wanted her alone. Where he could feast his eyes upon her without fear that alien eyes would notice. Where he could take her in his arms. . . . He stood up and pulled her with him. "Come on, Yvonne," he said. "Enough of this rabble."

The worthies thus designated were reluctant to let Yvonne go. They voiced protests. Why go? Dull idea, checking out now. Stay to lunch or something. . . . But Jock, deaf to their entreaties, and full of the

hauteur of enviable proprietorship, bore her in triumph away.

VIII

“Just drive, Michael. Anywhere. It doesn’t matter.”

The chauffeur nodded, and the limousine lunged forward, a singing, winged thing. “We’ll drive till we find a good inn,” Yvonne continued, “and then we’ll eat a lot of things—don’t you always feel like eating a lot of things, weather like this?—and then we’ll drive some more. How does that sound?”

“Too good to be true!” Jock leaned back, letting his body sink into the downy upholstery. “*Some* boat!” he commented. “Is it new?”

“No, I’ve had it—about a year.”

He scarcely heard her. He had drawn her arm through his, and their faces were almost on a level . . . in the intoxication of such proximity he lost interest in the limousine completely. “*Now!*” he sighed. “I’ve been waiting—how many centuries is it?—for this minute.” He thought he would kiss her; he longed achingly to kiss her. But it was high noon, and the streets were thickly peopled. . . . He looked away hastily from her red parted lips. “Funny,” he mused, “now that it’s over, and you’re back, I’m just beginning to realize how very damn miserable I’ve been all this time. It was most *particular* hell, Yvonne.”

“Was it? What-all did you do with yourself?”

“Oh—thought about you, and wondered about you, and wrote you poems, and letters that I couldn’t send—*why* didn’t you let me have your address, Beautiful?”

Yvonne hesitated, her eyes straying from his.

"There's a girl who's trying awfully hard to bow to you," she said, instead of an answer.

Jock followed her glance. Eunice . . . standing on the street corner, staring . . .

"Who was she?" Yvonne asked when they had passed.

"Nobody. Eunice Hathaway."

"She's very attractive."

"Yah," said Jock laconically. And dismissed Eunice forthwith. "What did you do with *yourself*, honey? Did you have a good time?"

"No."

"You didn't? Why not?"

"I don't believe—I'll ever have a very good time anywhere again—unless you are there."

She began this speech haltingly, and ended it in a rush. Jock could hardly credit the delicious evidence of his ears. "*What?*" he cried. He sat up straight, towering over her, and his brown eyes glinted. "Yvonne—sweetheart—do you mean that?"

"I'm afraid I do."

He peered at her a moment longer, to make sure. Then he emitted a mighty whoop. "You *do!* You *mean* that! Oh, gosh, *Yvonne*—" He would have kissed her then, regardless of onlookers, but she held him gently away.

"Not now," she said. "Not until I've told you what I came down here today to tell you. After that you may not want to kiss me—ever again."

Jock knew what she meant. Her story. She had promised, that last afternoon in New York, that when she returned she would tell him. . . . It had seemed important then, but it didn't now. Nothing was important now but her delicate softness beside him, her perfume in his nostrils, her voice saying, "—unless

you are there, Jock Hamill." The face of Parke Demorest of Demorest Motors flashed across his vision and was gone, without effect. He put his arms about Yvonne, and his voice shook a little in the force of its sincerity. "Darling—the only thing you could possibly say that would matter would be that—well, that there isn't any hope for me, ever. That would rip me up into a million pieces. But nothing else in the world could make any difference. Not any thing." His arms tightened their hold. "Oh, sweet—sweet—as long as I can have you like this—" He laughed exultantly. "Bring on your German armies!"

He did not attempt to kiss her again for a while. There was an exquisite torture in postponement. They rode on, and she nestled close to him . . . so close that now and then he could feel her eyelashes against his cheek, like the fluttering wings of satin butterflies. And he talked. Rapidly and gayly, giving all the things pent up for months expression. "I missed you—Lord, how I did miss you! No matter what I did, or where I was, or who I was with, there was a wallop-ing big emptiness inside of me all the time, because you were gone. I used to do the darnedest things, Yvonne! Walk at night and stare at the stars, because the same stars were a canopy over you. . . . There never was a beautiful sunset or a full moon that I didn't wonder if you were looking at it, too. And once when I was in New York I broke away from the gang and spent the whole afternoon tramping around through Central Park, thinking, 'Now *here* she said *this* to me, and *here* she looked such-and-such a way.' And then I went and gaped at your apartment house until they nearly pinched me for loitering. . . . And I used to make up lists of things you remind me of. Things like opals, and wind, and white birch trees

under the moon, and castanets, and champagne in a silver goblet. 'The kind of a woman men think of with a little corner of their minds when they're kissing their wives'—that was one line I remember. Silly or not?" he finished, laughing. "A fellow all goofy with loving somebody is certainly a pitiful object."

"That's not silly," Yvonne said. "It's beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing that's been said to me in ages, because—well, because you mean it, don't you?"

"*Mean* it? I—" He choked, and speechless, bent to press his lips to the hollow of her throat that showed where the fur curved away in gleaming wings. "You're so wonderful," he cried brokenly. "You're meat and wine, do you know it? I love everything about you. Your eyes. They're like gray cloud, and *wise*. I'm afraid of you sometimes, your eyes know so many things. And your marvelous hair, and your skin—so soft, Yvonne—baby skin. And that dimple in one cheek without any in the other—lopsided, it fascinates me. And I love the way you catch your lower lip with your teeth when you're thinking hard about something. And you're just tall enough—just *right*, Yvonne! That's what I kept thinking the first time I saw you. So *right*. Everything about you is just exactly what it ought to be. And your voice—I hear it often in the night, or I think I do. I'm crazy about it, it's so different. Deep, and a little bit husky, as though you'd have to give a little cough in a minute, only that minute never quite comes. Remember the night I met you, and we went for a ride, and you sang? I could never describe how I felt. I wanted to cry and yell, and yet I didn't want to do anything but keep still and listen. And yearn. I—I just yearned for something terribly, all the while you were singing. I didn't know what it was, but I knew I wanted it so, I

thought I'd go mad if I didn't get it. Now I know what it was that I wanted always, Yvonne. It was *you*" . . .

She said nothing; only pressed a little tighter against him in token that she heard, and was glad in hearing. Presently he spoke again:

"I like to think of you in places where you'll probably never be. In a splendid palace, on a throne carved out of jewels. Or barefooted on a tropical beach with flowers around your hair . . . that hair! If I were a painter I'd want to paint you sitting on a rock, combing it with a golden comb, like the Lorelei." He paused, speculating. "Not so bad to have the girl you loved an actress, would it be? Because then you might see her in some of the costumes and against some of the backgrounds you like to imagine for her. Do you know, Yvonne, I've thought several times you're probably an actress."

"Why? What makes you think that?"

"It's logical. Somebody'd surely capitalize on beauty like that." He chuckled, in amusement and perfect content. "Just imagine loving anybody as I love you, and not knowing one thing about them except that they're the only person in the world!"

"Shall I tell you now, then?"

"I don't give a damn if you *never* tell me! No, tell me something else. Tell me—" He laughed into her laughing eyes. "You little witch, you know doggone well what I want to hear——"

She obeyed, soft-voiced and instantly grave. "I love you."

And his heart echoed it, and found it overwhelming. "She loves me. *Me*. All that loveliness, for me." . . . Before the thought he bowed his head as before a thing divine, and kissed her hands, and whispered,

“Jesus.” Not in blasphemy, but in gratitude. And he felt that all the days of his life had marched to this day, an army with banners; that all days thereafter would date from it, as the birthday of happiness.

IX

They lunched in a wayside tea room, a merry little place, all sunlight, and cretonne, and yellow china, and canary birds in cages. And, because there were others at tables quite near, they talked like acquaintances rather than lovers, hiding the things that glowed in their eyes. They talked of California, and the University, and New York. . . . “I’ve moved,” Yvonne remarked, “I’m not living on Park Avenue any more. I moved yesterday.” She gave him a new address, somewhere in the East Sixties, and he jotted it down with a fountain pen on the back of a tailor’s bill. “As soon as I’ve graduated,” he told her, “you’ll move again, and don’t you forget it!” And he smiled his twisted adoring smile, and she smiled back . . . drawnly . . .

Later she said, “That girl we saw—Eunice something, didn’t you say her name was?—tell me about her.”

“Now why? I don’t want to talk about *her* on a day like this, for heaven’s sake!”

“Don’t you—care about her, Jock Hamill?”

“Good God, no!”

“She cares about you.”

Jock dropped his fork and leaned back, registering indignation. “She *what?*”

Yvonne nodded. “She does. I could tell. The way she looked at you when we passed. And the way she

looked at *me*. . . . Women know all about one another, my dear. I understood her."

"Say!" Jock snorted. "Well, you're wrong for once, honey. Eunice Hathaway doesn't care about anything in God's world except herself and—glitter."

Yvonne repeated the word meditatively. "That's your pet word, isn't it? I've heard you use it a hundred times."

"I'm for it," Jock declared. "It's expressive. Hard and bright and cold. *Glitter*. Just the sound of it! Things that shine and don't give any warmth. Things that attract your eyes at first and after that tire them till you have to look away. It's the one best word for the twentieth century—this generation 'in seven letters, horizontal.' "

There was a silence, then Yvonne said slowly, "I told you once it was the one best word for *me*. Yvonne Mountford 'in seven letters, horizontal.' "

"Yes, and you were a sweet little liar," Jock informed her with the utmost complaisance.

X

When luncheon was over they drove again, and the end of a half hour brought them onto a road that ran along near the ocean. They could hear its murmurous chant from over beyond a sand dune at their right, and occasionally, when the dune dipped low, they could glimpse an atom of its bright blue-green. Presently Yvonne called a halt. "Stop, Michael! Stop right here!"

The great machine slid to tranquillity by the roadside, and Jock and Yvonne got out. "Come on," she

said, taking his hand. "I want to look at this. The sea always pulls me—God knows why—I ought to hate it, really——"

They mounted the sloping bank, rounded the corner of a line of bath-houses, and emerged onto the incomparable loneliness of a summer resort in mid-winter. A long crescent of pale sand, bordered by cottages, green ones, brown ones, with singular names on shingles over their worn front steps. *Bide-a-Wee*, *Happy Days*, *Sans Souci*—names like that. Windows boarded up, or showing yellowing newspapers behind the panes. Porch railings where, in season, bathing suits flapped perpetually and young folk sat and swung their bare tan legs—deserted now. There was something pathetic, ineffably forlorn, about those cottages squatting in the February sun. . . . "They look so broken-hearted," Yvonne said. . . . And before the cottages, sea, that wallowed sluggishly as a summer sea, and whined, and crept in lace-edged scallops up the beach

The two walked along in silence, through sand that hugged their feet caressingly. And they came at length to a cottage called *Paradise* and there with one accord they stopped, smiling at one another. Yvonne sank down on the steps and took off and emptied her diminutive buckled slippers. Then she stood up. "I'm going to tell you now—my very dear. But kiss me once, first, before I do——"

Her lips had never pressed harder against his. A sort of a desperate frenzy beat in their pressure. Jock thrilled to them, the while, curiously, he was reminded of a person about to do a difficult and dangerous thing, who drank deep for artificial courage.

She detached herself and sat down again, on the top step. And Jock, a little shaken, seated himself oppo-

site, in the place she indicated. For a time neither of them said anything. Yvonne's glance roved out over the water, and the fingers that held her wrap about her were yellowish-white at the knuckles. Jock watched her . . . until, without warning, she brought her eyes to the line of his and began her narrative . . .

XI

"I was born in a little manufacturing town in Ohio. I want you to try to visualize that town, Jock. Think of hills and smoke. Steep hills without any trees rearing up from the river, and smoke-colored clapboard houses tossed every which way down the sides of the hills. The only thing about it that was lovely was the river, and I could never bear to look at that much because my mother and father were drowned in it. When I was small. Out of a canoe . . .

"After that I lived with my aunt. She was good to me, according to her lights, but oh, she *stifled* me! She—well, there were hundreds of women in the town just like her, and when I was older I always thought of them as the boudoir-cap women. You know the type, don't you? Little women with little futile messy minds. They were always worrying about the next meal, and the dust on the mantelpiece, and talking about each other's business. Oh, how I hated those women! They used to count on their fingers when any new bride was going to have a baby. . . . I hated the men, too. All the people in the town were like their houses. Self-satisfied and drab and middle-class and *little*.

"Well, I lived there, and grew up, and went to high

school, and had dates on the veranda on summer evenings, and did all the things small-town girls do. But inside I was *seething*. All the time. Wanting to get away from there, and live. I don't know how I knew enough to want to, but I did. Instinctively, I suppose, and then from reading. I read all the time. *Gulped* books. Novels and poetry—my aunt used to think it was the biggest joke, my reading poetry when I didn't have to——

“Anyway. When I was about twenty—or maybe I was older than that, I've lived such eternities since, it's hard to remember—I fell in love. Oh, terrifically! I can't tell you . . .”

Her eyes, distant and misty, told Jock better than any words could have. “She loved somebody the way I love her,” he thought, and knew a pang that was sympathy and jealousy in one.

“His name was Paul Kirk,” she continued, “and he looked—a good deal as you look, Jock Hamill. That's why you used to tear my heart a little whenever I saw you, at first, before—before I began to care about you for your own sake. No, don't, dear—don't interrupt me. Wait till I've said all I have to say.

“He had graduated from Boston Tech a couple of years before, an engineer, and he came to this town where I was living just for a few months, to do some experimental work at one of the factories. He boarded right next door. We were wild about one another from the very start. Kisses, and little notes, and all those foolish precious things. . . . My aunt didn't like it very well. She kept warning me against ‘city fellows’, and so did everybody else. They resent anyone from outside in towns like that. Bigoted . . .

“We planned to be married just as soon as Paul's work there was finished and he had settled in some per-

manent position somewhere else. He went away, and we wrote long letters full of exclamation points and words underlined—you know the kind of letters—and I began to keep a ‘hope chest.’ Hum. Imagine me hemming linen towels!

“Then the war.

“When I think of it now, I think of it in three stages. The first stage, when I said to myself that it was all right, the Armistice would come in just a few weeks now, I needn’t worry. Then the second stage, when Paul was at training camp in Massachusetts, and I thought, ‘He won’t have to go. It’ll be over before he can get there.’ I kept telling myself that again and again—arguing with my fright.

“And then all of a sudden he wired me, and I took a train—oh, the *slowest* train, Jock Hamill, I can remember yet how it dragged along, all night and half the next day!—and we were married at four that afternoon in a little town near Camp Devens, where he’d been stationed.” Yvonne smiled a smile without mirth, as though invisible strings were jerking her mouth up at the corners. “So funny! Just a parody of a wedding. In a shabby little house, with a shabby little minister, and the minister’s wife and a fat woman who came in wiping soapsuds off her big red arms with her apron, for witnesses. The place smelled of boiling cabbage, and flies buzzed against the windowpanes. I’ll never forget the commotion they made. It seemed to fill my ears and my mind, until I couldn’t think of anything else. Mercifully, perhaps . . . but I’d have liked things different. I’d have liked satin, and lilies, and stained glass, and the low throb of organ music—something to treasure beautifully through all the years.”

She fell silent, and her lids dropped down, shutting

away from Jock the story in her eyes. After a little her lips took it on. "We had a few hours together. And that was all. He went away, to France, and I went home. And waited and waited and *waited*. . . . That was the third stage. Then I thought, 'It'll be all right. God will send him back safe to me.' You see I believed in God in those days, Jock Hamill. I had—the most infinite faith.

"Well—God played with me, that was all. He didn't kill Paul in the war, but He killed him later. On the boat coming home—just a day or two away from my arms. Influenza. And they buried him at sea. . . . I didn't know, of course, and I was there to meet the ship that brought his battalion back. In Boston. So happy, and all in new clothes. Almost two years I'd waited. . . . Did you ever hear of the Mothers' Boat, Jock Hamill? When the big transports got in, sometimes they'd send a little tug down the harbor to meet them, with mothers, and sweethearts, and wives. I was on one of those little tugs. Early one morning. Foggy and wet and cold—in March, it was. You couldn't see the land, nor anything but gray fog and gray water all around. They took the tug boat out a way and then they let it drift, and everybody stood so quiet and tense, staring all in one direction. . . . I don't know how long we were there. A piece of forever. . . . And then finally we began to hear a foghorn, and bye and bye we could see the faint gray outlines of the transport through the mist. And they started our engine up again, and we went toward it. And when we got nearer there was a new color out of the gray. Brown. Khaki. Great lines of it—I could hardly see them, I was crying so. For joy.

"They brought the tug so close to the liner that there was only a narrow span of water between, and the liner

stopped, and we stopped. Close enough that we could look up high and see the soldiers' faces. Thousands of soldiers. I'll never forget them. Waving and cheering and jammed in rows a dozen deep all up and down the decks. I tried to find Paul. I couldn't, but it didn't matter—I was so sure he was there, somewhere. I smiled and smiled, and threw kisses. And all the time, I was smiling at the rail they had pushed him off of two days before, wrapped in a flag—and I *didn't know*——”

She broke off, fighting to retain the self-control that had kept her voice low and even . . . with an evenness that had somehow testified more poignantly than screams to the depth and truth of her emotion. Her dry-bright eyes looked out over the sea, and she shivered almost imperceptibly. Jock sat motionless, wracked. “*God*—how you did *hurt* her—” He would have taken her in his arms to soothe her, but something forbade him. It was as though she hid from him now, behind the ghost of the man she had so loved.

Presently he sensed a change in her, a definite hardening . . . steel doors pushed shut with a clang . . . and she was again the Yvonne he knew best, cool and possessed and faintly satirical. “Light me a cigarette, Jock. Appropriate to the rest of this autobiography.

“I won't try to tell you about those next few weeks. I couldn't tell you if I wanted to, because I can't remember anything about them except a sort of dazed, bruised agony. Just two things I knew: that there wasn't any God, and that it didn't matter in the least what happened to me, any more.

“I didn't go back to Ohio. I don't think it even occurred to me that to go back would be the logical thing, and I've never been back since, to this day. I went to New York . . . did you ever notice how

people crawl there when they're down, like poisoned animals toward water? . . .

"Of course I had no money, to begin with. I lived in a little black hole of a room in a boarding house just off Broadway, and worked. Sold magazines at a stand in the Grand Central station—that was my first job. Then I was a model in a cheap wholesale house for awhile. I suppose you've never been in one of those places, have you, Jock Hamill? The models sit around in little pink silk slips, and fat greasy buyers have a perfect right to paw them over like the merchandise . . . and do it. . . . Later I got into the misses' department of one of the big stores as a dress model, but I didn't stay. That sort of thing wasn't what I wanted.

"Then I worked in a cabaret. Carrying a tray tied around my neck with a ribbon, and crying, 'Cigars! Cigarettes!' all night long, and smiling at the men so they'd tip me well. . . . Finally the manager found out I could sing, and I did a couple of solos every night. You know, going from table to table. I took a new last name then—Mountford—the Yvonne is my own.

"There were several different jobs after that, each one of them a little step up. Cabaret singer at Huber's, and later at the Café Mandalay. And all the time, things were happening to me. Sordid things. I needn't tell you, they weren't important. Then—do you remember the Sedgewyke divorce case? The papers were full of it at the time. I was co-respondent. . . . That gave me a lot of notoriety, and got me a new place. On the stage. You guessed right about that, though I wasn't really what you could call an actress. Just sort of a glorified chorus girl in 'Pretty Baby' for a year on Broadway. I wore clothes, and walked

around, and sang one song in the second act. . . . In the spring I married the leading man." She mentioned a famous footlight name. "I don't know why. I didn't even like him. But he made a huge salary. . . . Gold-digger, you see. That's all I am. Or was," she added on a quiet breath.

"We lived together seven months in an apartment on Central Park West, and kept open house. He used to pick up the queerest people—I don't know yet where he found them all. There were a lot of show people, of course, and prize-fighters, and gamblers, and Greenwich village poets, and 'ladies with no destination,' as Kipling calls them, and flotsam and jetsam. We had parties *all* the time, night and day. Just drunken brawls. I was forever helping people to bed. Even now, when I think about that apartment, I can only see it as it used to look every morning before the maids got to work on it. Bottles, and siphons, and cigarette butts, and broken glasses, and stale, sickening air. I suppose that's what made me hate liquor the way I do. . . . I used to have an awful time, trying to get *him* straightened up before the performance. You never saw anybody become so drunk so often. And then one night he struck me across the face, and that was the end. I left him, and got a divorce—oh, I had plenty of grounds, even in New York.

"There was a lot more publicity connected with that, because he was so well known, and when it was over I wrote a story for a newspaper syndicate—or rather, some man wrote it, and I signed my name and got a sizable check. The thing was called, 'Why I'm Through With Matrimony,' and it ran in four installments in Sunday supplements all over the country. It was mostly bunk, of course, and very lurid. Pictures of me splashed all over the pages. I got a lot of letters about

it. Letters from men, making all sorts of proposals, and from crazy girls, and people wanting help. And one from a woman who said I ought to be locked up somewhere. . . . I've always remembered that. Sometimes, you know, I almost get myself to thinking that she was right.

"I'd put away a little money, but not much, and I had to make my living again. So I was hostess at the Twelve-to-Five Club. You've been there, haven't you?—you know the sort of place it is. Just like a hundred other supper clubs. That's where I ran on to some of the people I know—college boys, for instance. I met a lot of college boys. One reason I wouldn't come down to the games you asked me to last fall was because I was afraid I'd meet some of them again and they'd tell you about me. I didn't want you to know. I don't now, but I've got to tell you. Something is making me tell you. Don't think I'm *enjoying* this, Jock Hamill!

"Of course I had grown very hard and cynical—and mercenary—by that time. New York does that to a girl alone, and losing the only thing you really cared about does it. I wanted money. . . . See, I told you! *Glitter*. . . . I'd made up my mind that money was more important than anything else in the world, a lot more important than a fickle will-o'-the-wisp like happiness. Money was so tangible. So—so *there*. A thing you could hold in your hand. I wanted lots of it. And it didn't matter much how I got it. Do you understand, Jock Hamill? It didn't matter how I got it.

"Well, there was a man who used to come to the club often, named Parke Demorest——"

"I know," said Jock unexpectedly.

The sound of his voice surprised him. He had

spoken aloud without volition, for the first time since Yvonne began talking.

She stopped short now, and fixed him with her glance. "You—*know*? Who—who told you, my dear? You didn't know before I went away—" Her eyes filled with sudden enlightenment. "You've talked to that Toby Jennings who brought me to the dance the night I met you!"

"No I haven't," Jock said quietly. "Do you think I'd gumshoe around trying to find out things you didn't want me to know? I stumbled on it accidentally. Demorest's picture in a newspaper, and something about his having left for California. The day you did. I knew you knew him—that time in Sherry's, remember?—but even then I wasn't—I didn't believe——"

"You didn't *want* to believe, did you?"

Jock did not reply, and his eyes fell from hers, to her white fingers that played restlessly at her throat. He felt numb. A sort of mental paralysis, that enabled him to hear and see but not to think, seemed to have settled on him. "It's been just a lot of words," he told himself, "and they're true, yet they don't mean anything. I don't feel anything. Good Lord, what's the matter with me? I ought to feel *something*—one way or the other——"

Yvonne's voice began again, rather breathlessly. "I'm sorry. But you'll have to believe it now, because it's so. I've been his mistress for over a year. He gave me that limousine, and these rings, and the clothes I have on, and he paid for my apartment. . . . I thought I had what I wanted. Money; and everything money buys. But you see, I didn't leave room in my calculations for one thing, Jock Hamill. I didn't know I'd ever meet you, and love you, and wish—oh, *wish* so!—that I'd kept myself for you. I'm realizing, a

long while too late, that money doesn't really amount to much—that love is the only thing that matters.”

She stood up, and Jock from his seat on the steps raised his eyes blankly to her white set face. “Just one more thing I want to tell you,” she said. “I've left him. I left him in California, to come here and tell this to you, and I've moved from his apartment, and tomorrow I'm going to get rid of his car. I—I'd just like to have you know that I'll never belong to him again, even if—even if you don't want me——”

Jock gave a harsh, unintelligible cry then, and got to his feet. But she would not let him speak. “No, don't. I want you to *think*, before you say anything. I'm going to leave you for a little while, so you can. And bye and bye, when you've made up your mind—come and tell me—I'll be waiting——”

A minute later he was alone on the porch of the cottage called *Paradise*.

XII

“First,” he thought, “I've got to make myself *realize*.”

He sat down again, with his back against a post, and crossed his arms on his up-propped knees and looked straight ahead. He gave his imagination full play. He goaded it deliberately, and made it, unwilling, listen at doors and peep through keyholes. . . . And suddenly anguish smote him like a bolt, searing his every nerve. He shut his eyes tight, as though by this gesture he would erase the visions of his mind. He groaned, and dropped his forehead to rest on his crossed arms. And so for a time he sat still as stone,

suffering unutterably . . . because a dream, a lovely priceless thing, had died. . . .

How long he remained thus he never knew; whether an interval to be measured in minutes or in hours. Or in years. It seemed to him that he lived years while he sat there. "Oh, well," he reflected grimly, "I suppose that's what 'growing up' means. Losing your faith in people and things you'd have staked your life on, once." . . . After a while this thought drew another from the whirling tumult of his brain and set it up for him to examine. *Would* he ever have staked his life on Yvonne's integrity? Hadn't there always been a little lurking suspicion somewhere deep within him? . . . He recalled a thousand things she had said and done, a thousand irrelevancies that had rapped at his consciousness and been stubbornly denied admittance. All so obvious now, he wondered how he could have overlooked them. "Because I *tried* to." That was it, of course. He had been at great pains to overlook them. "Love is blind only because it ties its own bandage over its own eyes" . . .

Well, he couldn't overlook them any more. Never any more. It was as though he had seen Yvonne only by moonlight before, and now he saw her in a cruel white calcium glare. She was older, by the calcium glare. And wiser. And wearier. But was she any less desirable? Did he love her any less? *There*. That was the question that had to be settled, and soon. "*Do I love her any less?*"

He rehearsed again all the things she had told him, carefully . . . and this time pity overrode his pain. "Rotten. Life's treated her *rotten*. She hasn't had a fair break, not a single one, since the beginning. Her mother and father dying, and the atmosphere of that town she lived in, and then the fellow in the war. And

that second marriage—" After all, could you blame her? Could you blame her no matter *what* she did? He demanded it aloud of the empty air. "You can't blame her, can you?"

And then, because the near sea seemed to laugh and mock at him, he grew angry, and began to denounce himself. "Who are you to blame her, anyway? *You*. . . . Why, damn it to hell, you're not so almighty good yourself, remember! You've done things yourself. And without any justification, like she had. Just to be vile. Just to satisfy your lousy low-down vile curiosity!" Crashing-clear as though it were yesterday, a prep school memory came back to him. A house in a sinister street. Himself and two other stealthy, shivering youngsters, creeping there in the night . . . and the sick disillusionment, ugly, intolerable, that had followed. . . . When they left he had turned frantically, and picked up a rock, and hurled it through that leering window . . .

And there were other memories. Not many, but a few. Little dark splotches down the margins of fair pages. . . .

"*damn* you!" he choked. "Why, you're not fit to kiss her *shoes*. . . . And look! She doesn't ask what you've done. She doesn't care what you've done. 'Love is the only thing that matters.' She loves you. Enough to leave everything and come to you, and tell you—she didn't *have* to tell you. She could have lied and lied, and you'd have believed every word. But because she wouldn't lie to you, you sit like this, like a smug saint with a halo, and *dare* to judge her! She was too *fine* to lie. She wouldn't stoop to that. And here you are . . ."

He pitched sideways and lay face downward on the porch, humbled and penitent. He whispered, barely,

audibly: "Oh, Yvonne—sweetheart—forgive me, you'll have to forgive me for this! It was just that I worshiped you so. Put you in a shrine, and thought you weren't human. And then—someone else's arms—it killed me to think of you in someone else's arms. . . . But that's over. You're mine now. *Mine!*" He chattered it fiercely. "Mine! My wife! That's what you're going to be. And nobody else will ever so much as touch your hand."

He held then a little requiem over the past. He divided the things Yvonne had said, putting the ones that had stung him away into permanent oblivion, repeating the ones that were precious over and over, so that his lips should chisel them into the enduring tablets of his memory. . . . After a long time he stood up, laboriously, like a man just out of a sick-bed. He walked down the steps to the beach.

There was a weather-beaten wharf not a great distance away, and there he caught sight of Yvonne, standing on its far edge, gazing out at the ocean. Yvonne in her white fur . . . and she had taken off her hat, so that her hair was like the torch of a slender white candle. Yvonne. So beautiful. So glittering-beautiful . . .

And there was no problem in his mind any more. Nothing but a resolution, and a desire, and a new sharp ecstasy.

He began to run toward her, stumbling a little in the sand.

XIII

"Mail," observed Bones Allen to no one in particular.

He advanced into his room and took the thin stack

of letters from the desk, skimming through them hopefully. He had reason to expect a check from home; that is to say, he had written beseeching one in a manner so fervent that he assured himself it could not fail of results. He read aloud, "Mr. Jock Hamill, Mr. Jock Hamill, Mr. Laurence Allen—from Sis, that won't help the poor and needy—Mr. Jock Hamill——"

He held this last missive off and surveyed it with truculence. It was unstamped, and bore no address. Just his roommate's name. The envelope was rimmed in black, and its flap had a black monogram—E B H in letters that caught hold of one another's toes like acrobats hanging from a trapeze.

"That dumb dame!" Bones grunted. "Why the devil won't she let him alone?" He brought the envelope to his nose and inhaled disgustedly. "All stink-o with perfume——"

He gave his own letter the cursory perusal young men invariably accord the communications of young ladies to whom they are related. Even Peg's declaration that she was contemplating matrimony failed to win from him more than a tolerant smile. Peg was always contemplating matrimony—merely contemplating. She had been engaged so many times during the course of her kaleidoscopic career that any such announcement had become as the celebrated cry of "Wolf! Wolf!"—and was so accepted by her family. "Of course," she wrote now, "you're saying, 'What, *again?*' and thinking this is just another laugh. But I'm serious. I really think it's going to take, this time. You don't know the victim, but he's Johnny Havens of New York and I learned about fiancés from him" . . .

Bones tossed the scribbled sheets onto his chiffonier and began to disrobe. He wondered where Jock was.

After a time he picked up the battered nickel alarm clock that leaned drunkenly against the caster of his bed and squinted at it. A relic, that alarm clock. One-legged, and with sketches and legends pock-marking its unglassed face. Just now one hand pointed to a lady with a corn cob pipe in her month. The other pointed to "Andover 1918." This meant that the hour lacked fifteen minutes to six.

Bones went to the door, his mouth opened wide to bellow his roommate's name. Encountering Pink Davis on the threshold, he closed it to the degree adapted to propinquity and said, "Seen Jock any place?"

"Not since noon," said Pink.

"Wonder where he is?"

"Still out with the streamline siren, I guess."

"The what? Who you talking about?"

"That's right, you didn't come in till afterward, did you?" Pink recollected. He sat down, hoisted his feet to a table and prepared for oratory. "Say, you should have been here! We're all downstairs waiting for chow, when what should pull up out in front but Buckingham Palace on wheels containing a red-headed baby that would knock your eye out. In the midst of the riot that follows, Jock meanders in, takes one look, and dashes through the door like a bat out of hell. Seems she's a petting acquaintance of his, or what-have-you. Pretty soon he brings her back in with him, and a lot more redskins bite the dust. No foolin', Bones, she was bottled-in-bond stuff, and I don't mean maybe! She stayed a little while, talking to us, and then she and Jock rode off together. And nobody's seen him since."

Bones, who had been listening intently, now waggled a bent-back thumb in the direction of Yvonne's photograph. "That the one?"

"That's her. Who is she, anyway? I've noticed that picture before, but I never heard Jock say anything."

"Oh, well, you know how he is—mum's his middle name. He never said anything to me either except to tell me her name—Yvonne Mountford—but he's certainly *looked* a bookfull." Bones' eyes fell from the picture to the desk where the note from Eunice lay, a somehow flamboyant black-and-white square on the worn green blotter. "Humph!" he sneered at it under his breath.

A few minutes later Jock came in. They heard him approaching, whistling a tune—one of those modern tunes about blisses and kisses and happiness-this-is—and they winked jovially at one another. A college boy loves to tease, and here would be a rare distinguished opportunity. They rose simultaneously as Jock entered and they shook his hand with solemn and silent gusto.

"Gentlemen, I thank you," he said, equally solemn. "I do indeed. Your greeting warms the cockles of my heart, e'en while it bewilders me." He shrugged himself out of his coat and stood regarding them quizzically. "Have I been elected Dean of the college? I knew it was only a question of time——"

"Jock," interrupted Pink softly, "what kind of an afternoon did you have?"

Jock smiled, and rolled his eyes heavenward, over-emphasizing the rapture he felt to the point where it seemed caricature. "Ah!" he sighed. "You should ask me!"

"Where's the mamma?" Bones wanted to know.

"She's gone back to New York, worse luck."

Pink burst into song. "That red-head gal, la-de-da, la-de-da, she's got me worr-ried——" He subsided,

to add, "Ne'mind, Jock, I'm with you. You know how to pick 'em."

"Don't I, though?"

"I don't see how you do it," Pink continued. "I swear I don't. I was just saying to Bones before you came in, how does he do it, and Bones said, 'Why, it's his fatal beauty——'"

Jock bowed his head approvingly to Bones. "Truest words you ever uttered, brother!" . . . Secretly he was restless and impatient, bored with this persiflage and the necessity of returning it in kind. He longed to be by himself, alone with the new great glory that had risen in an hour from the ashes of an old ideal. He wanted to look into the mirror at the man whom Yvonne loved, and try to understand *how she could*. He wanted to think of the future. Of Yvonne belonging to him . . . not only saying that she would some day, but actually *being his*. It was a prospect to take the breath away like a keen wind in the face, to make the arms reach out suddenly and the blood leap and sing in the veins. . . . Maddening, to have to be facetious and light about it all for the sake of these two who watched eagle-eyed. Damn Pink Davis, anyway! "—that baby can use my toothbrush any time," Pink was now magnanimously declaring.

Jock sprawled in a chair and lit his pipe. "Any mail?" he inquired, to change the subject.

"Desk," said Bones succinctly.

Two letters propped against the inkwell, and a third flat on the blotter. He picked this up and glowered, much as Bones had glowered at it some minutes earlier. "*Now* what?" he said to himself. He perceived that Bones was looking at him over his shoulder with eyes darkly round in a ruddy face. The eyes flickered meaningfully toward Pink and back again. Jock, thus warned,

pushed the note into his pocket, where it seemed to weigh heavily, with a weight amazing in such a flimsy thing.

Later, when Pink had departed, he took it out and slapped it thoughtfully against the palm of his hand. He could not have explained why, but he was loath to open it. "When did this come?" he asked.

"Found it when I got back from track," said Bones. He gesticulated with a hairbrush. "For criminy's sake, Jock, tell that female to lay off! How can you expect the chatter to pipe down as long as she calls up on the 'phone and sends you notes by special messenger?"

"Calls up? Did she call this afternoon?"

"*Only* seven times," said Bones testily. "I met Benny coming in and he told me to tell you. He said her 'Is Mis-tah Hamill theah yet' had worn bunions on his ear-drums."

Jock heard with rising irritation. Just like Eunice! That was his thought. So exactly like her to intrude herself now, and cloud the radiance of his horizon. She had a genius for ineptitude, for striking the discordant note, that girl. . . . He ripped open the envelope with the stem of his pipe and read, scowling.

"What's she want?" interrogated Bones.

"Wants to see me about something."

"Tell her to go to hell, you can't give her any time."

"She says it's very urgent——"

"Yah!" jeered Bones. "Louder! And funnier! Yah, I'll bet it's urgent. You take my advice, and tell her——"

Jock cut him off. "Can't," he said simply. "I'll have to drop over after dinner and see what the trouble is. Least I can do. After all, Bones, she's Brad's widow, and she's terribly alone."

"You're so all-fired conscientious, you give me a

pain!" exclaimed Bones. "If she's lonesome why doesn't she go back down South where she came from? What's she moping around here for, that's what I'd like to know. Ask her that when you get there."

"No bad idea," commented Jock. "I will. I'd like to know, myself."

He sat idle for some seconds, toying with Eunice's letter but not thinking of it longer, nor of her. "Believe I'll leave college," he announced startlingly.

"*What?*"

Jock nodded. "Might as well. I haven't done a lick of work since before Christmas, and I'm darn sure I won't from now on. I'm sick of the whole business, anyway. Why hang on here for four months more when I don't want to, just to get a degree that won't mean a thing when I do get it? I can't see the percentage."

"You've hung on for four years already after that degree! What's a few months, compared——"

"Things are different now, though."

Bones left his dresser and came to perch on the edge of the desk, from which elevation he looked down upon his roommate with anxiety. "See here, Jock," he began. "I get it. I get it straight. You're all gloomed up over this Hathaway thing, and no wonder, what with the way the boys are taking it and Bad News down the street bombarding you with notes and all. But listen, that'll straighten itself out if you give it time, and then——"

"That's not it!" insisted Jock. "You're way out of bounds. I'd never let a little rumor hound me out of college if I didn't want to go, you ought to know that. No, the fact is——" He faltered, irresolute. To tell it! To hear himself say it aloud, and know that it was real! Bones' beloved worried face added the last straw to

this delectable temptation. "The fact is, old man—just between you and me—I'm going to be married!"

"You *are!* To——"

"To Yvonne, of course." Loving the very words, he said them over. "I'm going to marry Yvonne Mountford. Ha! What do you think of *that*, Bones?"

Bones beamed, his face clearing in a twinkling. "Great!" he cried. "Gee, yes, that's the honey!" He leaned to pump Jock's hand and to give him a stunning blow on the back. "Congratulations! Say, I'm damn glad——"

"Thanks," Jock said. Rather shortly, because an unaccountable fullness was constricting his throat momentarily, militating against composure. Old Bones . . . good old boy, best pal in the world. . . .

"—sore because I wasn't here when she came," Bones was rattling on. "Wanted to see her, the worst way. They tell me she's right there, and over. Say, how's to loosen up and release a little dope? You've been silent as the Sphinx, you big bum! How long's this been simmering? And when's the great event coming off? I'll have to get me a new drinking suit, and begin hoarding hootch for a fit celebration!"

"You've got plenty of time," grinned Jock. "We aren't going to be married for a—for quite awhile." He had almost said, "For a year." That had been Yvonne's pronouncement. "We'll wait at least a year, my dear." And when he had demurred, frenziedly, she had added, "You'll know me better in a year. I want to be very, very sure that *you* are sure" . . . Absurd! As though he wasn't sure now . . . as though a year of seeing her could have any effect whatever except to cause his love for her to strengthen!

"At least," he amended aloud, "she says it won't

be for quite awhile. But I'm going to talk her out of that, or die trying."

"Sure!" said Bones sympathetically.

"So you see, it's just a waste of time, my milling around here. I want to get out and get started in business. No wife of mine is going to live on my mother's money, that's one thing that's settled right now."

"What are you going to do, do you know?"

"Oh," Jock retorted vaguely, "sell bonds, or something, I suppose. That's what everybody does, isn't it?"

"It is," said Bones, "but you're not 'everybody.' You ought to take up something different and cagey—leave the peddling jobs to fish like me who can't do anything else."

Jock sputtered, "Now you're popping off just like your sister! There seems to be a family hallucination about my potentialities——"

"By the way! That reminds me, Peg's engaged too. I just had a letter."

"She is? Fine! I'm——"

"Oh, don't run a temperature over the thing," Bones advised. "Ten to one it won't pan out—you know Peg, she catches engagements like the rest of us catch colds. But she wanted me to tell you."

Later, when they went down to dinner arm in arm, Bones said with a determined levity that deceived neither of them, "Then it's all decided, is it? You're really going to sign off, and leave the rest of us flat?"

"Guess I am," replied Jock. "Don't say anything about it yet—I haven't talked it over with the mater, of course, but—well, I guess I am."

"I'll miss you."

"Same here, old man."

Both were tremendously touched, sad. And to deny the presence of so weak and feminine an emotion, they took the rest of the stairs in a series of gallops and descended, uproarious, upon the dining room.

XIV

Eunice was curled up in a great chair, reading . . . so absorbed in reading that she did not appear to have heard the clamor of the doorbell nor the entrance of Jock. He stood surveying her from across the room. Her head, bent over the book, showed dark hair marcelled in perfect concentric circles from a tiny part, and wisps of it pasted like inverted question marks on her forehead. Her gown was black lace, so tight in the bodice that the filagree design gave an effect of having been stencilled on the skin. One leg was tucked up under her, and the other, a slyly overt leg in a sheer pinky-black chiffon stocking and a black satin slipper held across the instep with a bow of ribbon, hung toward the floor. "She got that pose," he thought dryly, "from one of the hosiery ads."

He said, "It must be a darn good book."

She glanced up quickly then, simulating astonishment. "Jock! I didn't heah you come in!"

"Didn't you?" politely. "I rang three times. But maybe the bell is broken or something." He took the book from her fingers and read the title, "*In Defense of Women* by H. L. Mencken. Say, how do you like this?"

"All right," replied Eunice. "It's—" she paused uncertainly, and Jock waited. He thought if she would make an intelligent comment on this book, or

on any book or thing, he could forgive her much. But she finished lamely, and his flash of interest died. "It's peculiah," she said.

"Yah," he agreed vacantly. He put the book down and seizing a little chair thrust it between his knees, so that he sat eyeing Eunice above the back of it. "What's on your mind? What did you want to see me about?"

"Oh—lots of things," she evaded. "Let's not talk about that right off. Let's talk about you foah awhile. Why haven't you been to see me foah almost two weeks, Jock?"

Her perennial query; but before he could give his perennial excuse of busyness, she had veered to a new tack. "I saw you today."

"Is that a fact?"

"Didn't you see me?"

"Yes, I believe I did."

"Was *that* the woman you were tellin' me about last fall—the one you said had 'a mouth like Cleopatra's kiss'?"

Jock remembered having said this. But he wished very much that he had not. It sounded ridiculous, puerile, when Eunice quoted it. . . . He bowed stiffly in affirmation.

"But I thought you told me she was *pretty!*"

"Well, my God, *isn't* she?"

Eunice hesitated, running the tip of her tongue over her lips. "If you want me to be perfectly frank, Jock," she said at last, "she looked a little bit *passé* to me. She must be yeahs and yeahs oldah than you, of cohse."

Jock started; then chuckled derisively. "*In Defense of Women*—no wonder it had to be written by a man! Honestly, Eunice, you burn me up! You wouldn't

even give the devil his due if he happened to have a skirt on, would you?"

"Now don't be horrid!" pouted Eunice. "You asked me foah an opinion and I gave it. She *did* look *passé* to me. I can't help it if I've got eyes, can I?"

"No, but you really ought to buy 'em some spectacles."

"Rose-colohed ones like yoahs, I suppose?"

Understanding perfectly the spirit that prompted these sallies, Jock was no whit affronted by them. "Say," he said, pleasantly enough, "did you invite me over here this evening just to have me listen while you hurl bouquets at another girl?"

"Anothah *what?* 'Girl' is a teens-and-twenties word, remembah!" So unforeseenly that it took him a moment to accustom himself to the transition, she became apologetic. "Oh, I'm sorry, Jock. Really. Don't pay any attention to me. I reckon I'm—prejudiced."

He rather liked her for that. It seemed to him one of the few genuine things he had ever heard Eunice say.

"Let's talk about somethin' else," she suggested.

He had difficulty in analyzing her subsequent remarks. She seemed to be determinedly and gradually leading up to something, but to what he could not surmise. He was aware of an increasing tension—both in himself, and in her. She talked much faster than usual, and inconsecutively, bridging wide gulfs between topics with a single word, or even not troubling to bridge them at all. And as she talked she looked into her lap, at her fidgeting fingers, out of the window . . . everywhere, in fact, but at him.

"What is this?" he thought uneasily. "What's it all about?"

“ . . . Brad was wild ovah you, Jock,” she was saying. “I don’t think you evah realized how deah you were to him. He’d have done anythin’ foah you. Anythin’ undah the sun. He often said so, and I knew it anyhow. Just the night befoah—befoah *that* night, we were talkin’ about you, and he said that you were the best friend he evah had or evah would have—that he’d do anythin’ foah you and he was suah you’d do the same foah him——”

“I sincerely hope I would have,” Jock said.

Eunice threw him a brief glance, dropping her eyes again quickly. “He loved me so,” she proceeded. “I’ve been thinkin’ a lot about that since he’s gone. He wouldn’t let anythin’ trouble me, evah, foah a minute. He just took all the cahes and responsibilities right off my shoulders. I nevah knew what it was to worry until lately . . .”

And on, and on, in this vein. About Brad, about herself, about Jock. Presently he could not listen with forbearance any longer. He cleared his throat. “Look here, Eunice! Quit beating about the bush, will you? Something’s worrying you now, and you want me to help you—that’s what you’re trying to tell me, isn’t it? Well, of course, I’ll help you, and be glad to, if I can. So come on, out with it—what seems to be the matter?”

For reply she moved from her chair over to the lounge, where she sat patting the cushion beside her. “Come sit heah by me, Jock. I can talk to you bettah when you’ah not so fah away.”

He complied indifferently, stretching his superb length in the corner that was farthest from her. He shoved his hands into his trousers pockets and rested his chin on his chest, and waited. His face where the lamplight kissed it obliquely looked stern and forbid-

ding—a sure indication that he was puzzled and wary and not a little disturbed. Eunice, unwatched, watched him with telltale eyes. Once she made a tiny half-gesture toward him . . . then drew back in haste and locked her fingers together in her lap.

“Jock,” she began, “did you know theah’s a lot of scandal around about—us?”

“Yes. Asinine, isn’t it?” said Jock. Impelled by a second thought, he brought his chin up with a jerk and examined her. “Is *that* what’s got you so sunk?”

Even as he asked, he read his answer. Eunice’s lips were trembling. “Oh, listen!” he went on. “Don’t let a thing like that smack you down!” The fact that he privately shared her distress made him only the more vociferous in refutation, and he said aloud and with emphasis all the things he had long been telling himself by way of anaesthetic. “Why, it doesn’t amount to five cents’ worth of birdseed! It’s beneath our notice, absolutely! You ought to read Schopenhauer, Eunice. ‘To lay great value on what other people say of you is to do them too much honor.’”

Eunice was pressing a ball of handkerchief against her mouth, and now she spoke through it thickly. “It’s all very well to philosophize—you’ah a man, and men don’t mind things like that—they don’t *have* to mind, because nobody cares what they do. But it’s a whole lot different with a girl like me—” She raised the handkerchief to her eyes, and her concluding sentence came from her freed lips with a somehow staggering distinctness. “They won’t speak to me on the street any moah——”

“Who won’t? Who do you mean, ‘they’?”

“Some women.”

“Oh, of course, *women!* But who?”

“Professors’ wives, and—people like that.”

Jock had a distracted minute in which to visualize Eunice receiving the cut direct from women who had formerly accepted her as one of them . . . then he bent his mind acutely on her further revelations. She had conquered the weeping that threatened, and sat tearless and wan, fumbling with her handkerchief as she talked. Her fingernail, outlining its hem around and around and around made a sound that set his teeth on edge like the screech of chalk down a blackboard.

"You don't know," she said. "Nobody knows what I've been through. Things hit me mighty hard, Jock—I'm sensitive, I'm not like you. I can't laugh it off the way you can. In the beginnin' I didn't understand what was goin' on and I decided I must be imaginin' it, or somethin'. But then finally one of the girls—Fifi Dane, you know her—told me. She said she thought I ought to know that people were talkin' *somethin' awful!* All about you and I were in love with each other, and used to see each other on the quiet all the time, and about how suspicious and jealous Brad was. A lot of stuff about that. And then, how he caught us together that night, and how you ran away—she said people said you ran away, Jock, just imagine!—and how that was the reason Brad—did what he did. 'Turned the gun that was meant for you on himself'—that was the way Fifi put it——"

"God!" A groan, wrung from Jock. He sprang up and began to stride the floor, pushing the fingers of one hand through his hair. At the opposite wall he wheeled and faced Eunice, with the hand lying quiescent at the nape of his neck. "Did you tell her?" he demanded. "Did you tell her the real reason why Brad 'turned the gun on himself'?"

"No, I—I didn't——"

Eunice appeared a little frightened, as though the directness of the question had upset her. But Jock noticed nothing. He was engrossed in his own reaction to her reply . . . in despising himself because he could not deny that it was a disappointment. "You wanted her to tell!" his thoughts accused him. "You wanted her to say yes, she'd told the whole thing! Just to save your own skin, you hoped she'd done Brad a trick like that—that you wouldn't be willing to do *yourself*—say, what kind of a cur are you, anyway?"

Eunice's next words slapped at his ears like an added reproof. "How could I, Jock? You don't think I ought to go around tellin' people poah old Brad was a bootleggah, do you? And that he sold poison liquah to a——"

"No, no, of course not!"

"It's bettah they should think I'm no good than that he wasn't," Eunice asserted piously. "He's dead now. I'm the one that's got to suffah."

Then Jock's spleen at himself shifted to her, redoubled a hundredfold. Eunice! Self-commiserating! "I'm the one that's got to suffer" . . . she could say that with a straight face, a sad face, and in that aggrieved and martyred manner! Why, it was so preposterous as to be laughable! But he did not laugh. He stood and listened with a sort of detached appreciation while the invectives that had long lain dormant awoke and poured themselves cruelly, scaldingly, from his tongue.

"And why in God's name shouldn't you suffer? What made him a bootlegger—what started all this in the first place, just answer me that? Do you imagine for one minute Brad Hathaway would ever have dirtied his hands like that *of his own free will?*"

If you hadn't kept at him and kept at him about money till he didn't know what he *was* doing, he'd be alive this minute——”

“Oh!” gasped Eunice.

“—and you've got the colossal gall to sit there and talk about how you've got to suffer for him! And to say it's better that people should think you're no good than that he wasn't! You're damn right, it's better!—because it's truer! He was one of the best men that ever lived, and you—*parasite*—if he turned out to be anything else toward the end, *you* were responsible! No, you shouldn't tell anybody he was bootlegging. You were right about that. If he'd been anybody but Brad it wouldn't matter so much, but *Brad*—whom everybody loved and respected—who never did an underhanded thing in his life until *you* got hold of him—no, neither you nor I can ever tell on him. But don't try to make out you've got altruistic motives for keeping your mouth shut! I don't know what your motives are, I don't pretend to, but I know whatever they are they're selfish—like everything else about you——”

He desisted as suddenly as though he had been grappled from behind and bound and gagged. His eyes had fallen on a photograph of Brad, framed in polychrome on a little table. He fancied that the picture was reproaching him; that it looked sorrowful, cut to the heart, and that its frozen lips were whispering, “Jock! Jock! *Don't . . .*” He stole a look at Eunice and saw that she cringed like a flogged child, hiding her face against her bare round arm that lay along the back of the divan and clawed blindly at threads with its fingers. He thought how Brad would hate to see her so, and a great shame took hold on him. Not because he had hurt Eunice; Eunice

didn't matter, she deserved it anyway; but because he felt that in some occult way he was even now hurting Brad unbearably.

He had an uncanny impression, when he went to stand before Eunice, that the Eyes in the polychrome frame moved as he moved and stopped when he stopped—vigilant. He seemed to feel them boring into his back. "Eunice," he said with a gentleness that was for their benefit, "Eunice, look up here. Please forget what I said, will you? Can you? Please."

It was a relief to hear her say that she would. She said other things too, unconsciously remedying the deficiencies in his plea for pardon. "You didn't mean it, of course. You were just beside yourself on account of the othah. I know. Don't think any more about it, Jock." The grace and promptness with which she forgave him disquieted him. That wasn't like Eunice. It was more like Brad. *It was more like Brad!* Did she also, then, talk at the dictation of those dead and sightless, yet somehow seeing, living, penetrating Eyes?

He thought she did. Grotesquely he thought of a Punch-and-Judy show . . . Eunice and he, puppets, motivated and controlled by a hidden presence who spoke aloud now through their mouths.

He sat down again beside her. "Now!" he said, making a determined attempt to throw himself beyond the shadow of this awe. "That's all over. Go on with what you were saying, Eunice. About the rotten gossip—I'm sorry it worries you so."

"It nearly kills me!"

"I know. It's a crime."

"If Brad knew," Eunice went on, slowly and stumblingly, "I—I don't know what he'd do. He wouldn't

stand foah it, though, I'm suah of that. He'd nevah let me be persecuted and insulted the way I am being every day of my life. He'd do *somethin'!*"

She looked expectantly at Jock. He said the only thing he could think of that might be what she was waiting for. "What do you suppose that he would do?"

"Oh," cried Eunice, "what difference does it make what he'd do? He's gone—and I haven't got *anybody*——"

"You have me," Jock reminded her quietly. "You know very well I'll do anything in my power, for Brad's sake. And—for your sake, too, of course. But what is there I *can* do? I don't see——"

Eunice interrupted. "Wheah I come from," she said—and even the inflections of her voice on these first four words struck Jock as ominous, "wheah I come from, when a girl has been put in a compromisin' position, and theah is scandal around about her and some man, no mattah whethah it's his fault or not, the man—if he's honorable—offahs her the protection of his name——"

Silence, surcharged. Then Jock heard someone who sounded like himself at long distance say incredulously, "You mean—you think I ought to *marry* you—on account of this thing?"

"I mean I think that's what Brad would want you to do under the circumstances," answered Eunice, low.

Her gaze was upon him, her expression a thing mixed and undecipherable. But Jock was not looking at Eunice. He was looking once more toward the picture of Brad in the polychrome frame on the table. He was questioning it silently, fearfully. And he saw the picture *nod* at him . . . he would have sworn

all the rest of his days away on the actuality of that nod. . . .

“I see,” he murmured, stiff-lipped. “I see.”
(Oh, Yvonne! *Yvonne!*)

BOOK FOUR

Mrs. Hamill

Book Four

I

MRS. HAMILL was entertaining. All her guests were men, and at first glance there appeared to be hundreds of them, so wholly did they fill her house with tailored black and starched white and polished leather. As a matter of fact they numbered sixty. Bennett, the butler, had counted them, afterward sidling to his mistress to whisper the total. "Sixty tonight, Madam." And Mrs. Hamill had inclined her shingle-bobbed silver head in satisfaction. Sixty was quite as it should be.

They had arrived between the hours of ten and twelve, these guests, in a succession of motor cars sleek and correct and opulent, like themselves. They would depart again at dawn. In the meantime, rather incredible sums of money were changing hands across the little green baize tables in the card room, and above the long checkerboarded tables with clicking wheels sunk in their ends that lined the great salon. And of the rather incredible sums, a goodly portion would come to permanent rest at last in the soft small hands of Madelaine Hamill. Of course. One does not convert one's home into a casino of Chance for nothing.

Hour after hour she moved through the crowded rooms, smiling, greeting, exchanging badinage, seeing to it that highball glasses were often refilled and that matches were plentiful, noting mechanically whose

chips towered high on the roulette tables and whose dwindled. Now and then she stopped to follow the progress of a hand of bridge, or to stand behind some chair in obedience to the occupant's plea that she do so "to change my luck"; then strolled on again, a nomadic dart of color against the somber background provided by sixty suits of masculine evening clothes. She was wearing an orange gown that outlined her figure abruptly as a scissored paper-doll's and lit wee dancing lanterns in her eyes. She looked arrestingly lovely and extremely youthful, did Jock's mother. She seemed every inch the charming, the popular, the distinguished hostess; and not at all did she seem what she was . . . a lady making her living, just as she had made it every night for almost twelve years. . . .

Every night, that is, except the ones when Jock was with her. And even in twelve years there had not been many of those. Two weeks at Christmas, a week at Easter, a brief hiatus between the closing of school or college and the opening of camp or summer school—no more. Jock's vacations were, and had ever been, at once the glory and the bane of Madelaine Hamill's existence. They meant precious intimacy with the son she adored and knew only too little; but they meant also a wholesale housecleaning, a hiding-away of tables and wheels and all other damaging evidence, an incessant falsehood, an incessant panic for fear in some unthought of, unimaginable way, he might discover what it was that paid his bills and bought his education. . . .

"You're ridiculous," her good friend Saunders Lincoln told her often, "to try so hard to keep it secret. My dear Madelaine, surely you don't think any twentieth century college boy is going to faint away at the sight of a *roulette wheel*?"

And Mrs. Hamill always retorted, "No. I don't. But a woman who conducts a gambling joint, however exclusive and dignified, is nothing more or less than—a woman who conducts a gambling joint! Jock would hate the idea, and he isn't going to find out if I can help it."

Feminine logic, and therefore irrefutable.

This night plodded on in the footsteps of countless identical nights that had preceded it . . . through a murk of smoke and a dizzying flood of blue-white lights, and a tattoo of talk, throaty, monosyllabic. Mrs. Hamill's smile became set, as though she had painted its tilt with a lipstick and said to it, "*Stay that way, darn you!*" She was very weary. Her orange satin slippers were little gay prisons of pain, and her head swam. She consulted a watch in a diamond nest on her wrist, and promptly felt wearier. Three o'clock only . . . and no one ever left before five. . . .

She turned, and between lanes of rigid, preoccupied backs made her way into the hall. There for an instant she stood irresolute. Her impulse to rush through the door and refresh her smoke-choked lungs with gasps of outside air was succeeded by a saner second thought; outside air would be perilous, it being February and three a. m. . . . Mrs. Hamill was careful of herself, as she was of all exquisite fragile things. She hurried upstairs, returning swathed in fur from her ankles to her ears.

She opened the huge front door and stepped out and very nearly, but not quite, collided with her son Jock.

The type of mind that had ever enabled her to meet life calmly, resourcefully, gamely in the face of defeat, served her now. She reached back without too

much haste and shut the door. And she said in her normal voice, "Why, hello, dear."

"Hello, mother," said Jock, and bent to kiss her. "What goes on, anyway? Old Home Week or something? There must be a million machines parked around."

"I'm giving a little party," replied Mrs. Hamill. She laid hands on Jock's coat and pulled him so that the porch lights fell full on him. "Look at me, rascal! Have you been expelled? Don't keep your poor mother in suspense. And where's your hat? Did you—Jock, you didn't come all the way from college on a winter night without a hat?"

Her questions amused her faintly, so inconsequent they seemed. Hat . . . expulsion. . . . Dear God, what did it matter why he had come, or whether or not he had come bareheaded? He was here. And the veil of twelve years' tireless weaving was about to be swept from before him in one stroke, like a cobweb attacked with a broom. . . .

"No hat a-tall," she heard him say. "I 'spose you'll quinine me till I yell for mercy——"

"I shall indeed."

"Well, you see," he explained, "I didn't know I was coming. I jumped in the roadster about eight o'clock after a run-in with a gir—with someone, and started to drive like hell, and the first thing I knew I was a good fifty miles on my way here. So I came along the rest of the way." He hugged her close impulsively. "I wanted to talk to you anyway. I'm all tied up in the confoundest knot you ever heard of, and it's up to you to help me unravel. Say, let's go in, shall we? Here we stand like a couple of night watchmen——"

"No, wait!" cried Mrs. Hamill. And then, as Jock

stared at her in evident surprise, she added as lightly as she could, "It just occurred to me—wouldn't you rather go in the back door, dearest? Then you could sneak up the back stairs to your room and you wouldn't have to see anybody. I know how you hate to have a lot of people 'glad-hand' you, as you call it. And I'll join you up there in just a few minutes for a nice quiet chat——"

"Who's all in there?" Jock interrupted. "Any females?"

"N-no——"

"Then come on, I don't mind."

He took her arm and led her indoors, wondering while he did so why she laughed, a little hysterically. . . .

II

The last car droned down the drive and away into the reddening sunrise. Jock, at a window, watched it until it disappeared; after that he watched the place where it had been. From somewhere in the room behind him he could hear small sounds, significant. . . . Chips racketing into their boxes. Glasses clinking together on a tray. Voices, his mother's, Bennett's, the croupiers', business-like but oddly far off "Over a thousand." The scrape of chairs. The tiny whimper of a wall safe swinging open on its hinges, swinging shut again. Then receding footsteps. Then silence. . . .

And then, ever so sweetly, "Jock."

He left the window and confronted his mother.

"Ooh!" she said. "Don't look so cross, lover! Do you want to scare me to death?"

His face relaxed and he grinned. This mock terror of hers was winning, and as she twinkled up at him she was very young, younger than he—an urchin caught at mischief red-handed. "Madelaine Hamill, I've a good mind to spank you!" he said.

"Ho, you're not big enough!"

Giggling at this absurdity, they ascended the stairs together. "I hope you're not in a hurry to get to bed," Mrs. Hamill remarked en route, "because I have a lot of things I want to say."

"Hum. Just *try* to get me to bed till you've said 'em!"

But when they were established in Mrs. Hamill's dressing room, she stretched at full length on a wistaria taffeta sofa, Jock seated near in a wistaria chair as incongruous to him as lace would be on a football jersey, their cheerfulness dropped from them and they were grave and constrained. He spoke first, after a protracted wait. "Maybe you'd like to go to bed yourself, mother? You must be dog-tired. We can talk it over in the morning—I mean later—if you'd rather."

"I wouldn't rather," said Mrs. Hamill. "I want to talk it over *now*."

"Silly!" introspectively. "Twelve years—and now I don't even want to wait a minute——"

Jack lunged forward in his chair, gripping its arms. "Do you mean to say you've been doing this——" The break in his sentence encompassed all the things he had witnessed since he entered the house—"for *twelve years?*"

Mrs. Hamill nodded. "Ever since a year or two after your father died. I—he didn't leave any money, Jock. Not a cent. I've always told you he did, but he didn't. We were pitifully poor when he was alive

—you don't remember those days, do you? Do you remember anything at all about your father?"

"A little," Jock answered. "That he liked baseball—funny a detail like that should stick in my craw!—and that he was all the time writing at a desk. I have a vague idea what he looked like, too, but perhaps I got that from pictures."

"Probably. You were only eight. Well, he was a dear and splendid person, your father, but dreamy, unpractical—a poet, with everything that the term is always supposed to mean and usually doesn't." She contemplated Jock with musing eyes. "You're *his* son, of course, dear; not mine. You have his temperament—most sedulously coated over with undergraduate varnish, but it's there."

Jock would have repudiated this, as he perversely did any such penetrative reference; but he saw that his mother was not really thinking of him at all, except as the twig of the tree. So he said nothing, waiting with eagerness. These facts about his father were impressing him enormously. "Keys to *me*," he told himself.

Mrs. Hamill continued. "It is odd, your recalling about baseball, because I think baseball was absolutely the only usual, rational, man-in-the-street thing that ever interested him. Why, he—but no matter. The point I'm getting at is, he wasn't the sort who ever made money, or ever would have. When he died he left me with you to bring up, and nothing whatever to go it on—but nerve!"

She sat upright, and rid her feet of their slippers in two quick kicks, muttering "Drat the things!" so humanly that Jock barely suppressed a shout of laughter. He sent an affectionate glance after her as she padded into the adjoining room. Such a peach! . . .

pretty as a picture, and sweet, and *regular*. . . . He sought yet another word, and found it when he saw her reënter. Dauntless! That was it.

She had changed into a silver brocaded robe trimmed in bands of fur, and silver mules clung to her toes. She relaxed on the sofa once more, sighing happily. "Pardon the digression, Jock, but corsets at six in the morning are a very special abomination. Let's see, where was I? Oh. About Saunders Lincoln."

"You must have skipped something," Jock objected. "Where did Uncle Link come in?"

"He comes in now. I am, I'm skipping a lot, my dear, because it's late and you say you have something to tell me after I've finished, and if we expect to sleep at all today I'll have to make this a short synopsis. We've the rest of our lives to fill in the blanks. About Saunders: he was an old flame of mine——"

"Sure, I always guessed that."

"Precocious infant! Well, he was, and when I married your father he told me that if he could ever do anything for me I was to call on him—the time-honored litany of the jilted lover. I think he is probably the only one in history who ever really meant it, but be that as it may. Two years after your father died, I did call on him, in my extremity; and he set me up in this business. Lent me the money to buy this house and all its fixtures, and got men he knew in New York into the habit of coming out here. We really have a quite wonderful clientèle, Jock. Some of the names would astound you. Every newcomer is introduced and sponsored as though into a blue-blooded club, and has to present all the credentials you can think of—with the possible exception of a letter from his clergyman! We've been extremely cautious.

And I've acquired a tidy fortune. I was able to pay Saunders back in full in five years, and the rest has gone into investments, or toward your schooling—what's the matter, Jocky?"

"Nothing. Only I must be God's dumbest white creature!" . . . Yvonne, then Eunice, shadowed his mind. "Damn it, I never see *anything* until somebody *beats* it in!" he lamented.

Mrs. Hamill lay still, fondling with her eyes the line of the big frame, the symmetry of the black bent head. "Don't say you were very dumb," she suggested, "say that I was very clever. I went to the most exaggerated lengths to keep all this a secret from you. Remember the time camp closed unexpectedly on account of the measles and you wired me you'd be home about nine o'clock that night? The wire reached me at seven. I never put in such a two hours in my life! But by the time you got here every last trace was locked away down cellar, and Bennett was stationed behind a tree at the foot of the driveway to shoo off the cars, and your mother was spending a quiet evening in the home—as mothers should! And if you'd given me the slightest warning tonight——"

"But you must have known I'd get hep *sometime!*" Jock broke in. "Balmy as I am, it was bound to come sometime. What did you expect to do after I graduated? Board me out, or something?"

"I expected to retire," said Mrs. Hamill. "Permanently. In fact I've already made preparations to shut up shop in another month or so. I can do it. I've saved enough, we'll never starve. And I was sanguine enough to hope that you'd never be any the wiser."

"What do you mean '*we'll* never starve?'" cried Jock. "Do you think you're going to keep on paying

my way till I'm *toothless*? Not any! I'm going to jump college and I'm going to work. And," he wound up, "I'm going to do it right now!"

"Now?"

"Tomorrow. Sooner the better. No part of this degree stuff—it's all a rumor anyway, doesn't amount to a hoot whether a fellow's got one or not in the long run. That's one reason I wanted to talk to you, mother. I wanted to ask you if you minded. Now—" His white teeth shone in quick gaiety, "now I'm not asking, I'm announcing! Seems to me it's just about time I took you in hand!

"I'll tell you," he said sobering, "what my reaction to this thing is. Of course at first I was knocked cold. I'd never even dreamed. . . . And I didn't like it, not a little bit. Gambling as an indoor sport is a great thing and can have my month's allowance any time, but gambling as a business—*my mother's* business—well, that gripes me. It's so beneath you! You know that. Like a duchess acting as barmaid——"

"Thanks!" interjected Mrs. Hamill weakly.

"And not only that, but—well, look what a wet smack *I* turned out to be! Here I am, twenty-three years old in a day or two—I ought to have been supporting you for the past six years at least, instead of loafing around like a bloated plutocrat on money you had to make—this way—" He peered at her curiously. "Say, whatever did possess you to pick *this* way, mother?"

"Oh—that's a long story. I've always liked men and loved cards. The combination was not without its appeal."

"Well," Jock resumed after a meditative moment, "at any rate, it's all over now. If you think I'm going to stick in college even a day longer and let you go on

conducting this—this dolled-up *dive* that's kept me there, you're crazy, that's all. My education's finished, and so, Mrs. Hamill, is your professional career! Absolutely done with. Canceled. Blotto."

"I won't argue——"

"You better not, lady!"

"I won't argue," repeated Mrs. Hamill, unheeding. "I suppose I should, but I'm too sleepy. As far as my 'professional career' is concerned, I'll be glad enough to have that over. It never was as much fun as I thought it would be—I'd rather play myself than minister to other players—besides, I was on the point of giving it up, anyway. Of course, there isn't an atom of sense in your leaving college now with only a few months to go, but on the other hand I don't know that there's any particular sense in your staying—though there's money enough in the bank to keep you there indefinitely without my lifting a finger, if that's what bothers you. I'll let you make your own decision. If you honestly think you will never miss that A.B. after your name, I'm satisfied."

"Check!" exclaimed Jock, and rising went to pump his mother's hand with vigor. "The eighth wonder of the world—a reasonable woman!"

This little ceremony was followed by a pause. Mrs. Hamill, looking up, saw that Jock's face was solemn again and that his trouble-darkened eyes were fixed on space. At length she interrogated him. "Yes, dearest?"

"Oh, I was just thinking——"

He did not reveal to her all that he had been thinking. It involved herself, but more definitely it involved Yvonne and things about Yvonne that could not now nor at any time bear revelation. He said merely, "It's funny about money. The things people

do to get it. *Is it so important?* I've never known what it was like to be without it so of course I'm not qualified to judge, but it's got me stumped sometimes. I feel like saying '*what is this money thing about?*' all the time." He shook his head. "Darned if I can understand it."

"No." Mrs. Hamill's voice was silky-soft. "Of course not, dear. You couldn't. Being Peter's son."

There was no reproach in the words. But it came to Jock that his own words must have sounded harsh, ingrate, under the circumstances. He essayed amendment. "I don't mean about you, mother. You've been simply great. You did all this for me—I know that—and don't think I don't appreciate it. Gee, I should say I do appreciate it! But what I meant——"

His mind put Yvonne aside, loyally, protectively, and seized upon Eunice. "For instance, this: I wrote you about Brad Hathaway, didn't I? Well, I didn't tell you what it was that made him shoot himself, and about his wife. I've never told any of this to a living soul, but I'm about to spill the whole rotten thing—it's primarily what I chased down here to tell you and to ask your advice about. You're not *too* sleepy, are you? Good. Then listen. *And tell me what in time I'm going to do*" . . .

III

Bones Allen, like many gentlemen of his years and proclivities, was afraid of other gentlemen's mothers. He regarded them as unnecessary and even obnoxious, and the habit they had of seeming to look straight through his skin to his soul disconcerted him to the

writhing point. "Mothers" was a vituperative term in Bones' diction; it included all maternal ancestors above ground except his own, and preceded the phrase "cramp my style" as inevitably as, in gastronomic diction, "bread" precedes "and butter."

Wherefore the news that his roommate's mother, whom he had never met, was even now ensconced in his room and awaiting him, became as a light but provoking blow of misfortune. "The devil she is!" he said, and betook himself thither with sighs.

His initial thought was that there had been a mistake. This daintily shapely person standing alone in the room with her back toward him could be no mother. Why, this was a *girl!* . . . Then she faced about and he saw that she was not a girl but that she must have been one very recently. People often had that feeling about Mrs. Hamill.

"Hello, Bones," she said. "For of course that's who you are."

"How-d'y'-do. Awfully glad."

They shook hands. Mrs. Hamill sank down on the window-seat and opened the platinum cigarette case monogrammed in sapphires that hung from a chain on her arm, extending it invitingly. Bones accepted one. His peace of mind was returning.

"I've just been looking at *her.*" Mrs. Hamill waved her cigarette toward the pictured Yvonne. "Isn't she simply magnificent?"

Bones said she was.

"Don't you think I'm fortunate to be acquiring such a decorative daughter-in-law?"

Bones did think so.

Mrs. Hamill blew an amazing cloud of smoke from a mouth like a scarlet letter O and asked, "Have you seen the original?"

"No, I haven't."

"That's too bad! I haven't either, yet, and I wanted you to tell me about her. All I can get out of Jock is that she has promised to marry him, that she has red hair, and that, to quote him, 'they broke the mould after they made her.' Having said which he appears to believe that I'm well enough informed."

"He sure is dippy about her," Bones contributed.

"He must be! Last night from home he talked to her on the telephone for one hour, and I——"

"Is *that* where he's been? He's been home?"

"Why, yes. Where else?"

"I—I didn't know. He went without saying anything to anybody——"

"Sit down," directed Mrs. Hamill gently. "I want to talk to you a little before Jock comes back—he's over at the Dean's office just at present. He's leaving college, you know. I drove down with him today ostensibly to pack up his things, but really I'm here for a different reason. In fact, Bones," she smiled deliciously at him, "you see in me a lioness fighting to protect her cub, because the cub, though well equipped to protect himself, declines resolutely to do so!"

She quashed out her cigarette and sat very straight, holding one crossed knee in the cup of her hands. "I need your help. Briefly, here's what's happened: Jock got home at three o'clock yesterday morning, having left that Mrs. Hathaway's house in the early evening in such a state of mind that—well, he was almost beside himself, poor lamb. To my surprise, for he's usually very reticent as you no doubt know, he was anxious to confide in me. And did. He told me the whole story of his connection with the Hathaways, of the man's death, and of the slander that

has attached itself to him on account of the woman——”

“It’s her fault!” Bones interrupted at this point. “She’s promoted it every way she can think of——”

“I gathered that. I gathered a great many things Jock didn’t actually say. I think I know exactly the sort of woman Mrs. Hathaway is.”

“She’s the goddamnedest—I’m sorry, Mrs. Hamill——”

“Don’t apologize. You haven’t said a tenth of what I think. Now, she has informed Jock that in view of the talk that links their names, he should feel obliged to marry her. I know!” she continued hastily, as Bones seemed on the point of exploding. “I know just how it affects you. It affects me the same way. It’s the most farcical thing that ever happened. But the trouble is, Jock has worked himself to the point where he actually is convinced that he *should!* Some misguided notion of chivalry and honor. Naturally, since he’s engaged to Miss Mountford and head over heels in love with her, the prospect——”

Mrs. Hamill allowed a moment’s silence to imply that the prospect was too dismaying for expression. She looked at Bones, and knew a deep little warmth. “Just *sick* about it!” she decided mentally. “Bless his old heart!”

She leaned toward him confidentially, and Bones leaned also, so that their tête-à-tête took on the semblance of a conspiracy. “Do you know where Jock keeps his strong-box?” she queried. “You do? Well, in that strong-box, right this minute, there’s a letter written him by Bradley Hathaway giving the reasons for his suicide—which, incidentally, do not involve Jock in any remotest way. Don’t you think it might help matters if we took possession of that letter?”

"Say! There *isn't!*"

"Yes there is. Jock told me so himself."

"Why, say, gee, but—" Bones was spluttering wildly in his excitement. "But he always vowed up and down he didn't have an idea why Brad crocked off! I bet I've asked him a thousand times!"

"Jock," said Mrs. Hamill quietly and proudly, "is sometimes very nearly too fine for this world. Of course this time he's been a fool. But rather an admirable fool. I declare, when he was telling me all this, I didn't know whether to kiss him or to slap him hard!" . . . Seeing Bones cross the room and begin to burrow into a closet purposefully, she added, "Yes, get it now, before he comes. I have no conscience whatever in this matter and I rejoice to perceive that you haven't either, but if Jock catches us at it——"

"Hell will pop," finished Bones concisely, emerging. He clutched the strong-box, an oblong tin receptacle bruised with dents and scratches. "Don't know where the key is, I'll have to break the lock."

"Do."

He laid the box, open, in Mrs. Hamill's lap, and she explored its contents with flying fingers. Verses, innumerable verses, scrawled in pencil on smudgy papers of divers sorts and sizes. Two little black notebooks. A snapshot of a laughing blonde in a canoe. A package of purple-inked billets-doux, eloquent of some last-year's love. A swollen envelope marked "Keep" with an elastic girdling its middle. A wedding invitation that bore the notation "*Sic transit Gloria*" in Jock's handwriting across the face of it. A sheaf of clippings from newspapers and magazines. A typewritten copy of a lecture on sex by Professor Somebody of Columbia University. An address book,

nude of covers. A page torn from a theatre program with "Lisette LaLune, Plaza 3500" on the margin. . . .

"Isn't this disgraceful?" whispered Mrs. Hamill guiltily. "It's worse than reading his diary! But the end justifies the means. Now where do you suppose—here! This looks as though it might be it——"

"It is," she said upon investigation. "Read it. I don't have to, I know what it says."

Bones obeyed, bending over the letter, holding it so close to his wide eyes that Mrs. Hamill later declared she expected them to drop into it at any moment "like walnuts into a paper bag." At the end he looked up dazedly. "Well, can you tie that? *Well!* Can you *tie*——"

"It seems to me," put in Mrs. Hamill smoothly, "that if that letter were abroad in the land, this Eunice person's importunities would automatically be rendered null and void. Doesn't it seem so to you? Listen, Bones: how would you like just to tuck it away in your pocket sort of absent-mindedly, and then, when you have opportunity, bring it out and show it to people? Will you do that for me—and for Jock?"

"*Will* I?" Bones' face was suddenly illumined. "Will I? Say, you don't know how quick I will!"

"And now," said Mrs. Hamill mischievously, "let me tell you what *I'll* do!"

IV

To be warned that you will certainly rue the step you are about to take is unpleasant, even though you know better. Jock was glad to get away from the Dean. "Pedantic old pessimist!" . . . Yet in a way

he was not glad. The Dean was symbolic; a sort of gateway between the University and the world. You approached him, a stripling, and you left him, a man. During that short half hour while you sat by his desk and listened to him and eyed the prophetic waggings of his head, you grew up. And there were growing-pains. . . .

He did not return to the fraternity house for awhile. Instead he chose an opposite direction, and walked aimlessly, down sidewalks grown so newly dear that objects he was wont to pass without a glance loomed up and beckoned to him. Here was the tree into which he and others had crashed in a stolen taxicab one long-ago larksome midnight. Here was the corner where he had stood and waited for a mysterious unknown "in a black hat with a big red flower, you can't miss it"—who never showed up. Here was the place where Piggy Wilde, the quarterback, had tripped on a loose brick and broken his collar bone the day before the big game. Here was the house of a professor who had tutored him, here a window he had shattered with a snowball, there a freshman dorm where he had lived. And over there, the Fence, the long wooden railing grooved with the penknives of the legions who had come . . . and romped and laughed a halcyon little while . . . and then gone on, as he was going.

A Ford lurched past him. Full of legs. Straight handsome boy-legs protruded at all angles. Voices were lifted in song, and the legs swayed in the air like batons to the beat of it. While Jock still watched, the Ford stopped. The song stopped. The legs stopped, disappeared, were replaced in a jiffy by up-reared heads and torsos. Figures spilled on to the street over the sides. The Ford went forward again,

propelled from the rear by half a dozen arms, beguiled from the front by a boy who danced along ahead of it, holding a tempting red apple for the radiator to sniff at.

He smiled after it mistily. "Humm," he said, "there goes college" . . . He choked, and swore under his breath, because oaths are man's poor substitute for tears.

V

Some time later he forced his loitering steps to take him to Eunice's bungalow. "Got to thrash this out," he told himself grimly, "one way or the other." College was finished. College lay behind him. But Eunice, who had so distorted the final precious months of it, was still ahead, an immediate stumbling-block across the new path of the future.

He fingered the doorbell; then as he heard it shrill inside the house, he wished that he had not. "Wait a minute!" he muttered suddenly. "I haven't doped out what I'm going to say yet!" Since his last encounter with her his thoughts had been too chaotic for sane consideration, and he had formed no plan. Here he was on the threshold, blank. He had to conquer an almost overwhelming urge to turn and flee.

One of the living room windows went up, and Eunice popped her head out.

Unhappy Eunice! The hours of laborious tinting and curling with which for years she had prefaced Jock's visits—and he would always remember her only as she looked now, in this moment! With hair that hung dankly, with eyes that were narrowed to ugly

slits, with face that was livid. Even her voice was not Eunice's voice—not syrup, but acid. "You can't come in, I'm busy now!" she called, and banged the window down again.

"Ouch!" said Jock aloud.

He went away very much puzzled. Eunice, snarling at him, like a tenement woman at a drunken husband! And *looking* like one! "What's got into her?" he wondered. "What——"

On the Zeta Kappa steps he was accosted by Ken Kennedy. Ken extended his hand. "Jock, old kid, I've been waiting for you. I wanted to tell you how very blame sorry I am——"

Jack merely stared at him.

Ken flushed miserably. That level gaze was disconcerting. "Darn it, why don't you knock me down? I wish you would. Honest, I'd feel a whole lot better."

"Forget it, Ken."

"No hard feelings?" Ken persisted, brightening.

"Nary a one."

"Believe me, that's white of you, Jock! If I were in your place, I'd——"

"Forget it," said Jock again. Mechanically. All his answers had been mechanical. Why, this—these things meant——

He made for the door, throwing back a cursory "See you later." Inside the house his progress was arrested again, thrice, by brethren who spoke feelingly, if incoherently, in like vein. He marched up the stairs in a tempest of warring emotions.

"Bones!"

"Sir?"

"*Where's mother?*"

"Out."

"Out where?"

Bones fixed his eyes intently on a crack in the ceiling and fell into a brown study.

"Out where?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"See here!" cried Jock, exasperated. "I want to know where she is?"

Bones raised both arms in the manner of the victim of a holdup. "Search me thoroughly!" he begged. "I haven't got her. She's been here, yes. But she's not here now. She left. And who am I to question the goings and comings of lovely ladies? She'll be back, I imagine. In the meantime, pray have a chair, and give an account of yourself. I hear you've been over getting clubby with the Dean."

"Correct."

"Has he agreed to part with you?"

"Tearfully, yes."

Jock sat down; then in one swift swoop he was up again, towering over Bones' chair, holding him by the shoulders. "You big bum, quit stalling, will you? Where's that mother of mine? And what's she up to? And how come Ken and the rest are aching around about having done me wrong? Tell me that!"

"Well, they did do you wrong, didn't they?"

"But how do they know they did?"

"They've read Brad's letter," said Bones quite matter-of-factly.

There was utter stillness after that. Jock released his hold on Bones' shoulders and backed away slowly. Bones examined the ceiling once more. "Of course," he observed finally, "they should have read it weeks ago. Everybody should have. Would have, too, if I'd known there was such a thing in captivity."

When this elicited no response, he said further, "But people who live in tin boxes shouldn't have mothers! Some of your possessions, my good fellow, were—were—well, I blushed for you, I did really. That drool by Professor Whosis, for example——"

"Where's the letter now?" Jock demanded. "Have you got it?"

"No."

"Then mother has. What's she doing with it, making a house-to-house canvass?"

"Wrong both times. Your mother hasn't the letter, and she's not making a house-to-house canvass. There are ways and means more efficacious—whew, *efficacious!*" Beyond this word Bones seemed unable to proceed. He repeated it several times with growing enthusiasm, and looked to Jock for plaudit and praise. "How 'bout that? Ain't she a lulu? Efficacious! Say, did I make that up or did Webster? Reminds me of the game we used to play when we were kids—you know, like this: 'Mr. and Mrs. Kashus and daughter Effie Kashus——'"

"Ass!" bellowed Jock. He was beginning, despite him, to feel blissfully light of heart. He wanted to laugh. His chest ached with captive laughter. And so he bellowed "Ass!" in a great voice and glowered at Bones with all the ferocity he could assume. "*Where is that letter?*"

"The—oh, the letter. Why, Pink Davis took it to math class. You know," Bones raised his voice slightly, "how math class is. The boys have to do something to while away the time. Pink and I thought they might as well be reading the letter as——"

"And where's mother?" Futile question now, for he knew, beyond any doubt.

"If you must know, she's putting the skids under

Eunice," said Bones, "—but don't start after her! Because it'll be over my dead body. She told me to keep you away till she was through. Said she was going to see to it that you wouldn't be let in if you did go."

"I wasn't. I've already been there."

"No foolin'!"

"Yup. Just now. Eunice—she—oh, *Lord*—"
His face crinkled, and he laughed at last, helplessly, convulsively, leaning against the edge of the desk. "Bones, honest—you should see Eunice—*mad*—with the paint job off—she looks—she looks like *hell*—"

His hilarity passed in time. It had never been hilarity, really; just a tremendous release, a healing, in hilarity's guise. Jock sat quiet. Bye and bye he swung himself erect and walked over to a smoking stand in a corner, where he stood fumbling with pipe and tobacco. "Poor old Brad," he murmured.

But even as Bones opened his mouth to protest this indication of a contrite mood, Jock turned around again, shining-eyed. "Boy, haven't I got *some* mother?" he said simply.

VI

He had firmly believed that within a day or two after he left college, or within a week at most, he would be numbered among the workers of the world. He had pictured himself going to New York early every morning, one of the army of alert, business-looking young men who spilled over daily from Jersey, and returning with them every evening, full of the fever of Commerce. In the interim, of course, the

picture grew dim, for what work he would do was still problematical. But it would be something. Something in an airy big office high up in a tall building, at a mahogany desk with a telephone on it and a stenographer efficient but not too hard on the eyes sitting near. And it would be soon, without delay.

It wasn't, however. When the time came for him to bestir himself, he was bound in lassitude. "Tomorrow," said his soul. "Tomorrow you can see about a job. Today, just take it easy." And he did . . . while the todays and tomorrows strung themselves together into weeks, two weeks, three weeks, of soft idyllic idleness.

Every now and then he awoke briefly and ranted at himself. "You lazy good-for-nothing! You big hunk of cheese! *Get going*, will you? You left college to *work*, remember, not to loaf in the sun." Yet he continued to loaf in the sun. He literally had to, for awhile. He was convalescing, from mental stress and strain so acute that its snap had left him limp as a string and in need of this interlude.

The matter of Eunice was settled; his mother had attended to that thoroughly. And he had gone from the campus with apologies and retractions singing in his ears and the glow of his comrades' regard in his heart. It had hurt rather terribly, that departure; when he drove away the road had blurred before his eyes as though there were rain on the windshield. But now. . . . Ah-h, to be at home! To sleep until noon in a bed like a silky white cloud! To breakfast on unquestionable eggs, and peerless coffee, and cream that fell *plopp* from the pitcher! To see the hours lined up, waiting, like minions for his bidding! To be his own master, free, and to have on his mind no

lingering shadow whatever! These things were sweet beyond measure, and precluded all regrets.

He became acquainted with his mother, and adored her. There were long conversations at bedtime, or in the dreamy afternoons, when they discussed things ethical, things psychological, things political, things obstetrical—any and every kind of thing. He found her mind a labyrinth for fascinating exploration, her personality endlessly beguiling. He took her to fly wild miles in the roadster, exulting in her sportsmanship, for she never cried out, never pressed the floor with an instinctive right foot, never clung frantically, frightenedly, to the side. He accompanied her to plays and gave her selected books to read, to hear what she would say of them, and was often surprised but never disappointed. She existed in his thoughts much less as a mother than as a sweetheart, a contemporary, a friend.

Two afternoons they spent apartment-hunting. The idea was Jock's. "No percentage in staying on in this house. Darn thing's too big! Why rattle around like a couple of bugs in a bucket? Let's sell it, and take an apartment in the city." It seemed feasible. A New York dwelling would be convenient to "the office" (so spake Jock, laughing at himself) and wonderfully convenient to Yvonne; and now that Mrs. Hamill's coterie had fallen in number from sixty to a nightly bridge-mad three, space was no longer requisite. So they hunted, and found what they wanted—eight livable rooms in an apartment house overlooking Central Park. They were to move the first week in April.

He had one fleeting burst of creative energy during this period, inspired by a group of his father's poems which his mother had dug from a trunk in the attic

and given him to read. He bought a portable typewriter, and all through one night picked patiently at its keys. One product, a sonnet, he despatched to a magazine, and played mentally with the notion that perhaps he was destined to be a poet . . . until it came back, with admirable promptitude and a printed notice to the effect that the editors were sorry and that no reflection on the merits of the manuscript was implied. He abandoned the notion forthwith, snorting, and the typewriter gathered dust.

He read enormously, a heterogeneous, ultra-modern mixture. Michael Arlen, Booth Tarkington, Scott Fitzgerald, because each in his way was fitting to his current mood. James Branch Cabell, Aldous Huxley, Ben Hecht, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Van Vechten, out of curiosity. Fannie Hurst and Edna Ferber because everyone was reading them. Christopher Morley for sheer delight. Somerset Maugham because he had thrilled to the play, *Rain*. Laurence Hope's *Indian Love Lyrics* on Yvonne's recommendation. *Prancing Nigger* by Ronald Firbank because the title caught him. *Dancers in the Dark* because a photograph of the young writer had called to his youth. *The Plastic Age*, which annoyed while it entertained him. And, by way of ballast, *The Mind in the Making*, Emerson's *Essays*, and Wells' *Outline of History*—which last, of course, he never finished.

VII

And there was Yvonne.

He had been shocked, the first time he had called on her in her new quarters, to note how cramped and

dingy and altogether cheerless they were. Two little rooms with low ceilings, nauseous wall paper, few windows. He had recalled the Park Avenue apartment—odious comparison!—"like transplanting an orchid from a conservatory into a little brown flower pot," he had said, with his unfailing penchant for expressing everything in terms of something else.

They had quarreled bitterly that day. Beginning thus:

"Well, of course, you'll have to get right out of *here!* This won't do at all. I won't have you living in any such dump."

"It's the best I can afford right now, my dear."

"It's not the best *I* can afford! Listen, Yvonne honey, let me tell you what we're going to do. You're going to move again, right away, see? Never mind the cost, I'll fix that up—hock the roadster if necessary—main thing is, to get you into a better place. Then, in a week or two, just as soon as I've got a regular job with a pay-check attached to it, we'll be married——"

"We're not going to be married for a year. , I've told you that."

"Rats! That's idiotic, and you know it. We're going——"

"My mind is absolutely made up, Jock Hamill. Please don't let's argue about it."

"Of course we'll argue! You don't think I'm going to say 'yes, fine,' to any such bunkum as that, do you? Look here, Yvonne; I'm out of college now. It won't be long before I'll be in a position to support you at least halfway decently. In the name of all that's crazy, *why wait?*"

"Because I want to. No, I don't. But because I think it wise."

"Wise, hell! Why's it wise? What do you mean by that?"

"I've told you."

"Yes, that you think in a year I may change my mind! That's the most outrageous——"

"You hardly know me."

"What's that got to do with it? Why, darlin', I love you! You can't seem to understand. I love you so that waiting's an agony—don't make me have to! And when I look around and see what you've given up—on my account——"

"What I'm saying now is on your account, Jock Hamill. I don't want you to be unhappy, ever. Certainly not through me."

"Well, you're making me damned unhappy now, I'll tell you that!"

"Dear, *please*——"

"But Yvonne, *listen*——"

There were hours of it . . . terminating at last when Jock strode from the room, slamming the door furiously behind him. In less than five minutes he was back. And Yvonne was in his arms, trembling a little. And he was crooning words, repentant words, promises that his will denied even while he said them. "It's all right, Beautiful! Just whatever you want to do, we'll do. I won't say anything more about it. Yvonne, don't—I didn't mean to make you feel like this—of course I'll wait if you want me to. I could wait a million years, if I knew in the end I'd have you! Look up here! Got a little smile for Jock? *There!* There now! Armistice! And we'll never fight like this again, will we? *Never.*"

But they did, and soon. The same scene, with variations, was repeated three or four times in the ensuing days. All the paths of their affinity seemed to lead to

it. When Yvonne let fall a hint that she was seeking work wherewith to replenish her ebbing funds, she met with fiery combat. When Jock sold some bonds of his own and attempted to press the money upon Yvonne, he found himself battering against a stone wall. She would not hear to an early marriage, she would not accept assistance, and she declined to leave her present place of residence. Jock alternated between prayers and profanity, between tenderness and white-hot rage. He saw no valid reason why they should not be married straightway; and certainly he could see no reason that prevented him, her fiancé, from doing for her the things that other, lesser men had done. . . . Gradually, though, he grew resigned. The new inertia, the langorous *laissez-faire* spirit that had taken possession of him made resignation with few misgivings possible. Yvonne was being unreasonable, of course. But she'd "come to," doubtless, given time. And meanwhile life was sweet just as it was.

Mrs. Hamill and Yvonne met duly, and appeared charmed with one another. "Although," Jock reflected, "you can't tell a thing by appearances." He had engineered the meeting as a matter of course, knowing it inevitable, but with a certain secret trepidation. One's mother and one's betrothed—well, there was a bar between, always. And when each was a woman fundamentally inimical to all other women, the bar might easily and at once become a grim and immutable thing of iron. . . . He put in a busy first hour, mulling over in his mind everything they said to one another, every glance they exchanged, until they chided him laughingly for his silence. After that he talked a great deal and very fast, and ate, according to Bennett's calculation, thirteen small pink cakes.

Late that same night, after he had driven Yvonne

back to New York, dined her at a café in the Village, taken her to the *Music Box Revue* and afterward somewhere to sup and dance, he returned and roused his mother from a sound sleep, saying, "Well, how 'bout it?"

Mrs. Hamill, for all her pardonable drowsiness, interpreted this question correctly. "I think she's a dear," she answered heartily.

"I knew you would!" Jock exclaimed, and seating himself on the edge of the bed waited expectantly for more.

More was forthcoming. "And so beautiful she takes your breath away, doesn't she?" said Mrs. Hamill, patting back a yawn. "Her hair is the loveliest I've ever seen. I liked her clothes, too. Good taste. If you'd brought me a daughter in a chorus-girl hat I couldn't have stood it. She must have money?"

The interrogation point at the end of those words was as a hook that caught Jock by the collar and yanked him down to earth. He frowned. "Some. That is, she did have some. She hasn't much right now." Perceiving that this was too vague, he indulged in a slight fabrication. "She lost all she had in the stock market."

"Oh, what a pity! And she's quite alone in New York, didn't she say?"

"Yeah."

"Where are her people?"

"Dead. They've been dead for years. An aunt in Ohio brought her up." He got to his feet, in order to discourage further inquiry. "Well, guess I'll turn in. Sorry to have waked you, little sleepy-head, but I wanted to know what you thought of her. She thought you were a peach."

"Then," said Mrs. Hamill, snuggling into the pil-

lows, "that makes it satisfactory all around. Good-night, dear."

"Goodnight, mother. I'm darn glad."

VIII

Yvonne's visit had another outcome, less proximate but not less vital.

During the course of the afternoon Mrs. Hamill had conducted her upstairs "to see Jock's den, you'll love it, he planned it himself." They had stood shoulder to shoulder on the sill, looking in. . . . A small, bright room, a happy room, walled in on two sides by books, row on row, from floor to ceiling, on a third side by long casement windows with dull purple hangings, on the fourth side by a giant fireplace built of rough field stone. A desk in the center, and, before the fireplace, two chairs of inviting depth, with a reading lamp craning its neck above one of them, and a banjo leaning up against the back of the other . . .

Yvonne had moved to the chair and picked up the banjo, eyeing thoughtfully the nicknames and monograms and *bon mots* etched on its head. "I didn't know he played."

And Mrs. Hamill had responded, smiling, "I only wish he did everything half so well!"

Then Yvonne had taken the banjo downstairs and thrust it at Jock, and he had played it—oh, remarkably well! Exceedingly well! As Bones Allen was wont to say and would have said again had he been present, "Hot dog, like *no one* can!" And Yvonne had listened, pondering.

A few days after that she stipulated that he was

positively *not* to come to see her the next day unless he brought the banjo with him. "Why won't you ever bring it, my dear? I must have asked you at least three times now. Don't you enjoy playing it, or what?"

"Sure, I like to whang away at it. But there's so much else to do when I'm with you——"

"Silly! You bring it tomorrow, or I won't let you in! I have a special reason for asking."

So he took it along, and pushed it through Yvonne's door ahead of him, crying "Passport!" meekly and plaintively. And he was admitted, by a particularly bewitching Yvonne in cornflower blue.

"You'd better!" she approved.

They embraced lingeringly, as was their custom. And they ran through the catechism peculiar to sweet-hearts:

"Love me?"

"Um-hum."

"How much?"

"Oceans."

"More than you did yesterday?"

"Oh, infinitely more!"

"Well, whose girl are you?"

And so on, with words that were threadbare in Eden.

"Now!" said Yvonne, when this was disposed of. "Let's get down to business. I want you to play all the latest ragtime, and I'll sing, and we'll see how it goes."

An hour later they agreed that it had gone beautifully. They disagreed as to why, and had quite a dispute about it, Jock stoutly maintaining that the voice was the thing, Yvonne reiterating that those chords and that double break were sufficient to make

any old voice at all sound "like Jeritza singing the blues."

She concluded, "Anyway, we're good. Plenty good enough, as soon as we've practised together a little more."

"Good enough for what?" asked Jock aimlessly. He had pulled Yvonne on to his knees, and hence had little interest in the forthcoming answer, if any.

She put her hands against his chest and scrutinized him soberly. "Jock Hamill, how would you like to go into partnership with me—no, wait, my dear! I'm serious about this. Listen to me just a minute. I have to work—*keep still* till I finish, for goodness' sake!—and you're going to work too, when you get your lazy old self around to it, so why shouldn't we work together, playing and singing in a——"

"Salvation Army!" crowed Jock. "Just the thing!"

Yvonne disengaged herself and stood up, vastly dignified. "All right, if you refuse to be sensible——"

"I will be! Word of honor. Sit down here again where you belong. Where are we going to play and sing? Tell me."

"Did you ever hear of Terrace Tavern?"

"Rum joint out toward Pelham? Yah, sure, I've heard of it."

"It's not a 'rum joint!'" remonstrated Yvonne. "It's a very nice roadhouse, one of the nicest around New York."

"Question: *is* there such a thing as a nice roadhouse?" grinned Jock. "Alas, I fear not, the boys and girls being as they are nowadays. But go on. This is all very interesting."

"Terrace Tavern," pursued Yvonne after a reproachful pause, "is run by a man named August Schultz, who used to be at the Café Mandalay when I was

there, two—no, nearly four years ago. I went out to see him the other day, and he gave me a job. I'm to sing a couple of songs every night, beginning a week from Monday. I was going to have piano accompaniment, but this will be lots better, and I know that when he hears you play he'll——"

"You're going to do nothing of the sort!"

"Yes I am, my dear. I told you I'd have to do something to earn a little money. And this is the only thing I know how to do—except drive a car, which doesn't help any."

Jock was serious enough now. "If you think I'm going to have you singing for a bunch of raucous drunks every night——"

"I did it for years, remember," Yvonne reminded him. "And besides——" One velvety arm curved about his neck and her cheek was cool against his—"and besides, Jock Hamill, I'll have *you* there to look out for me. Won't I? Though of course I shall do it whether you're there or not. I'm determined to take the job, and it's useless to argue with me—you ought to know that by this time. But oh, my dear, if you *would* come too and work with me!

"I can't understand," she observed, as Jock sat scowlingly silent, "why you aren't more enthusiastic. Dearest boy, don't you see what fun it would be? We go somewhere to dance almost every night anyway—why not get *paid* for doing it, while we're about it? Wouldn't you like that better than sitting poked off in some stupid office somewhere? Just for awhile. Just till we're married—naturally I wouldn't want you to be a cabaret entertainer all your life, with the brains you've got and the education you've had——"

"It's not me I'm worrying about!" spoke up Jock with more earnestness than attention to grammar. "I

wouldn't mind it. In fact I think it would be great stuff, for a few weeks—snappy way to put in the time while I'm making up my mind what I want to do with myself. But you, Yvonne—I don't care what you say, there's no reason on God's earth why *you*——”

Yvonne interrupted this speech with a long kiss full on the lips. “That's my way of saying ‘shut up, Jock Hamill,’” she explained sweetly.

“It's a great way! I could use a lot of those. But listen, about this Terrace Tavern business——”

She kissed him again.

After which he continued to say “But listen——” at two-minute intervals all the rest of the afternoon. Not protestingly; gleefully, for the kiss each repetition earned him. And protest, thus neglected in the heyday of more palatable matters, withered and died away.

Often in the days that followed he wondered what had become of it. He had not intended to give in so easily; he hadn't intended to give in at all! But Yvonne now obviously considered the thing decided, and was going ahead with preparations in a manner so final that the time for discussion seemed past and irrevocable. And Jock, after his preliminary puny splashing, swam with the stream. “Can't do anything now,” he assured himself comfortably. “Too late now. We're all set.”

And they were. After arduous hours of practice, they had “tried out” before August Schultz and been accepted as a team. Impassively. Everything August Schultz did he did impassively, with an air of scarcely knowing and not one iota caring whether or not the thing was done. He was a porcine gentleman with a vague chin or chins, a motley assortment of teeth, some gold, some bad, some false, some missing, and little half-shut slits of eyes, like buttonholes embroi-

dered deep in the pasty cushion of his face. After hearkening to two selections by Jock, he had said "You're hired" in such a drear, dead voice that Jock had been compelled to whisper to Yvonne, "Hired or fired?" before he could be sure just how to answer. From the very beginning, August Schultz delighted him. He always referred to him as "my Boss" with becoming, if synthetic, reverence, and was fond of giving squinty impersonations of him for the benefit of all and sundry. Also he made him the unwitting hero of several hilarious rhymes, noteworthy among them one beginning: "*I prithee, August Schultz, reveal to me, Who in the hell doth do thy dentistry?*" . . .

He had rather expected that his mother would prove difficult to handle in this contretemps, but, as he afterward informed Yvonne, "You can't jar that lady!" Mrs. Hamill gave vent to a few calm whys and wherefores, characterized the whole affair as "simply mad," and washed her hands of it. To Saunders Lincoln only did she confide her true attitude.

"There wasn't any use making a fuss," she said. "Though goodness knows I wanted to! Just imagine *Jock*, of all boys in the world, contenting himself with playing the banjo in a cheap wayside dancehall! I don't know what's come over him. Yes, I do too, it's that Yvonne, she has him wrapped around her little finger. He's so dazzled, he can't see beyond his own nose. If I were not so sure this was just a phase—but it *is* a phase. It's got to be!"

"What's Yvonne like?" Saunders Lincoln queried.

"Beautiful as a dream, wise as all the ages, shallow, superficial, rather notoriously immoral—I've had her looked up, of course—and at least six years older than Jock," said Mrs. Hamill all in a breath. "And, strange to say, really in love with him, unless my intuition de-

ceives me as it never did before. Why she doesn't marry him is quite beyond me, for she could have him tomorrow if she whistled. He says she's trying to make him wait a year. I hope she succeeds! She won't be able to get him so easily, in a year, if she did but realize! She'd destroy him in time, you know, Saunders. In the worst way. Not by a single blow—he'd recover from that—but by a slow insidious poison."

"Did you tell Jock all this?"

Mrs. Hamill glared irritably. "My dear Saunders, don't be such a ninny! Do you think I'd help this affair along by *opposing* it? Indeed I did not tell him, nor shall I unless worst comes to worst. I shall sit tight, and let the thing work itself out. And continue to pretend I'm delighted with Yvonne, so that in the event they decide to get married I'll know about it in time to get busy."

"Perhaps—" began Lincoln speculatively.

Mrs. Hamill caught his meaning. "I hope so!" she nodded. "I sincerely hope so. *That* would solve the problem quicker than anything else." . . .

IX

Terrace Tavern is built a cautious little off the beaten track. But travelers of the beaten track, though they do not actually pass its door, are assured that it lies somewhere in the vicinity by a series of signboards pricked out with red electric bulbs. These read variously, becoming more garrulous as the distance becomes less. "Five Miles to Terrace Tavern." "Four Miles to Terrace Tavern—August Schultz, Prop."

“Only Two Miles to Terrace Tavern—Chicken, Steak and Lobster Dinners.” “One Mile More to Terrace Tavern—Dancing Every Evening Six to Two—Happy Hatton’s Celebrated Syncopated Seven.” A speedometer mile-and-three-quarters beyond this last there is a giant crimson arrow pointing into a thicket and the terse injunction, “TURN HERE FOR TERRACE TAVERN,” in letters a foot high.

At night, the injunction is continually obeyed. Car after car leaves the highway and twists along a serpentine side-road, until its headlights are one with the light that blazes like noon in the clearing at the end. August Schultz has ever been a firm believer in electricity for outdoor use. It allures, it looks hospitable and happy and as an aid to motorists somewhat inebriated it is invaluable. For indoor use, of course, he doesn’t think so much of it.

Terrace Tavern is long and low and sprawling, made of stucco. It has a red tile roof, innumerable windows bonneted with red-and-white striped awnings, and below the window, boxes, in which things assorted grow. A liveried negro with a flashing white grin holds the door wide for you to enter, then lets it whisk to behind you so abruptly that you feel as though you had been swept in by a broom. On the wings of this head-start you hasten down a long tunnel of hall paved with red carpet, and bring up against a triple barrier of tall painted screen, velvet rope, and dinner-coated functionary who eyes you phlegmatically. From behind the screen, sounds issue . . . the wham-wham of jazz, or the combined roar of speech and laughter and forks on china . . . orchestra and guests in alternate hubbub. The dinner-coated functionary has to incline his ear to your lips to hear you say, “A table near the floor if you have it,” and you have to

incline yours to his to hear him reply that he hasn't it but that he'll give you something in a corner.

The room beyond the screen is enormously large, and looks even larger because its walls are dusky-black and seem to mingle with the night in an infinitude of darkness. A ruby necklace of lights encircles these walls—ornamentally, not usefully. There is a great horseshoe packed tight with black lacquered tables bordered in red, and little black-and-red chairs, and *people* . . . and at the open end of the horseshoe Happy Hatton's Celebrated Syncopated Seven preside, in an elevated alcove draped in scarlet satin, like the boudoir of a courtesan. The dance floor is oval, painted black and red, and above it searchlights from opposite corners meet to play with a globe of tiny mirrors hung high in the center, and to win therefrom a thousand iridescences. Wisps of light spray down from this globe upon the dancers, and blobs of it drift over their faces like huge intangible snowflakes, making them look pretty—much prettier than they are.

Of course, there are crowds and crowds. There are ballroom crowds that smack of valets and French maids and show windows on Fifth Avenue. There are amusement-park crowds with sleazy dresses and gents' ready-to-wear suits and run-down heels and jaws in perpetual motion. There are baseball crowds, straw-hatted, shirt-sleeved, perspiring. There are football crowds, vast gay menageries of fur. There are movie crowds sticky with candy, pale with bad air; and hotel crowds, dark-clad and middle-aged and smug. But the roadhouse crowd is like no other in the world.

To begin with, it is bored. With itself, with its neighbor, with all things. It has lived hard and swiftly, the roadhouse crowd, and now it is burned out and bored; and so it cries for White Rock and cracked ice,

and mixes itself illegitimate drinks, and downs them, and mixes more, and downs them . . . that it may forget how bored it is, that it may become merry and loud and hysterical . . . and a little disgusting . . .

Then it pounds the table and calls for music. And it dances, after its curious wobbly fashion, and pats its fat palms at the musicians. And after that it returns to its table, and perhaps kisses its partner for the edification of the next table, and orders a club sandwich that it doesn't want, and fishes under the chair for its bottle . . . and repeats itself and repeats itself . . . until at last the check girl helps it into the wrong coat, and the guardian of the parking space tells it to "watch out for the turn, sir, remember," and it goes wavering off to its home, wherever that is.

And if you take the roadhouse crowd apart to see what makes it tick, you come upon such curious cogs as these:

Lewd women dressed in white, like brides. Pudgy-legged women in the most abbreviated skirts of all. Girls with fresh young faces and eyes a million æons old. Drunken mothers. Bedizened grandmothers, whom you somehow know will pay their callow escorts' dinner checks. Lounging jointless boys with lifeless skin. Men with benign silver hair and Mephistophelian faces. Men with bald heads and loose, slippery mouths. Roués of twenty. Frail sisters of seventeen. Chorus girls and college boys. Boarding school girls and youths their parents have forbidden them to see. Glove-counter clerks and traveling salesmen. Young matrons enjoying an extra-nuptial thrill. Young benedicts enjoying an extra-nuptial thrill. Rouge turned purple under the lights. Thick red necks in wilting collars. Three-karat diamonds and dirty fingernails. Dandruff on dinner coats. Rolls of flabby flesh bulg-

ing over the tops of tight bodices. Silken insteps swollen fat above tight shoes. Heavy yellow powder and piercing perfume. Love words in crow voices. Laughter, high-pitched, hideous. And *eyes*. Greedy eyes. Weary eyes. Eyes like sucked wells. Blood-shot eyes. Roadhouse eyes, as bright and glossy and hard and cold as the marbles children play with.

X

The patrons of Terrace Tavern liked the new entertainers, liked them immediately and immensely, and learned to anticipate them with increasing impatience. "Wait'll you see this red-head!" the men would say, smacking their lips. The women, saying nothing, would fasten their glances on the little door at the right of the orchestra's alcove and watch for the dark tall boy with the crooked impersonal—so *darned* impersonal!—smile. There would be a hush of expectancy over all the room . . . a flare-up of bright lights . . . a crash of clapping as the little door opened and Yvonne and Jock appeared.

It was a simple thing they did. Perhaps its very simplicity was what made it appealing. They came out together, hand in hand, Jock immaculate and imposing in a "tux" to pattern after, Yvonne brilliant as some exotic bird in one or another of the daring gowns she had selected for this purpose. They walked to the center of the floor, nodding to the applauding throng as though to a single intimate friend. ("Some night," Jock had predicted, "they aren't going to applaud, and then that march across the floor in dead stillness will be ungodly awful." But his prediction had not come

true, and seemingly never would.) Once there, he knelt on one knee and rested his banjo on the other and plucked marvelous shoulder-stirring harmony from the strings. And Yvonne stood beside him, with her hands on her hips and her body bent the least bit forward, and sang the *Blues* in her lovely melancholy voice that so befitted them. Because she had the art to create an illusion of reality, her songs were more than just songs; they were anecdotes set to music, tiny cross-sections of life—her life, you felt. When she sang *He Used To Be Yours But I Got Him*, she gave you a sense of her personal triumph over an unseen rival and asked you to gloat with her in it. When she sang *Don't Think I Care What You Do*, she made your own lip curl vicariously. When she sang *My Man Went Off and Left Me All Alone*, she broke your heart.

At the end she would bow, gracefully, prettily. And Jock would get to his feet and bow also, the jerky bow of an embarrassed small boy at dancing-school . . . and he would laugh a little, as though to say, "You're right—the joke's on me!" He never noticed that the applause swelled in volume at this point, but it always did. Public fancy is a mysterious thing. Professionals may labor years and fail to catch it, and a rank amateur like Jock, all unawares, may call it his on the strength of a bow and a deprecatory grin.

He was having, as he said himself, the time of his life. The work was holiday—not work at all, really, but fun. They appeared only twice in an evening, at nine and again at twelve; and between times, aside from Yvonne's change of costume, there was nothing to do but wait. That also was enjoyable. They waited in the mammoth red-and-black room, where they sat at a corner table, and ate, and watched the eternal Mardi Gras of Terrace Tavern. Jock always thought of a

college prom grown old and ugly and gross and rather ridiculous—"The grinning cadaver of a really good time," he remarked once—but it continued to amuse him, rather than to sicken and pall upon him as Yvonne had feared that, with repetition, it might.

To be sure, there were things about it that he found annoying. The way men stared at Yvonne, for example. With eyes that fairly *drooled*. And the way they laid familiar hands on her arm or her shoulder in passing and praised her singing, or begged her to dance with them. These things were particularly annoying because nothing could be done about them. Jock spasmodically expressed a burning desire to "smash their mucker faces for 'em," and was forever breaking off in the midst of sentences to glower at some near-by table and to growl, *sotto voce*, "Pull your necks in, damn you!" But further than this he did not go, realizing that his hands were tied by the subservience of his position; and in time he became so accustomed to such trifling indignities that they ceased altogether to affect him.

And then, the women. "The fool females," to use the mildest of Jock's long list of invectives. They lavished upon the good-looking young banjo player constant and most unwelcome attentions. They broke into languishing smirks whenever he inadvertently gazed in their direction. They converted the waiters into messengers and dispatched them to his table with invitations to join their various parties. Or they sent their escorts to try to exchange dances with him. Or sometimes, if they were sufficiently intoxicated, they came themselves. . . . One night a girl, a little Jewess with startling orange lips in a chalk-white face, swayed unsteadily up to him as he and Yvonne were leaving the floor and threw her arms about his neck and called

him her "sheik." She had to be pried loose and dragged back to her seat by her flustered partner and the head waiter. This incident, coming as it did soon after Jock's introduction to Terrace Tavern, very nearly nipped his new career in the bud, so great was his horror and dismay.

And once in awhile—just once in awhile, when he knelt on the oval of polished floor in the flaming spotlight, or when he took his pay envelope from August Schultz, or when he contemplated himself attentively in the looking-glass—a small faint something stirred in him. And he thought of college, books, courses. Learning . . . "good Lord, was it for *this?*" . . . Thought, also, of the time when he had fancied himself a man marked for glory, he, who now strummed *Blues* for Yvonne to sing to, and asked no greater boon of Fortune!

But these flies in the ointment were few and far between, and the ointment was rich, plentiful, anaesthetic. Time lounged on. It was April, and the Hamills moved into New York. Yvonne, ever exciting, just around the corner. . . . It was May, and he agreed to play at Terrace Tavern through the summer, at least. It was June, and he made a quick trip to college, driving through one night to watch his class receive diplomas in the morning, starting back again at noon. He thought that some of the boys in their caps and gowns were "hot sketches," that it was an unconscionable lot of pother about nothing after all, and that Eunice, whom he spied at a distance, was getting much too fat. Aside from that, he felt nothing. . . . It was July, and his mother had gone to York Harbor. And Bones Allen, from Paris, was sending him characteristic postcards. "The French women are 'way overrated," said one of them tersely. "The French

women have dirty necks," said another, on the reverse side of a tinted picture of the Arc de Triomphe. . . . It was August . . . September . . . sequence of drawling, mellow days.

He lay late abed every morning, and took a combination breakfast and lunch with Yvonne, either at her apartment, where they made electric coffee and electric toast and chafing-dish scrambled eggs, or at his own apartment, where the ubiquitous Bennett served them. Then they sallied forth. Sometimes to a *matinée*. Sometimes to a vaudeville show, for business reasons. Sometimes to buy new ragtime selections at a little Broadway shop, and take them back and try them out together. Sometimes, if the day was hot, to scoot into the country in the roadster, or to swim at some not too populous beach. That is, Jock swam; Yvonne merely waded, or sat on the sand in a one-piece black suit with her unbound hair blazing about her face, and watched. "Swimming is not in my line," she would say, "and I never let anyone see me do anything I don't know how to do *well*."

And nights. Glamorous, glittering, bright-white nights. "Playboy nights," Jock termed them. They went out to Terrace Tavern every evening about seven, returned every morning about one. They laughed a great deal, and danced a great many dances together, and a few with suppliant patrons when they could not discreetly avoid it. August Schultz liked to have his entertainers appear unofficially, and mingle with his guests. "Good business," said August, which meant that it was Law. Their work improved more and more, and, in response to public demand, they performed three times every evening instead of twice, giving each time several encores.

"As nearly as I can ascertain," reported Saunders

Lincoln in a letter to Mrs. Hamill at York Harbor, "he is entirely happy. Tickled with what he's doing and the way he's living. Bennett tells me he spends every waking minute with the girl . . . he seems as enthralled as ever" . . .

Which he was. Yvonne's was a lure that did not wane with proximity, a luster that the passage of months did not rub dull. And if occasionally there were incidents, perceptions, that vexed him—little things she did and said, little surprising streaks of alloy—he forgot them all in a second when she smiled. He kissed her countless times a day, hungrily . . . with a mounting hunger that tore at him. . . . He could have satisfied the hunger, and knew it, but he would not, and wished that he did not know. That was one of the things that vexed him. His love for Yvonne transcended flesh, for the time being anyway. He wanted very much to believe that hers for him **did** also.

They would be married in late February, when their year was over. No sooner. Jock had long since abandoned the struggle to dissuade Yvonne from her stand, for she was adamant. They agreed to stay on at Terrace Tavern until the first of the month, at which time Jock would secure for himself a position in some advertising office (he had decided that advertising was to be his ultimate vocation) and Yvonne would buy her trousseau. Regarding this last, Jock gave implicit instructions. "Not a damn stitch in it that you had—*before*," he commanded; the closest approach he had ever made to reference to her life with Demorest.

He talked incessantly of February, so absorbed in plans and prospects that he failed to notice how often Yvonne tried to change the subject, how wistfully,

almost hopelessly, her big gray eyes caressed his face as she listened . . .

XI

He was sitting in the lobby of the Biltmore, waiting for Bill Olmstead, who had vowed he would be there at four sharp but who at four-thirty had not arrived. Bill was now employed in a New York bank, where, according to him, he "filled inkwells," and he and Jock met now and then to lay new fuel on the embers of their campus intimacy. Today they were thoroughly to investigate an unconfirmed report that there was genuine Bacardi to be had at a drug store on Forty-fifth Street, by the simple expedient of asking for Mr. Wilson, giving Mr. Wilson certain moneys, and observing that Mr. *Mercer* (articulate clearly or all's lost) sent you to him.

The afternoon was Friday, the month November, and the Biltmore lobby swarmed with chattering humans who later in the day, or early the next day, would hie them down to Princeton for the gridiron classic. Spruce long-legged boys, big-eyed girls, portly dowagers, in endless panorama. Jock watched interestedly, making mental comments. "Gee, *pretty!* No, she isn't, not near to. Lotta girls disappoint you that way. One thing about Yvonne, she doesn't. . . . Don't see a soul I know. Funny, how soon you lose touch. . . . That lad's pretty well oiled. They'll have to wake him for the touchdowns tomorrow if he keeps that up. . . . Twenty bucks' worth of orchids and a dime's worth of woman—who went crazy there, I wonder? . . . Why do girls shriek so? 'Hello, people' at the top of her lungs. Could say 'Hello, Brooklyn'

and it would carry all right. . . . Hate that type of fellow. . . . What's that on her stocking, oil or a birthmark? . . . Wonder where he got that suit. Not bad. . . . There's what's-his-name. Best punter Princeton ever had. Selling insurance now, but still walks as though he heard cheering. . . . Say, where the hell's Bill, anyway?"

He glanced up at the clock again, and was on the point of rising to leave when a voice at his ear said blithely, "You look nice, I guess I'll sit by you!"

He turned his head—

"Peg!"

"Guilty."

They shook hands with great gusto. She was, Jock perceived, the same Peg. Same laughing eyes, same infectious grin, same impudent, pert pug nose. . . . The mere sight of that nose made him feel suddenly gleeful. "It's still there!" he exclaimed, involuntarily and quite inanely.

"What's still there?"

"Your nose——"

This struck them both as excruciatingly funny, and they rocked with muffled mirth, pressing their mouths tight shut and puffing out their cheeks. "You bet it's there!" Peg said, when the paroxysm had abated a little. "That's my trade-mark. Peg, Limited. The Nose With a Smile. Ask the Man Who Owns One—say, you knew I was married, didn't you? Of course you did, you were the bum who wouldn't come up to Boston for my wedding but sent me a pretty pickle dish or something. One of these days I'll write and thank you, but until then let's let it go because I'm not at all sure it *was* a pickle dish—sorry, but you know how weddings are—we drew five hundred and three presents, five hundred of them pickle dishes, so that I'm

considering putting a notice in the paper, 'All those who sent pickle dishes to Johnny Havens and spouse'——"

"Hold up!" cried Jock. "Are you going to talk all *night*, woman? Let me get in a few questions. What are you doing in New York? Where's your husband? And all about it. Bones never writes, you know. I had a string of simple postcards from him from abroad, but I haven't had a word since he got back—except a recipe for making beer, all by itself in an envelope. What's he up to, the old son-of-a-gun?"

"He's working for dad. At least, he thinks he is—dad, of course, thinks differently. Son-of-a-gun is right, he almost broke up my wedding! He was best man, you know, and instead of attempting to cheer poor Johnny up he kept whispering 'She snores,' and little brotherly things like that, all the time I was moseying down the aisle! What else did you ask me? Oh, yes—why, we're living here. Down in Greenwich Village. Johnny's father owns the *New York Log*, and Johnny—here he comes now! On time, for once in his life. Act as if you're in love with me, Jock—I think that's good for husbands——"

People were always conscious of a surprised sensation the first time they saw Johnny Havens. This was because his hair was extremely blonde, almost white, and his eyes and eyebrows were coal-black—a combination so startling that you required a second or two in which to accustom yourself to it. After that you discovered that he was very handsome, and big with a bigness that reminded you of things. Outdoor things. The crack of a shot in a forest. The cut of a boat through wings of spray. Camp fires, and piney air, and gray flannel shirts with corduroy trousers. . . . All of which, in view of the fact that he was suited by

Brooks Brothers, worked at journalism, and seldom went out of New York if he could help it, was quite absurd.

Jock had never met a man he liked so well on sight, and as the four of them (Bill Olmstead had arrived, breathless and propitiatory, on the heels of Johnny) sat drinking tea around a table a little later, the liking grew into something deep and strong and destined to last. *And* mutual. Every so often the wash of the world eddies together two souls so essentially congenial that they admire each other at once, love each other thereafter, and entertain each other to the point where everything said by one, however slight, excites the risibilities of the other. Jock and Johnny were thus. Either of them had only to say "Pass the salt," and the other howled and clapped him on the back.

So they had a hilarious tea party, taking it all in all, and Jock enjoyed himself hugely. At the same time he was conscious of tiny pangs of envy. Peg and Johnny were so happy! Even though they joked about their marriage, teased one another, you could not miss the contented undertone, and it gave you a feeling of standing shivery-cold and looking through a window at firelight. Jock tried hard to shrug away this feeling. "In just a couple of months now—" he kept telling himself, and he wondered why he was not comforted.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Peg, who adored to arrange. "We'll lap up this tea and stuff, and then we'll all go 'round to our place and call up some people and have a bender. Tomorrow's Johnny's and my anniversary—six weeks married and no bureaus heaved by either party—and something ought to be done about it. Jock, you get your Yvonne—I've been dying to clap eyes on that woman ever since the day

you raved about her for two hours straight and never repeated yourself once——”

“Can’t,” interrupted Jock, grinning. “I work nights. Didn’t Bones tell you?”

“For the love of Pete, are you still doing *that*?”

“I am.”

Peg sat back in her chair, looking reproachful, and brandished a teaspoon at her husband. “Listen, Johnny! Listen while I tell you the tale of another good man gone wrong. This bunny you see before you, endowed by God with all the—*Ow!* Quit that, Jock! Johnny, he’s *pinching* me!”

“Just the same,” she said, when peace was restored, “I’m ashamed of you, Jock.”

“I’m ashamed of myself,” said Jock. And, momentarily, he was. Johnny Havens was the kind of new acquaintance to whom you would have liked to be able to say that you were in a brokerage office, or with an advertising firm, or, thought Jock, “anything respectable.” He listened with avidity to such intermittent mention of his own business as Johnny made, and eyed him with esteem. Newspaper work . . . something pretty fine about that . . .

They parted at six o’clock, with resolutions for a soon reunion. “I’ll call you up,” said Peg from the taxi. “Been meaning to, anyway, but we’ve only been back from our trip two weeks—we went to Cuba, naturally, so Johnny could drown his woes. We’ll give you a buzz—you too, Bill Olmstead—and Jock, you bring Yvonne when you come, and I’ll make fudge and fried eggs, my two *chef-d’oeuvres*——”

“Great pair,” remarked Bill, when they had pulled away.

“Yeah,” Jock said. He stared after the receding rectangle of glass with the two heads . . . close to-

gether. . . . "So darn *right*, too," he added, almost with bitterness.

XII

New Year's Eve at Terrace Tavern looked, as Jock put it, "like a futuristic conception of a riot in an insane asylum," and sounded like no known thing. It fairly rocked and vibrated and teemed. It was a cyclone of color, a turmoil of motion, a pandemonium and a hullabaloo. It was Terrace Tavern at its rowdiest, and by comparison with it the average roadhouse evening seemed tranquil, staid, and placid and demure.

Reservations had been made weeks in advance. Every table bore a thicket of green and brown bottles, a flotilla of glasses, a dust of crumbs, an array of women's vanity cases, ash trays full of smoked-up ends, dishes, food under plated silver beehives. Every chair had a flushed and gibbering occupant, wearing a crêpe paper hat. There were fat bald heads in blue sunbonnets, and pin-heads in green helmets, and square heads in pointed caps, and flabby pink jowls tied 'round with babyish bows. And women in rather becoming hats. Women always manage that, somehow. Vain, even in wassail.

Confetti lay on the dance floor in little parti-hued puddles, and marked trails between the tables. It flecked the dark-coated shoulders of men, and glistened in women's hair, and stuck like beauty marks to their moist warm skin. Colored streamers looped from the central chandelier, bunched about the feet of the dancers and tripped them, stacked itself in corners as though a giant ticker-tape basket had upset. A Christmas tree stood near the stage where the orchestra played,

stripped now of most of its ornaments and possessed of such deputy ones as a wisp of chiffon handkerchief, an ostrich feather pompom off a dress, two hats, a corkscrew, and a man's limp string of collar.

Little tin horns whined, and little cardboard horns with peppermint-candy stripes tooted and bleated, and little souvenir hammers, marked "August Schultz wishes you a Happy New Year," rat-a-tat-tatted ceaselessly. And, as though this were not noise enough, there was added to it the nasal yell of the saxophones, the deep boom of the drum, the fret of chairs pushed back suddenly . . . and the screaming talk . . . and the squawking laughter . . .

"It's incredible, isn't it," said Yvonne, "that mere flesh-and-blood ears can stand a racket like this?"

Jock smiled at her adoringly. Almost any man would have smiled adoringly at Yvonne that night. Gasp'd first—and then adored. She was wearing a creation of pearly white velvet that covered her chest to the throat, where a tight high collar of rhinestones held it, but that had no back whatever and very little side; and the strands of her shimmering ruddy hair were wrapped smoothly around her head and held with a crescent-shaped rhinestone pin. . . . It's incredible," he retorted justifiably, "that mere flesh-and-blood eyes can look at you without blinking. You're so superb that it's——"

"Sh-h! They'll hear you, my dear!"

"They" were six in number—New Year's Eve revelers at whose table Yvonne and Jock were seated. The host, Barney Blaine, owner of several cinema theaters, had known Yvonne "when she sold smokes for a living," as he was fond of saying to Jock's chagrin, and had insisted tonight that they "come on over here and be sociable." So here they were. Yvonne. Jock.

Barney, with his swart, smiling face and his restless, unsmiling eyes. Barney's lady, a bosomy blonde who took whiskey straight and whose flow of tainted narrative seemed limitless. Charley Kaufman, press agent for what Barney always referred to as "my interests," lean and saturnine. Kittens Mitchell of the almond-shaped eyes that flew to Jock like steel to magnet, who had but a moment since asked Yvonne how she ever "found" that unusual shade of hair. And the Kendricks, man and wife, who did a dancing act on the two-a-day and cordially hated each other.

It was eleven o'clock. At the stroke of twelve August Schultz's wee niece, clad airily in cheesecloth panties, would appear, representing the New Year. (That is to say, the management hoped she would appear; at rehearsals she had temperamentally balked, and kicked August Schultz in the shins.) She would, it was hoped, plant her foot triumphantly upon the prostrate back of the trombone player, who, in a long hoary beard, would represent the Old Year now defunct. And among the spectators there would be an increase of din, if possible. And people would kiss one another, and cheer, and bawl felicitations, and whistle, and spit the confetti out of their mouths, and do all the things with which good Americans usher in another first of January.

Preparations for this great moment were even now apparent. Everybody was drinking preposterously—the American hypothesis being, of course, that the drunker one is the better one *ushers*. Everybody was achieving terms of the friendliest intimacy with everybody else. Convivial souls were roaming from table to table, getting in the way of the distracted waiters, pausing to introduce themselves and to exchange a pleasantry or two. Gentlemen with their ties untied and

their hair in their eyes were singing sentimental ballads, heads together. Acquaintances of two minutes' standing were calling one another "ole Joe" and "my frien' Sam, here, he's from St. Louis, yup, big cloak-an'-suit man out there." Streamers were describing graceful parabolas through the air, lighting like lassos around white necks. Girls were laughing shrilly, swaying back and forth. Here you saw a sleeper, chin on chest. There an old man, clenching the arm of a pretty blasé youngster so tightly that his fingers dented dimples in her skin. There a woman knobby with avoirdupois, weeping at she knew not what. There a girl trying to climb on to her table, breaking glass, upsetting dishes. There a sophomoric individual being assisted out by two companions, assuring them as he went that "S'all fun." There a whole party owlshly intent on making a spoon jump into a tumbler by means of another spoon . . .

At eleven-thirty Jock and Yvonne left Barney Blaine's table and vanished . . . to reënter a few minutes later through the little painted door and to walk to the middle of the dance floor through a storm of hammering and tooting and clapping that threatened never to subside. It did partially, however, and Jock played, kneeling on his right knee, balancing the banjo that had a pink light in it on the other, throwing back his shoulders and jiggling them a little to the time, as he always did. And Yvonne sang. Sang about mammies she was going back to, and daddies who were coming back to her, and two-time fellas, and brown-skin gals, and love, and longing. A few more women and two or three men wept, and everyone approved thunderously, and some invisible one shouted in a megaphone voice, "Nice warblin', baby!" . . . They took four encores, and sat down again at Barney Blaine's table, and pre-

tended they didn't hear the hammering and the clapping and the tooting and the cries for "*Mo-o-ore!*" . . .

Then the orchestra struck up. The dancers tumbled out from the tables, pursing their lips to exhale their final hurried pulls of cigarette smoke, dragging their partners by the hand, or being dragged. The floor that but a moment since had held only Jock and Yvonne now seethed like a human ant hill, billowed and quivered and overflowed with people. The paper hats bobbed, the hectic faces simpered, the bodies collided and churned . . . collided and churned . . . collided. . . . And the music fretted and thumped:

"Oh

I said Oh

Oh, you better take a train an' go where you belong

Because ain't nobody ever gonna do ME wrong

An' I mean that

So grab your hat

An' get along, big boy, get along' . . .

XIII

"There's a cunning child," said Yvonne.

Jock looked away from the floor and followed the line of her glance. "Where?"

"The one in red, at the table by the post."

He saw the back of a close-cropped brown head, a little column of neck with a choker necklace of pearls, a V of milky skin where the red gown was cut low.

"How can you tell from the back?" he said idly.

"She looked this way a minute ago," answered Yvonne, also idly.

"Well, I don't envy her the boy-friend she's got,"

put in Kittens Mitchell, who had heard this, as she seemed to hear everything Jock and Yvonne said to one another. "I know him. I was out with him once myself. Once was enough, let *me* tell! Perry Loomis, his name is. Champion All-American tank. He's been bounced from more good schools than any seven birds in history."

"He looks it," remarked Jock. Perry Loomis did look it. He was a plump, dissipated-faced youth, plainly very tipsy at this moment. He hunched over the table toward the girl in red, lolling his head from side to side, narrowing his eyes, and wagging a limp forefinger by way of emphasis to whatever it was he was saying.

Jock summed him up in a sentence. "Natural-born wet smack." And thought no more of him. He pulled out his watch and peered at it, and showed it to Yvonne in silence. Their eyes met comprehendingly. "Let's go," he said, dropping his own eyes to hide the sudden flame of them.

"Where you going?" cried Barney Blaine. "You're not going to leave us? Why, it isn't twelve o'clock yet, even!"

"It's two minutes of," Jock announced. "We'll be back after a bit. Got a little matter to attend to backstage."

They had decided, earlier in the evening, that they would see the New Year in alone, together. "It's going to be *our* year," Jock had said romantically. "Don't let's be in the midst of this mob when it begins! Let's begin it *right*, by ourselves." This was the "little matter" to which they were now obliged to attend.

"Kiss her for me," hazarded Charley Kaufman as they rose.

"I'll just do that little thing," Jock answered lightly, hating him.

They threaded their way along the narrow aisle, walking single-file. And this happened:

As they neared the table occupied by the girl in red and the man named Perry Loomis, Jock saw Loomis get to his unsteady feet and half lean, half pitch forward, as though he would seize his *vis-à-vis* in his arms. The girl shrank away from him violently, so violently that she lost her balance and went, chair and all, over backward, with an instant's fetching flash of shapely little red silk legs.

"Whup!" said Jock, and halting, stooped to assist her. "Say, did you hurt yourself——"

His voice died out.

An exquisite girl. Her face was delicate, pastel-pink, her mouth a coral atom, her brown hair sheeny, waved to a deep sweep over one temple, her figure soft and round to the touch of his hands. A flower of a girl, sweet, just-bloomed. . . . But Jock was not admiring so much as he was puzzling. Except for her eyes he would have said he had never seen her before. But those eyes . . . bright brown, with up-curved starry lashes. . . . They plumbed deep, to a forgotten episode. A little girl, no taller than this little girl, who had come to a prom at college ages and ages ago, and cried, and asked him to tell her how to be popular, how to be "just like the rest of these girls." And he had advised her, with all the wisdom he could muster. . . .

"It is," he said aloud, "it's little Cecily Graves!" And added under his breath, "And drunker than a monkey."

The New Year crashed in—the year they were to have greeted together because it was to be *their* year.

It found Jock with his arms about Cecily Graves, and Yvonne, a few steps away, watching.

XIV

"I'm a little bit 'ntox'cated," said Cecily Graves.

"I know it," said Jock.

He righted the chair and lowered her into it. Across the table Perry Loomis slumped in his seat, motionless and unseeing. His one burst of animation had been succeeded by a coma from which it would obviously be difficult to rouse him. "Just as well," Jock grunted.

He caught up with Yvonne and elucidated. "Girl I met once at a prom at college. Friend of Dopey Lane's—you've heard me speak of him. Nice little kid, good family—she hasn't any business here with a rotter like that Loomis. He's passed out now, anyway. Let's take her back to your dressing room, shall we? I feel sort of responsible——"

"Of course!" agreed Yvonne.

She led the way, and Jock followed with Cecily, steering a careful course between the tablefuls of lunatic merrymakers. His face as he went was firm-set and bothered. He had never spoken more truly than when he told Yvonne that he felt "sort of responsible." Cecily, in this condition, stabbed his conscience. "Oh, good Lord!" he moaned mentally. "I bet *I* did this! I started it, anyhow, I know that. And she's taken all my advice and then gone to the *other* extreme!"

Yvonne's dressing room was a cubbyhole containing a table messy with cosmetics, a huge mirror framed

in electricity, two kitchen chairs, and an assortment of gowns that peeped from behind a sheet stretched across one corner. It had no windows, but after the heat and smoke of the place they had left it seemed cool, airy, delicious. And so quiet! The outer commotion was a monotone now, like city traffic distantly heard. The jazz was a purring throb:

*“Oh
I said Oh
An’ I mean Oh” . . .*

Cecily sat down, pushing her hair back from her forehead with a petulant hand. “Nice in here,” she breathed relievedly.

Jock stood over her solemnly. “Are you all right, Cecily?”

“Uh-huh.”

She was avoiding his eyes, and it occurred to him that she had given no slightest sign of recognition, neither in that first instant when he lifted her from the floor, nor since. “You don’t know who I am, do you?” he said.

Cecily glanced up then, surprised, even scornful. “Of course I do,” she said simply. “You’re Jock.”

The next minute her features underwent an unexpected metamorphosis. They puckered like a colicky baby’s, and two tears splashed over the rim of her eyelids and traced glinting zigzags down her cheeks. “Oh, dear,” she lamented, “everything’s gone wrong—*everything* has——”

Yvonne reached her in a swift rush. “Here, don’t cry, honey! You mustn’t cry.”

“I can’t h-help it! Everything’s——”

Yvonne knelt beside the chair and dabbed at the

streaming tears with a handkerchief. "Yes, you can," she soothed. "Of course you can. There isn't a thing to cry about. We're taking care of you now. Nothing's the matter, child—is there? Tell us all about it."

The united efforts of Yvonne and Jock finally elicited from Cecily the news that she felt "awfully funnee" and a series of sobbing speculations as to what her mother would say when she went home. "And how'm I going to *get* home?" she wound up, lifting a tragic wet face. ("Anyway," Jock told himself, "she cries a lot prettier than she used to. Why, she cries the prettiest of any girl I ever saw!")

"I'll take you home, don't worry," he said.

To his astonishment the offer provoked fresh snuffles. "Wh-what'll you think of me?" gulped Cecily. "I never was like this b-before, and of course it would have to be *this* night! Oh, everything's all t-terrible——"

It was eventually determined that Cecily should be driven to Yvonne's apartment for the night. "It's the only logical thing to do," Yvonne said to Jock. "If her mother's like most mothers, taking her home as is would be sheer cruelty. You find August, will you, and ask him if he cares if we do our last numbers now instead of later—and bring her wrap from the chair where she was sitting——"

At twelve-thirty the roadster fled away from Terrace Tavern, bearing three people.

"Lean against me, Cecily," suggested Yvonne.

"No," said Cecily drowsily. "I wanna lean the *other* way."

She dozed through the trip into the city nestled against Jock, with her head contentedly resting on his shoulder.

XV

He was hailed from sleep the next morning by the peal of his bedside telephone and a lilting remote announcement to the effect that "This is me."

"It's *who?*"

"Me. The old soak."

"Oh, hello, Cecily," he chuckled.

"Why, you're horrid!" cried Cecily instantly. "You weren't supposed to identify me by *that!*"

Jock thought, "Gee, she's got a cute voice! She sort of sings everything."

He propped himself on one elbow and gazed absorbedly at the telephone's mouthpiece. "How are you this morning?" he asked it. "I bet your head feels as if they were holding the Battle of the Marne inside."

"It does not!"

"It should. You ought to have a whale of a hang-over."

"I have. But you didn't name a bad enough battle! Say, Jock?"

"What ho?"

"Can I call you Jock?"

"For cryin' out loud what else would you call me?"

"Well, I didn't know. Your behavior toward me is sort of Mister-Hamill-ish. Anyway: Yvonne says to tell you to take me somewhere to breakfast."

"I'll take you both, of course."

"Yvonne says she doesn't want any breakfast."

"What's the matter with her?" Jock interrogated, alarmed.

"She says she's tired. She says I kept her awake all night, talking in my sleep. About you."

"Now I *know* she's kidding! Tell her I'll be over

there in twenty minutes, and I want to find both of you with your bonnets on, all ready for a bevy of ham and eggs——”

“If you mention food,” stated Cecily, “I shall die. I don’t even want to *see* any, from now until I’m ninety. But I want to talk to you. That’s the only reason I’m going.”

“I want to talk to you, too! You’re going to get the bawling-out of your young life, don’t think you’re not!”

“I don’t,” said Cecily.

He found her waiting for him in Yvonne’s little living room, wearing a gown that he recognized as belonging to Yvonne. It hung to her insteps. “Look,” she said, patting the skirt. “I’ll have to tack it up with safety pins before we go out or everybody will think I’m trying to hide bowlegs or something.”

“I can tell ’em different!” retorted Jock. “After the back-flip you took last night, I can speak with authority.”

Cecily giggled. “Wasn’t that the limit?” she said in a confidential undertone. “I’m mortified to death when I think of it. It must have been awful.”

“Well, not *too* awful. In fact, I might say—but never mind. How’re you feeling this morning, Cecily, no foolin’? Have you a headache really? You’re looking full of pep.” His eyes roamed over her commendingly. No, he hadn’t been mistaken last night; she was delightful. All pink and white and brown, like a wild rose—no, too banal—like a——

He searched for a fit simile, and finding none, said, “Anybody who can look like that on the morning after——”

Yvonne chose this unfortunate moment to enter the room, in a negligée of Nile green chiffon and lace that

foamed behind her like a boat's wake. The negligée was very lovely and Yvonne was very lovely. But ten A. M. and a little beauty like Cecily are a combination hard on even the loveliest of women grown. For the first time in his life, Jock thought Yvonne looked old. "As the *hills!*" he told himself, scandalized.

She must have realized—women are always sensitive of those things—yet she went straight to Cecily and put an arm about her shoulders. The effect was pictorial in the extreme. But it was rather terribly revealing.

"Our little toper here—" Yvonne smiled at Jock, squeezing Cecily affectionately "—needs some breakfast. Take her to some not too conspicuous place, will you, Jock Hamill? My dress doesn't seem to fit her any too well, and she can't wear her own in broad daylight, of course——"

"Look here, why aren't you going?" Jock wanted to know.

"Yes, come on, go with us, Yvonne," added Cecily.

"Can't," said Yvonne. "Can't possibly. I'm *dead* for sleep, and I'm going back to bed as soon as you two leave." She dimpled down at Cecily. "I hate to give you away, honey, but the truth will out! She chattered about you all night, Jock."

"Don't tell him what I said!" begged Cecily.

("My God," thought Jock, "a girl who can *blush!*")

"Oh, I won't, I'll never tell him," promised Yvonne.

After this Cecily vanished into the bedroom, muttering something about "safety pins," and Jock and Yvonne were alone. He kissed her gently, his hands framing her face. "I wish you'd come," he said.

"Honestly, my dear, I don't feel like it."

They exchanged a long look, Jock's quizzical, Yvonne's even and smiling. "What is the trouble?"

she asked at last. "If a person just doesn't want any breakfast——"

She let the sentence hang there, and presently Jock opened a new topic. "What did you do about Cecily's mother?"

"Oh, I telephoned her after we got here last night, in my best drawing-room voice, and told her I was Mrs. Somebody-or-other—Cecily gave me the name—and that her daughter was spending the night with my daughter and would be home this morning sometime. You'll have to drive her out there later on. And don't scold her too much, will you? She thinks you're simply going to lay her low, and she's worried to death. She explained it all to me at great length—said, 'you see I'm sort of a *pupil* of his'—" Yvonne broke off to laugh reminiscently. "Isn't she the cunningest?" she finished. "You know, I'm wild about her."

Then Cecily reëntered, looking down at the shortened skirt as she walked and kicking her legs forward to get the effect, somewhat in the manner of a goose-stepping soldier. "How is it?" she inquired. "I had to use plain pins in some places. And I borrowed a pair of stockings, Yvonne, and these pumps, because red ones look too ridic at breakfast time. Oh, and this hat, too. You don't mind, do you?"

Yvonne said that indeed she didn't mind, and Jock reflected that Yvonne really ought to give Cecily the hat as a present, so wonderfully it suited her. And he bundled her into her soft gray squirrel coat, and off they went, calling back good-byes to Yvonne from the hall.

"Good-bye!" echoed Yvonne gayly.

"*Good-bye*," she added in a whisper, and pressed clenched knuckles hard against lips suddenly contorted.

XVI

"I'm going to bawl you out, as I said," began Jock, when they were face to face over two orange-juice wells sunk into two miniature icebergs. "But first I'm going to tell you that I think the transformation is—is miraculous. Duckling into swan, and all in one short year—I don't see *how* you did it."

"Year *and* two months," Cecily corrected him. "Well, you don't know how hard I've worked at it!"

"You must have."

"I've remembered every last thing you told me, Jock. Did you notice the dress I had on last night, for instance? 'Get red,' you said, 'something that knocks 'em in the eye.' Did it knock you in the eye, Jock? Say it did!"

But Jock had grown severe. "Right here," he asserted, "is where the fight starts. Did I, or did I not, tell you to run around with men like Loomis, who is one of the lower and lousier gutter-pups, as anybody can see at a glance—and did I *ever* tell you to go getting potted like you were last night?"

"I'll tell you, Cecily," he went on, "the way I feel about it. I feel as though I'd met you up on the top of a nice little white hill, and I'd said, 'Here, here's a sled.' And you'd climbed aboard, and I'd given you a little push, and it turned out to be a big push after all and took you whizzing past where I wanted you to go. It's got me all worried, and I wish I'd left you just where you were."

Cecily sighed. "Oh, dear, I just *knew* you'd take it that way!"

"Well, sure! How else would I take it? When I was the egg who——"

"Listen, Jock. Let me explain something."

"Shoot."

Cecily put both elbows on the table and dug a determined small chin into the back of one hand. "I don't know just where to begin," she said, "but here's the way it was. This whole year and two months has been one long preparation for the time when I'd see you again. Not because it was *you*, particularly," she amended quickly, "but—well, you know. Like studying a lesson and then reciting. I wanted you to see how hard I'd tried and how—how well I'd got along, so you'd know that all your trouble wasn't just for nothing. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Perfectly," said Jock. (Oh, *cute* . . . the little wrinkle of her forehead, the intense gravity. . . .)

"That was why I blubbered and blubbered last night," Cecily went on. "You thought it was one of those weeping jags, didn't you? Well, it wasn't. It was because, after all that waiting, I had to be intoxicated when you saw me again. Why, Jock—" Her voice rose to a sudden small wail—"I never was intoxicated in my *life* before! I never was! And I never was on a party with Perry Loomis, and I never would have been if he hadn't told me there were going to be ten of us or something. Jock, you—you believe me, don't you?" she pleaded.

"Of course, Cecily."

"I don't know what happened," Cecily said dismally. "I swear I don't. I've had a couple of drinks lots of evenings, and they've never affected me a bit. But we got to that Tavern place, and Perry said we'd have to wait awhile till the others came, and we waited and waited, and I had two drinks, that was all. And the first I knew everything was kind of floating in a funny way, and some man who looked exactly like

you only a little fuzzy around the edges—you know how—was playing the banjo. And then, while I was trying to figure out whether it could be you and what you'd be doing playing the banjo—you see, Dopey's moved away from East Orange and I never see him now, so I didn't know—then Perry started saying that there weren't any others coming after all, and—and saying other things——”

She stopped, quite out of breath, and peered anxiously into Jock's face. “You're not still angry, are you?”

“Not at you. But if I ever see that—well, but go on.”

“That's all there is,” said Cecily. “I just wanted you to know that I'm not a confirmed drunkard.”

She said this in all seriousness, with a little air of righteous self-satisfaction, and Jock unexpectedly let forth a whoop that caused heads to turn all over the restaurant. “Oh, you're not?” he chortled. “Are you quite sure about that? You mustn't deceive me, you know, Cecily!” He leaned back in his chair and beamed down at his plate. “‘Not a confirmed drunkard,’” he quoted softly. “And what was that other?—oh, ‘a little fuzzy around the edges.’ Now I *ask* you!”

Later he began a rigorous cross-examination. “I bet you've got a raft of heavy lovers. Haven't you?”

“I have a few,” said Cecily calmly, nibbling a roll.

“Loomis isn't a sample, I hope?”

Cecily lowered the roll and looked pained. “Didn't I just *tell* you——”

“All right,” said Jock. “Take it all back. Signals over. Who are some of these lads, then?”

Cecily obediently enumerated a sizable list of names,

all of them strange to Jock, and on each made pithy comment. "Awfully dumb but he 'can dance" . . . "Piggy Day, he's too fat to mean anything, of course" . . . "Mere infant, still in Lawrenceville" . . . "Bill Burnholme, *precious*" . . . "Henry Ernest, mother's promoting that" . . . "Norman Farrell, he's terrible, one of those smarty ones—makes jokes about baths on Saturday night and things like that" . . . "Jimmy Cruthers, he probably likes me better than any of them and I hate him the worst—that's always the way, isn't it? . . .

"Of course," she ended, "you'll have to meet one or two of them. I want you to pass judgment."

"Right. I want to. I wouldn't be surprised if you needed some more of my looking after—that's too many beaux for one little woman, anyway. Which of them is the lead-off man, by the way?"

"N-none of them."

"*What?* Say," Jock scoffed, "I know you eighteen-year-olds. You're always in love with somebody, or pretending you are. You've always got *somebody* in your minds to get maudlin about when there's moonlight. Now, which one is it, Cecily? the 'precious' Bill?"

"I guess so," Cecily said vaguely. "I'm sort of engaged to him. And then again I'm not. It just depends."

She added with dignity, "If you know us eighteen-year-olds as well as you think you do, you'd know that as a rule it's different ones at different times. It may be almost anybody. Rodolph Valentino, or Richard Barthelmess, or Red Grange of Illinois, or our best friend's husband, or the policeman on our beat—or anybody."

"I see," grinned Jock, "that I must brush up on my

eighteen-year-olds! I'll make a note of that. Well, tell me this: where did you meet all these fellows? How'd it all come about? I want a complete account of your activities since I saw you last. Unexpurgated. Abandon the toying with that hapless roll, and get at it!"

So Cecily described what she called "my renascence" and its aftermath. A triumphant tale, but she told it modestly. Jock guessed rather than heard how popular she had become. "Several people were nice to me at the beach this summer," she said, and he in his mind's eye saw whole stacks of straw hats with fraternity ribands, and droves of white flannel trousers. "I took in most of the big games this fall and the dances that went with them, and had quite a different time from the one I had at that prom at your college"—and Jock visualized relay after relay of eager stags. You could not know young men, and know Cecily as she was now, and not see how inevitably she must attract them.

He listened with deep attention, and not infrequently shouted aloud over some especially ingenuous twist she gave the story. She had, he noted, a certain wit and a sure feeling for the humorous. "A flapper with brains!" he told himself. He watched her with growing appreciation. *Adorable*. That was the word that occurred to him oftenest. Artless, spontaneous, effervescent, were others. She twinkled with animation. Her hands—little plump stubby hands that looked as though they should be playing with dolls—gesticulated continuously. Her face was charmingly mobile. "It talks," he decided. Her eyes talked too, and the remarkable lashes swept up, dropped down, fluttered, were never still. "Laughing lashes," he called them privately.

He had one thought, undercurrent of all the thoughts that came to him that morning, which he strove so desperately *not* to think that he had almost a sense of warding it off with physical hands. This was the thought:

That Cecily was refreshing after Yvonne . . . like water after too much wine. . . .

BOOK FIVE

Cecily

Book Five

I

LATE that afternoon Jock let himself into his mother's apartment and found her deep in conversation with Saunders Lincoln. From the door he could see the semi-circles of their heads, one iron-gray and smoothly brushed, one silver and rippling, above the backs of chairs drawn to a sociable angle. A quartette of crystal glasses on a stand, and a card table pushed to one side with cards in concise little stacks of four still lining its edge testified that there had been other guests, but there were not now, and he had an immediate distinct impression that his entrance interrupted a discussion of himself.

"Who's been taking my name in vain?" he demanded, marching over to stand before them, fists on hips, accusingly.

"Both of us," Mrs. Hamill admitted with composure. She was lying almost at full length, her slender shoulders sunk into a cushion and her feet, frivolous as a debutante's in chiffon hose and three-inch heels, thrust out on a footstool in front of her. She twisted a finger in the long string of amber beads that touched her tea gown with color and smiled up at Jock. "Your entire future, my dear, has just been elaborately and painstakingly mapped out."

"Fine! What's it going to be?"

"God knows," said Mrs. Hamill piously. "We only

decided what we'd *like* it to be. Having no influence in heaven, and none whatever over you, we suspect that in all probability it will be something quite different. Do sit down, darling, you make me nervous. A grin at that height is too remindful of a gargoyle on a roof."

Jock and Saunders Lincoln laughed together, and Jock bent to move the little slippered feet to the side of the footstool, seating himself by them. "Well, I," he declared, "have spent this New Year's day elaborately and painstakingly mapping out the future of a beautiful young lady!"

"Coincident with your own, of course," said his mother dryly.

"Bum guess. The beautiful young lady was not Yvonne."

Mrs. Hamill's eyes widened, and Lincoln said, "Why, I'd been led to believe that Yvonne was the only really beautiful young lady now extant!"

"She is," Jock assured them, sobering. "This one's just an infant. Cecily Graves, from East Orange. I met her once at college, and last night she showed up at the Tavern, and—well, there's quite a yarn. Want to listen?"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Hamill with enthusiasm.

Leaning forward, his arms on his knees and a forgotten cigarette consuming itself in his fingers, Jock outlined the history of Cecily as he knew it. His hearers seemed to find it extremely interesting. They neither moved nor spoke, and he, absorbed in what he said, did not realize that they were more absorbed in the way in which he said it—in the inflections of his voice and the unconscious buoyancy of his expression. He failed to note how often their glances met across the top of his head, and how once, after a descriptive passage employing countless superlatives, Mrs. Hamill's

right eye disappeared for the fraction of a second under a drooping lid, while the left eye glinted meaningly . . .

“So, after we’d had breakfast,” he narrated in conclusion, “I took her back to Yvonne’s while she got her own clothes, and then we drove out to East Orange——”

“Yvonne with you?” queried Mrs. Hamill very casually.

“No, she still wouldn’t budge. Just Cecily and I. And I met her father and mother. They’re wonderful people—you’d like ’em, especially the poppa. He’s fat and bald and rubicund, and on the slightest provocation emits guffaws that make the welkin ring. Great guy! He and I got very clubby inside of ten minutes. Mrs. Graves isn’t quite so approachable—little bit high hat and *grande dame*—but she’s all right too. They seem to have all kinds of dough. You know that house that sits back in the trees on the right as you go into the town there, mother?—the one with an artificial lake in the lawn and a lot of turrets and things, like a fairy-story castle? Well, that’s theirs. I stayed there about an hour, and then came back to Yvonne’s again, and we’ve been talking the situation over ever since. Yvonne thinks I ought to appoint myself Cecily’s guardian from now on—sort of look after her and take her around places——”

“Yvonne thinks so?”

Jock, looking up, saw incredulity writ plain on his mother’s face, and a faint reflection of it traced across the features of Saunders Lincoln. “Sure she does!” he insisted. “Why not? Did you think she’d be jealous, or something? That’s absurd. Yvonne isn’t that way. And besides, Cecily’s only a kid, I tell you! Just a darn cute little kid who needs a bit of looking after.

"Yvonne feels," he elucidated further, "just as I do, that I'm really more or less accountable for her behavior, and that it's up to me to do what I can."

"I see," said Mrs. Hamill slowly. "Quite right, too!" she added, nodding. "You should, under the circumstances. When are you going to start?"

"I've started already. Lectured her at breakfast and all the way over to Jersey, and on the way back I stopped at Brentano's and picked out a couple of tons of books for her to read. No flies on me as a pedagogue!"

"Evidently not. Well, and when do you expect to see her again? Why don't you bring her here some day soon so I can meet her? I like what I hear of her." Mrs. Hamill spoke never more truly.

"I'll do that," answered Jock. He rose, stretching, and observed haphazardly, as though it had just occurred to him, "She's coming to the Tavern tonight again, this time with the boy she's engaged to."

Mrs. Hamill sat up with such suddenness that an ash tray she had balanced in her lap slid to the floor. "Oh, so Cecily is engaged!"

A little pause followed this impulsive and illuminating exclamation. "Why, she's *sorry!*" thought Jock, struck. Belated cognizance of the things that had moved in his mother's mind came to him. "She wanted to think I might fall in love with Cecily—that must mean she doesn't like Yvonne—oh, hell, it *can't!*"

But he knew it could not mean anything else.

He said stiffly, "I believe so. Cecily won't acknowledge it in so many words, but she seems particularly anxious to have us meet this bird and see what we think of him. What if she is engaged, for heaven's sake? I'm not trying to marry the girl—I'm engaged myself, don't forget!"

"I am not forgetting," murmured Mrs. Hamill.

There was another pause, heavy and uncomfortable. Then Jock sauntered toward the door, attempting, rather unsuccessfully, to sound natural as he said, "Well, guess I'd better step, it's after six. Ladies and gentlemen: exit the boy banjoist in the performance of his duties!"

II

The evening, given a bad start, went more and more awry as it proceeded.

Jock and Yvonne reached Terrace Tavern at seven o'clock, to find the red-and-black playground already filling with men and women, and smoke, and whisky and gin. The crowd seemed to be made up for the most part of people who had been celebrating New Year's for twenty-four hours without cessation, and who were now either violently disorderly or very nearly comatose. The atmosphere was even more jaded than usual, the faces more drawn, the laughter more metallic. From their scarlet nook Happy Hatton's players sent forth a listless syncopation, and about the oval floor couples jogged drearily, doggedly, as though forced to foxtrot much against their will. The whole scene, after the night before, savored of anticlimax.

Jock and Yvonne took a table for four and there waited, saying little. Yvonne was too weary to talk, she averred, and Jock was too preoccupied. He sat idly pouring salt, watching his fingers mold it into infinitesimal hills . . . thinking many deep and troublous things.

After quite a long time he said unexpectedly, "Dear, let's not wait till February. Let's get married right

away "Shall we?" His hand covered hers on the table. "*Please!*"

He had made the entreaty innumerable times, but never quite in this way. There was a sort of desperation in his tone, and something very like fear in his eyes. He felt Yvonne's hand tremble, and was sure that she shared this strange indecipherable new emotion which filled him . . . until she spoke. Her words were light, and tinkling-cool as little icicles. "What on earth is the matter with you tonight, Jock Hamill?"

"I don't know," he answered hopelessly. "I just—have the damnedest funny feeling——"

Then through the smoke and the tired air, Cecily came toward them. She seemed to dance toward them, like a bright autumn leaf in the wind—radiantly alive, quickening the pulses. She wore a brocaded evening cloak with a vast fur collar, and above it her eyes shone and her sweet full lips smiled a smile that said, "Come on! Life's fun! Come and play with me!"

A young man walked just behind her, and as soon as he beheld this young man Jock thought, "She'll marry him. Any girl would." . . . There was a beauty-parlor look about Bill Burnholme. His crisp fair hair waved as though fresh from a marceling iron, so that you were tempted to lay your fingers along its perfect undulations. His eyebrows grew thick at the nose and thin over the temples, like a tweezered flapper's. His eyes—blue eyes, almost violet—were set in tangled dark lashes. But to counteract the effect of these too-faultless attributes, he had a great sinewy body, blunt hands with callouses below the fingers, and a careless, collegiate, thoroughly masculine manner. So men forgave him the beauty of his face, and women adored it the more.

Cecily presented him, and sank into her chair with a sigh, declaring that "introductions always befuddle me." Bill and Jock, from opposite sides, assisted her to shed her wrap, thereby revealing a tight little gown of coral velvet with a spatter of glistening beads across the bodice. "Don't tell me we're late," she implored. "What I mean is, not *too* late—you haven't done your act yet, have you?"

"No," said Yvonne, "not until eight."

"We had a flat tire," Cecily explained, "—of course. Bill is one of those people who always get flat tires. And then he couldn't find the jack——"

Bill interpolated meekly, "I'm one of those people who never can find the jack——"

"Absolutely!" nodded Cecily. "He is, really. Well, and so we stopped the next car that came along and there was a most vicious-looking man in it and I was petrified and put my rings in my shoe——"

She rattled on, and Jock listened, his eyes shifting from her face to her escort's and back again. He saw that Burnholme was infatuated with Cecily. His every glance at her gave it away, despite the labored unconcern with which he sought to keep it hidden. "He's trying to hide it from *her*, though, not from us," Jock sensed intuitively. "He isn't sure of her." Somehow this was a gratifying reflection. "Means she's handling him cleverly," he added, by way of explaining to himself just why he should approve.

They ordered four chicken dinners, and Jock from a pocket flask mixed three highballs, for Burnholme, Yvonne and himself.

"Am I a step-child?" complained Cecily. "Where's mine?"

"You don't get one," Jock announced. "After last night——"

"Say," broke in Burnholme, chuckling, "how about that? Scoop tells me she disgraced herself."

"He calls me Scoop, isn't it senseless?" Cecily said gravely to Yvonne.

"I understand," Burnholme went on with evident relish, "that the floor came up and whacked her on the back of the head."

"Don't sound so perfectly delighted!" cried Cecily. "You wouldn't have liked it if you'd seen it. I was no lady. Besides, it hurt. It made a bump. Feel the bump, Jock." She ducked her head, and Jock prodded the back of it with his forefinger. "Feel it?"

"No."

"Well, it's there! You're a punk phrenologist."

"What tickles me," said Bill, "is—well, in the first place, I positively forbade her ever even to see that mutt she was with. This proves I had God on my side. And in the second place, she's always prided herself on being the only up-to-date woman in captivity who never got lit. She——" He broke off, and laughed into Cecily's eyes so intimately that Jock had a queer and cold sensation of not being present at all. "Remember the day I met you?" he asked her.

Cecily dimpled—whether in sentimental or merely humorous recollection it was impossible to determine.

"Certainly do."

"It was at a picnic," Bill informed Jock and Yvonne, "and she sat there holding two paper drinking cups—gin in one, water in the other. She'd drink the water and touch the gin to her lips, pretending it was the chaser, and then dump the rest of it on the ground. She did that all afternoon, and I, guileless and honest, trying to keep pace with her, lapped up approximately three quarters of a quart of gin alone and single-handed and presently passed right out of the picture. Never

did know the facts till afterward. Thought she must be the original human sponge."

"I'm full of those little tricks," observed Cecily. "You sort of have to be these days. Don't you, Yvonne? You have three alternatives—drink actually, drink ostensibly, or else be called a wet smack. I refuse to be called a wet smack."

The conversation dealt briefly with prohibition, then veered to other topics. Jock left the burden of it to the rest and relapsed into moody silence. A dread of the evening's performance had grown in him, all in the last few minutes. To walk out beside Yvonne into the spotlight, to bow and scrape to the crowd, to kneel and strum, with these two looking on. . . . There was suddenly nothing in all the world he wanted less to do. He felt placed at a definite disadvantage. This fellow Bill—budding architect, Cecily had said—what would he think? What was he thinking now? "Probably looks on me as about one degree higher than a confounded chorus man!" . . . He could imagine Bill on the way home, upbraiding Cecily, saying of himself, Jock, "What do you see in a sap like that? Why, he doesn't amount to anything!" . . . destroying with a few caustic sentences the whole structure of her esteem.

The orchestra was playing again—the last dance before eight o'clock. Jock grasped Cecily's elbow almost roughly. "Come on, let's try this."

She danced perfectly, with rhythmic effortless ease. "Do I still hang on your left thumb like a coat on a peg?" she quoted after a moment, sparkling up at him.

"You know you don't. I wish you wouldn't remind me of all those ancient dirty cracks."

"Why not? They made me what I am today——"

"Look here," said Jock, "are you engaged to Burnholme or aren't you?"

"How do you like him?" evaded Cecily.

"All right. Fine. Seems to be a good sort. Answer my question."

"What do you want to know for?"

"Why wouldn't I? You're like a little kid sister to me, you know."

"Oh," said Cecily.

Bill Burnholme and Yvonne glided past them, Yvonne's head a fiery blotch against the broad black shoulder. "She's gorgeous, isn't she?" Cecily breathed.

"Isn't she," echoed Jock absently. "Aren't you going to tell me, Cecily?"

Before she could reply the music died, with the sharp unmusical groan beloved of jazz bands, and Jock said hurriedly, "Listen here, Cecily: Yvonne and I do our stuff in just a minute. And listen, don't think—remember in a month from now I'll be doing something different—something a lot more to be proud of——"

This was all he had time for. Bill and Yvonne joined them, and the foursome went back to its table, Jock with the conviction that he had sounded silly and accomplished nothing.

Ten minutes later, he and Yvonne were out on the floor alone.

The spotlight was extraordinarily bright that night. It beat upon him with a searing, intolerable lucidity. It lay in a circle around him, so that he reminded himself, ridiculously, of a valentine figurine glued upright on a white cardboard base. Beyond the spotlight there was gloom, and out of the gloom, wan faces, like enormous scattered blossoms. He saw Cecily's face and Bill's, blurry with distance, and he was full of an

awful certainty that both of them were amused, supercilious, scornful.

He had never felt more awkward, nor more miserable. The embarrassment and stage fright attendant on his début at the Tavern had been as nothing compared with this. He could feel perspiration—what he fancied must be a veritable torrent of perspiration—on his forehead. He could feel slow red in the traitorous inches between the back of his collar and the roots of his hair. And when he knelt, in the hush that followed the preliminary round of applause, his knee cracked, making what seemed to him a deafening report.

He began to play.

He believed he had never played worse, but in reality he played quite as usual, his fingers instinctive on the strings. Yvonne, beside him, sang a little wicked song. *What Makes 'Em Dog Me Aroun'?* . . . He was conscious of the motions of her hands, of the sway of her gold-sheathed body. Suggestive. Faintly indecent. Adapted to the tenor of her audience. "And I *let* her!" he thought, in a frenzy of self-condemnation. A man who let the girl he was going to marry stand in a public place and croon innuendos for the delight of the dissolute—what must right-minded people think of *that?* . . .

They presented three numbers, and when they had finished there occurred an incident unprecedented in their Tavern experience: somebody threw money at them.

They were bowing, hand in hand, and a disc of silver came spinning over the floor and lay at their feet . . . then another . . . and another. Jock, seeking wild-eyed the source of this generosity, located it as a ringside table around which was assembled a senile

stag party of six. One of the six was lost in slumber, gripping the neck of a bottle in an oblivious fist. His companions were very much awake. They had shifted their chairs so as to face the entertainers, and they lolled back, crossing their corpulent shins, and whistled, and cat-called, and grimaced behind the films sent up by their cigars. Their hands alternately whacked approval and delved into their pockets. . . . Jock found himself noting details with a peculiar cold precision. The diamond on one man's little finger. The three wisps of hair brushed so meticulously across the naked pate of a second. The stubble of beard on the chin of a third . . .

Clink! Clinkclinkclink! *Clink!*

Other groups were following the example of the inspired quintet. Coins whizzed thick and fast. Fifty-cent pieces. Quarters. Dimes. A dollar, hurled by a bibulous maiden who made a great hue and cry about it, standing up and flexing her arm like a baseball pitcher.

This took place in a mere few seconds. But it seemed to Jock that it had all begun exceedingly long ago, ages ago. It seemed to him that ever since he could remember he had stood there, a target for people's small change, like a street singer, or a beggar, or an organ-grinder's monkey—*while Cecily watched*. The thing would have been painful in any case; under the circumstances, it was tragic. He wanted to shrink to nothingness, to become invisible, to be swallowed by a yawning floor. He wanted, in short, all the things that shame-filled sufferers want, and that no kindly deity ever vouchsafes.

"Give them another," Yvonne whispered in his ear. "We'll have to. *Hypnotizin' Mama,* or anything——" He looked down at her and saw that she

was genuinely merry; almost laughing. "My God, she thinks this is *funny!*" he told himself.

Mechanically he knelt again, and struck opening chords, while the spectators settled back to listen and the shower of metal slackened, ceased altogether. *Hypnotizin' Mama*, verse once, chorus once, repeat verse, repeat chorus twice. This was the formula, and he followed it through force of habit . . . then rose, and clasped Yvonne's hand in his damp one, and bowed again . . .

Yvonne was giving him further sibilant directions under cover of the clapping. "Pick up that money, Jock Hamill! You've *got* to! Doesn't matter what you do with it, but pick it up. And for pity's sake, *look pleasant!*"

The moments during which he trotted about, scratching silver out of the dust and hearing it patter into the inverted hollow of his banjo were the most ghastly he had ever known, or ever wished to know. He carried with him as he moved a mental cinema of himself—a cinema photographed from Cecily's angle, wherein he appeared the sorriest possible spectacle. He had no idea, of course, that all the women in the room, Cecily included, found him appealing and very lovable in his discomfiture.

When the last dime was lifted he took Yvonne's arm, walked resolutely to the platform with the banjo held straight out before him like a church collection box, and dumped its contents at the feet of Happy Hatton.

III

Yvonne comprehended in some degree Jock's state of mind that night, but only by intuition, for at the

time he said nothing. Not until two weeks later did she hear from him how complete a change in his attitude toward Terrace Tavern Cecily's visit had wrought.

During those two weeks, she saw less of her lover than at any time in all the year of their intimacy. His days, formerly hers exclusively, were now the joint property of herself and Cecily—with the balance of hours perhaps a little on Cecily's side. This was right. This was as it should be. She encouraged it; and in the evenings, while they waited their turn at the road-house, she listened to Jock's accounts of his afternoons with Cecily, and smiled and smiled . . . wanting to cry . . .

Twice she invited Cecily to her own apartment when Jock was not there, to eat chocolates and discuss clothes, plays, parties—and him. She learned many things that Cecily did not intend to tell; and Cecily learned many things that Yvonne did intend to tell. And both of them seemed very happy, and one of them was.

Jock seemed happy only at intervals. At other times, he was troubled and morose. Yvonne saw plainly that he failed to understand his own mood, that he did not analyze it—probably for the reason that, deep in his subconscious mind, he was afraid to. She was not altogether surprised, therefore, one Saturday evening in mid-January, when he burst into a sudden storm of abuse of the Tavern, which he apparently blamed for all his present discontent.

He said, without preamble, "Oh *good God*, but they turn my stomach! Look at them, will you, Yvonne? Just look at 'em!"

Yvonne looked, and perceived nothing but the usual diners, the usual drinkers, the usual dancers, neither better nor worse than they usually were. She looked

back at Jock again. His dark glance brooded over the room and his lips were twisted to sneer.

"It's enough to make you sick!" he went on savagely. "Damn' *swine!* Look at the way they paw each other, and kiss each other, and leer unspeakable rottenness out of their eyes! 'Children of disobedience.' That's from the Episcopal prayer book, and I've remembered it since prep school, and lately every time I look around this hole I think of it. '. . . lust, evil concupiscence . . . for which things' sake the wrath of God falleth on the *children of disobedience.*' When—if I ever write a book that'll be the title, and it'll be all about people like these——"

He ceased, smiling. "I'm popping off, as usual."

Yvonne was silent, running her fingers up and down the stem of her water goblet. Presently Jock resumed speaking. "To tell the truth," he said in a somewhat mollified tone, "I guess it's not so much that I'm sore at the Tavern as that I'm sore at myself. I have been ever since the night they started flinging money. That was the night I began to see just what a caricature of a real he-man I look like. First year out of college—year of laying a lifetime's cornerstone, it ought to be—and what did I do with it? And what did I allow *you* to do?" He indicated the surroundings with a sweep of his hand, and his scowl deepened. "Fine!" he finished witheringly. "Most laudable! Jock Hamill, the human jellyfish!"

Another lull. Yvonne lit a cigarette and eyed its slender upward twirl of bluish smoke. Jock dug his hands into his pockets, seeming by this gesture to pull his whole long body lower in the chair. His eyes focussed themselves on a bar pin fastened to the bodice of Yvonne's gown, but she knew he was not thinking of the bar pin.

"Now you take Cecily," he said. "The poor kid looks up to me as if I were her father or somebody. She does everything I tell her. And who the hell am I? That's the point. I've got a sweet nerve to be advising her what to do and what not to do, when all I rate is a rag-picking job in a low-life——"

"Jock Hamill, let's leave tonight."

Jock had been so engrossed in his diatribe that he had almost forgotten Yvonne. Now, with her interruption, he appeared to bethink himself of her. His face softened. "I'm sorry, honey! I've got you all upset, haven't I?"

"No, that's not it. But I see how you feel, and since you do feel that way why should we stay on here two weeks more? You'll only hate it. Let's go find August and tell him we're quitting right now, don't you want to?"

Jock shook his head. "I've thought that all over, but it won't do. Rum trick on the old boy—he's been pretty good to us in his way. We agreed to hang on till the first of February, I suppose we'd better stick to our word.

"Don't look so worried!" he added, laughing at her. "I can stand it all right! I've stood it an awful lot of weeks already, remember, and thought it was hot stuff."

"You did, didn't you? You enjoyed it for awhile?"

"Sure I did! You know that."

Yvonne changed the subject abruptly. "Tell me about this afternoon."

(*Cruel*, the swift light of his face!) "We went up to mother's to lunch," he said, "and you should have seen mother and Cecily! They hit it off from the word go."

"I knew they would," said Yvonne.

"Well, they did! Chattered away, and giggled—I felt like an old man with a couple of high school daughters. Had such a time getting them apart that Cecily and I were half an hour late to the matinée. Say, the show was good, too!" He paused, regarding Yvonne. "Shame you missed it, honey."

"I'm sorry too. But I simply had to go to the hair-dresser's, as I told you. I needed all sorts of things done to me."

"You look great. Well, after the show we went to the Ambassador and had tea and danced, and got to talking about the books I picked out for her. She's read them all already, though when she gets time I can't imagine because between Bill Burnholme and the rest of her string, not to mention yours truly the nurse, she's busy all the time——"

"Have you found out yet whether she's really engaged to Bill?"

"Nope. Little devil won't say yes or no."

"I don't think she is," opined Yvonne. "And even if she should be, it probably won't pan out. About one girl in a hundred ever marries her first fiancé."

"She could do a lot worse, though," Jock said generously. "Bill's a good boy. I like him better every time I see him. Well, anyway, as I was saying: Cecily's comments on those books—I wish you could have heard 'em, Yvonne! Clever as they could be. If it had been any one else I'd have thought she was plagiarizing from some big critic's book reviews, but not Cecily. Everything she said was original, you could tell that, and it was great dope. She had me humping, I can tell you."

"She does sort of stimulate your mind, doesn't she?" Yvonne said, making the "your" impersonal.

"You bet it's the truth!" agreed Jock vigorously.

"I have to look out or this'll be one of those pathetic cases of pupil telling teacher where to get off. She's got no mean head there, let me say, for all it looks so frivolous."

Yvonne took a little sip of water and set the goblet down carefully. "You know," she remarked, "sometimes it occurs to me that Cecily is the kind of a girl you should have married—would have, if I hadn't come along."

As she voiced this, quite without appearing to, she watched Jock so narrowly that she felt her eyes burn in their sockets. But she could detect nothing in his face except surprise and instant repudiation.

"Don't be silly," he advised, and smiled easily, as though she had said something humorous.

Yvonne thought, "No, not that way. It's got to be more drastic than that. He isn't on to himself yet, and even if he were his conscience wouldn't let him listen to reason" . . .

"Two more weeks— isn't very long, is it?" she mused aloud, with what might have been irrelevance.

IV

"And bring Yvonne tomorrow," commanded Peg over the telephone.

"Absolutely will."

But when the receiver was back on its hook Jock said to himself. "No, I won't. I'll take Cecily."

True to their word, Peg and Johnny Havens had summoned him to their home in Washington Square very soon after the November day when they had had tea together; and he had been there often since. He

loved to go there. Peg amused him always, Johnny he was enormously fond of, and their host of friends he found exactly to his taste. There was a special brand of informality about the Havens's parties. Everyone was expected to do just what he pleased in that apartment, and did so. People came if, and when, they wanted to, entertained themselves according to the dictates of their fancies, and departed at such time as they saw fit. They danced, and sang, and stirred weird concoctions on the kitchenette range, and played stud poker on the dining room table, and made light love in the hall, and *laughed*. . . . Nowhere under the sun, Jock thought, was there ever quite so much laughter. Into this environment he had taken Yvonne one afternoon around Christmas time, and he was left with a distressing belief that the experiment had not been successful. Yvonne had been an onlooker, not a participant; and the crowd resented onlookers, however lovely and gracious, on the ground that they "crabbed a party." The fun had been rather subdued that day, and Jock had known why and been both grieved and disappointed. He had felt that in this small but somehow not trivial matter, Yvonne had completely failed him.

Cecily would not fail him. She was fundamentally adapted to just that sort of thing.

He reached for the 'phone again with a view to calling Peg back and announcing the substitution, but thought better of it. "No use," he reflected. "They don't care who I bring, and anyway I'm going to see Johnny at lunch——"

It was the last Friday in January, and the luncheon engagement was a business one. Johnny's father was to be present, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not he agreed with his son that Jock would prove

an asset to the paper owned by him, the *New York Log*. A matter of form only; Jock was as good as hired, sight unseen. But he did not know this, and the meeting seemed to him crucial and precarious. He dressed for it with vast attention to detail, and, in the conviction that the first requirement of a reporter was punctuality, reached the appointed place on the stroke of one—and waited half an hour.

While he waited, he planned the dialogue to come. "Then he'll say" . . . "Then I'll say" . . . He examined his watch at minute intervals, and once he held it to his ear. As one-thirty approached he was assailed by a panicky suspicion that Mr. Havens had declined to present himself after all. In fancy he saw Mr. Havens, a sort of Johnny-grown-old with a beard and a belly, pounding his fist on a pile of newspapers and roaring, "Why should I waste my time?"

Why, indeed? Jock could think of no good reason, and it began to seem to him that his mere presence here in expectation of the Great was most presumptuous.

But Mr. Havens came, and was not ostentatiously Great at all, but quite human. You felt at once that he enjoyed cards and horse races, that he commanded a supply of excellent stories, and that he had a cellar full of bottles with cobwebs upon them. That type of man. He was of medium height, thick-set, with an abundance of graying hair, a square strong face, and at once the shrewdest and jolliest eyes Jock had ever seen. He spoke in an abbreviated way, as though before presenting each sentence he mentally blue-penciled it to the bone. "Late," he said, pumping Jock's hand. "Kept you waiting. Couldn't help it. How're you? Glad to know you."

Nor was the ensuing meal at all as Jock had thought

it would be. Almost to the end of it, business remained unmentioned. He himself dared not introduce the issue, Johnny would not, and Mr. Havens appeared much more interested in the information that Jock had once played the Valleydale course in two below par than in the fact that he wanted a job. They talked golf until dessert.

"Have to have a round together," Mr. Havens remarked at last, "spring comes."

Jock said, truthfully, that he would like that very much. "But you'll probably beat me ten-up, sir," he added smiling. "I've hardly had a club in my hands since I left college, and I never was any great shakes. That Valleydale score Johnny told you about was an accident."

"Haven't been playing?"

"No, sir."

"Why not? No time?"

Jock hesitated, and Johnny supplied the answer. "No inclination. Tread softly, dad, the boy's in love."

Mr. Havens elevated an eyebrow at Jock. "Fact?"

"I'm going to be married about the last of next month."

"Good!" said Mr. Havens. "Means you'll take hold. Look at Johnny. Engaged, perfectly useless. Wrench in the wheels of Progress. Sat and mooned from morn till eve. Marriage made all the difference. Now look at him, works like a steer."

"First time you've ever admitted it," Johnny muttered.

His father ignored this. "When can you start?" he shot at Jock.

"Monday, sir."

Mr. Havens jerked his head in manifestation of approval. "Come 'round. Ten a. m. My office."

What do you want, anyway? Business end? News end? What?"

"News," said Jock with emphasis.

"Ever done any writing?"

"Just at college. Of course that doesn't mean anything. But I think I can, Mr. Havens."

"Damn right he can!" put in Johnny. "I've read some of his stuff my brother-in-law sent Peg in the olden days. He's got more literary ability than any staff man ever needed. Also personality, guts, and everything else you'd want."

"This your press agent?" grinned Mr. Havens, pointing a thumb at his son.

"Seems to be," Jock said, also grinning.

"Well, we'll try you, see if he's right."

Which was all there was to it. They parted soon after; the Havens, *père et fils*, to return whence they had come; Jock to rush into the nearest telephone booth, demand his mother's number, and say in a voice which he vainly strove to control, "Hello! Mrs. Madeleine Hamill? A reporter from the *Log* speaking" . . .

V

There was assembled in the Washington Square apartment on the following afternoon a representative group of kindred spirits, to the number of twelve. Of these twelve, six were shooting dice in a circle on the floor. Two—a girl with straight blonde bobbed hair, like yellow paint, and a boy in a West Point uniform—were seated close together on a divan, wearing that desperately solemn expression of countenance young people wear only when they are discussing one

another's probable faithlessness. Two more occupied the piano bench and played intermittent ragtime, the girl with both hands, the boy with a somewhat erratic forefinger on the upper end of the keyboard. The host, Johnny, was performing calisthenics with a cocktail shaker. And Mrs. Johnny, in a voluminous blue-checked apron and with a smudge on the tip of her extraordinary nose, was flying back and forth between kitchen and living room demanding whether or not anybody wanted her to make coffee—"If anybody says yes I'll crown them——"

On one of these trips she paused by her husband's side to say, "What's happened to Jock and Yvonne, do you 'spose?"

"He's not bringing Yvonne," Johnny answered, opening a fresh bottle of gin and sniffing into it with the usual post-Volstead distrust. "He's bringing some other girl. Told me so yesterday. Forgot to tell you about it."

"He is?"

"He is."

"Why, what's that mean?" Peg marveled.

"I don't know," said Johnny, "but I know what I hope."

"Me, too. I don't like her either."

"Oh, I liked her all right enough," Johnny contradicted. "But not for old Jock. Wrong kind entirely. Listen! There he is now."

Outside in the street was heard an automobile horn braying a little refrain. "Honk—honky-honk-honk—honk *honnk!*"

Peg and Johnny with one accord went to a window and threw it open, drenching their protesting guests with zero air. They hung out. Four stories below they could see Jock's roadster, and Jock assisting to

alight from it a diminutive person in a fur coat and a dot of green hat.

"Ship ahoy!" boomed Johnny.

"Look out, you'll fall over backward!" warned Peg, giggling, as Jock and Cecily stretched their necks to look up.

"Wait'll you see what I've brought!" Jock shouted from the sidewalk, and the pair vanished into the doorway below.

Their arrival at the apartment proper was attended by an untoward mishap. Amy Hazelton, the girl at the piano, understanding that Jock had Yvonne with him and desiring to be apropos, struck crashing chords . . . Jock and Cecily entered to the *Bridal March* by Lohengrin.

"Why, how nice!" said Cecily, quite unabashed. "Now if somebody'll lend me a lace curtain——"

Amy gasped and jerked her fingers from the keys. "Oh, I'm so sorry—why, I thought of *course* it would be Yvonne!" she explained brightly.

Peg rushed to the rescue, and without waiting to be introduced to Cecily introduced her to the room at large. "Say hello to these tramps, my dear," she directed, hooking her arm into Cecily's. "The one now lumbering toward us is my warden, Johnny Havens. And this is Elsie Henry, and that's Dinny Purviance ——" She recited names rapidly, and Cecily smiled and twinkled; which was really all the current Cecily had to do to conquer.

"Jock seems to be trying to keep it a secret," she said at the end with just the proper touch of diffidence, "but my name's Cecily——"

And inside of a minute they were calling her Cecily, with unanimous cordiality. They were making quite a little stir about her. Dinny dragged her coat from

her shoulders, and Johnny handed her a drink, and someone else proffered cigarettes, and the crap shooters shifted to make room for her. And in a few minutes more she was down among them on the floor, leaning on one palm, shaking the dice in the other, her wavy brown hair half hiding her cheeks as she bent to see whether or not she got that "Ada from Decatur" she had cried for.

Through all this Jock stood quietly watching; and his were sensations like unto those of a parent whose offspring performs creditably, even brilliantly, at a public entertainment. "I knew it!" he crowed in secret. "Takes to 'em like a duck to water—and they to her!" He continued to watch her, entirely unconscious of himself. She lost the dice and sat up straight, a slim, supple figure in modish green, with a noteworthy ankle and calf showing beyond the hem of the green skirt. Larry Vane, who sat next her, said something to her in an aside and she laughed, throwing her head back. That line of her throat . . . entrancing . . . Larry looked as if he thought so too. . . .

"Jock," said Peg's voice plaintively, "are you going to stand around till doomsday in that overcoat?" And, as he slid out of the coat with guilty haste, there were chuckles and pointed remarks. He saw that his engrossed attention to Cecily had been misinterpreted, and he was confused and angry. "They ought to know better than that!" he told himself peevishly. "They all know about Yvonne. Do they think I'm one of the two-time boys, for heaven's sake?"

After that he took pains not to gaze too often or too long in her direction; but he contrived to miss nothing.

The crap game gave way in time to informal dancing. Rugs were rolled up, chairs sent spinning into corners,

Amy Hazelton instructed to play "That thing that goes 'ta-ta-tum-te-ta,' you know, and not too fast!" Cecily, flushed and merry, her hands full of crumpled one-dollar bills, was pulled to her feet by Larry and another youth and literally fought over. Finally Dinny Purviance settled the question by carrying her off himself.

Jock danced with Peg. She had pulled her apron around so that it hung from her shoulders down her back like a court train; now she threw it over both their heads. There was an outbreak of comment; "Holy smoke, will you pipe that?" . . . "What is it?" . . . "It's the covered wagon!" . . . "It's a laundry bag with legs!" . . . "Hey, Johnny, better look into this!"

Peg, paying no attention, said in Jock's ear under the sheltering gingham, "She's a knockout! Who is she?"

"Cecily Graves. Little friend of mine—mine and Yvonne's."

"Since when?"

"Oh, I've known her a long time. Met her over a year ago, and discovered her again New Year's Eve."

"I should think you'd feel as though you'd discovered America," Peg declared briskly. "I'm sold on her. So's Johnny. So's everybody. Be sure to bring her again."

"I will," Jock promised. Even as he promised, he thought, "But I can't, very many times. I'll be married in a month, and they don't want Yvonne."

Some one lifted the apron neatly from their heads by means of an umbrella, Peg meantime complaining that it was a shame if a lady couldn't have a little privacy in her own home. Jock observed that Cecily was dancing now with the cadet, Scott Mason. She

caught his eye and wiggled her fingers at him. "So nice to see you again!"

After a while he cut in on her. "Having a good time?"

"Wonderful."

"Nobody," he said positively, "ever went across any bigger. From the minute you came in the door and spoke right up the way you did——"

Cecily rejoiced to quote his bygone phrases whenever applicable. She did it now. "'Always, when you're introduced to anyone or any group, make a remark within the first minute—let 'em know you're there.'"

"And believe me you *are* there!" he retorted. "There, and 'way over. I'm all puffed up about it."

They danced without speaking for an interval, both enjoying the antics of the couples rotating about them. The cadet and the straight-haired blonde were presenting an exaggerated interpretation of a Bowery bunny-hug, and Peg and Johnny, by way of contrast, were doing an old-fashioned two-step with overwhelming gravity. Johnny, stiff as a ramrod, stepped as though he were stepping on eggs, and held Peg at arms' length. And Peg bounced and hopped and counted painfully under her breath, "One, two, one, two." The whole was a study in consummate gawkiness.

"Aren't they *rich*?" whispered Cecily. "Look, Jock—look at Peg's expression! Did you ever see anything funnier? Oh," she added on a little sigh, "I adore all this! It's so crazy. If I ever have a home of my own I'm going to cultivate just this sort of unconventional happy-go-lucky atmosphere."

"So'm I," said Jock without thinking. And then thought that it had been rather a senseless observation, all things considered. A home of which Yvonne

was mistress would perhaps be unconventional, but it would certainly never be happy-go-lucky.

The party romped on. Peg whisked away to the kitchen and came back wheeling a tea cart laden with, as she said, "alleged rarebit." It proved edible, and everyone ate voraciously, sitting on chair arms or on pillows on the floor. Amy was replaced at the piano by Larry Vane, who struck a Paderewski pose and intolerable discords until removed by force. Cecily, finding a dilapidated ukulele, coaxed melody from it and danced alone to her own accompaniment—graceful, and beautifully un-selfconscious. Dinny Purviance, draped in a couch cover and topped by a huge parchment lamp shade, recited the classic of the Drunk and the Pig, with gestures made effective by a sandwich with a bite out of it which he flourished in his hand. Everyone became involved in a warm argument on the subject of spiritualism, which terminated, as such arguments invariably terminate, in the darkening of the room and the tipping of a table, followed immediately by fresh argument as to *who* tipped it: "Scott did. I felt him." . . . "Why I did not, you egg, you did it yourself!" . . .

"I hate to take you away," Jock said to Cecily at half past five, "but I've got to shove off. Ought to be at the Tavern on time if I can—this is our last night there, you know."

"I should say I *do* know! You've talked about nothing else for weeks!"

They made their adieux, Jock in a lazy "So long, everybody," Cecily more punctiliously and personally. They crowded about her, and she sealed twelve new friendships with a smile and a gay word or two apiece. Voices shrieking things after them followed them to the elevator, and when they were again on the street

in the spangled dark the window four flights above went up again and Peg called, "Hey, Cec-i-lee! How's to have lunch with me Monday?"

In the roadster, Cecily relaxed, and the riotous vivacity that had been hers all afternoon—that was always hers—slipped suddenly away. She leaned limply in her corner of the seat.

"Tired?" queried Jock, peering sideways at her.

"Not specially."

Her face in the beam of the street lights had a queer pinched look about it. He became a little disturbed.

"This is the first time I've seen you when you weren't packing the old wallop. Anything the matter, Cecily?"

"No."

The curt monosyllable disturbed him more. Good Lord, was she angry? She sounded that way—and yet what in the world——

"I think you might have told me you were going to marry Yvonne, Jock," said Cecily.

"*What?*" he cried out.

"You heard me, didn't you?"

"I heard you, but—Cecily, you don't mean to tell me you didn't *know?*"

Cecily's tone neither rebuked nor deplored. It simply answered, expressionlessly. "Of course I didn't know. I didn't know until we went into that apartment and what's-her-name played the Wedding March and then said she was sorry, she'd thought it was Yvonne."

"How would I have known?" she challenged, as Jock remained speechless with surprise. "You never said a word about it, did you?"

His mind skimmed their month of association . . . and could find no actual word that he had said to her of his engagement. This was utterly inconceivable to him. Nothing, he thought, had been further from his

wish than deliberately to keep Cecily in ignorance, and the discovery that he had inadvertently done so dumbfounded him. "Why," he stammered, "I—I just took it for *granted* you knew! I thought of course you knew, from the start! It never entered my head once that you'd need to be told—I—why, you've seen us together—you spent that one night and a couple of afternoons with Yvonne, I supposed naturally she'd tell you——"

"She told me you *weren't*," said Cecily very distinctly.

Then Jock swerved the roadster to the right and brought it alongside the curb, and turned off the switch. He shifted in his seat so that he faced Cecily's profile, outlined against the yellow of a near shop window. Even in his abstraction, he gave a little mental salute to the cameo perfection of that profile.

"Cecily," he said, "*what do you mean?*"

"Exactly what I say. Yvonne told me you and she were not going to be married." The profile was lost unexpectedly, and Cecily's eyes were wide and dark on his. "I asked her," she stated. "I asked her that first morning when you brought me back to her apartment after breakfast. She came into the bedroom with me while I collected my own things to go home with, remember?—and I said, 'Are you and Jock engaged or anything?' I thought maybe you were—she's so marvelous-looking, and you seemed to know each other so well. But she just laughed, and kissed me, and said, 'No, my dear, we're just friends and business partners—and that's all we ever will be.'"

"'All we ever *will* be?'"

"That's what she said. She's said it since, too, several times."

"Well I'm damned!"

This remark of Jock's, delivered in a manner that testified to his absolute stupefaction, became the last made by either of them for some time. Cecily pulled her coat collar high and was hidden except for her eyes, which regarded the rear of a parked truck filled with crates. Jock sat motionless; the million mingled noises of the streets assailed his ears and aggravated him. . . . Once, in college, he had taken an examination upon which everything depended. (In those days, "everything" meant keeping on in college.) It was a mathematical examination, and the answer to one of its questions, the most important one, had eluded him. It had jumped just an infinitesimal length beyond his brain. And the feelers of his brain had reached for it—almost caught it countless times—and every time, a boy who sat in the seat behind him had *coughed*. Then he had had to begin all over again. . . . The street sounds now brought back the experience. They seemed to shatter his reasoning powers as that remembered cough had shattered them, so that he could not wrestle with his problem.

"Cecily," he said finally, "I give up. I just don't *get* it, that's all. The whole thing is a misunderstanding. I didn't mention the engagement because I simply took it for granted you knew. It's so much a part of me that I'm foolish enough to expect everyone who knows me to know it, just as they know my hair's black. As for Yvonne—well, that's what stumps me. She probably had some reason for telling you what she did—but she shouldn't have—because it isn't true. We are engaged. We have been engaged for almost a year. Why, we're going to be married within a month."

He could not even be sure that Cecily had heard him, so rigidly still she remained . . . until her voice came

to him, muffled by the fur. "I hope you will be very happy, Jock," said Cecily.

With his fingers he pulled the collar down and drew her chin around so that she faced him again. "God bless your little heart! It means a lot to me to hear *you* say that, Cecily——"

She cut him off. "Why don't we go on? It's getting late."

They went on.

"But of course," remarked Jock on the end of a long and thoughtful silence, "it doesn't make any difference——"

Cecily's eyes flashed, and her reply was so quick that it had the effect of a *pounce* upon his sentence. "of course not!" she said. "Why should it? I—I'll be married myself before you are. I'm going to marry Bill. Right away.

"I've been meaning to tell you for days," she added.

VI

Yvonne sat before the mirror in her dressing room. All about her were indications of a permanent leave-taking. The costumes that had hung behind a sheet in the corner were gone now, and only the sheet and a few hangers remained. Shroud and bones. . . . The dressing table was quite bare, and behind Yvonne's chair two suitcases, shut and strapped, lay waiting.

It was long after midnight. They had given their final songs, made their final bow to Terrace Tavern, and Yvonne knew that even now Jock would be fuming with impatience, wondering why she did not come. Yet she sat there, without moving. From the square of

glass with the light bulbs studding its edges like tiny fires, her face stared out at her. Fixed. Tragic-eyed. Only the eyes seemed living. The rest was just a surface, whitened here, painted there, with the red-gold waves of hair to form its frame. She examined this image with a curious intensity. "Oh, my dear," she choked at last, and covered her eyes with her palms so that she might not witness her own pain . . .

For a year, she had foreseen this moment. She had known herself to be nearing it, one halt unwilling footstep every day. In endless hours of solitary argument she had sought to put herself in readiness to meet it. She had said to herself, "You can't have him. He's not for such as you. You know that. He refuses to see it, even though you've told him, but *you* know. Make up your mind to it. Take this little year, and thank whatever gods there be you had that much." . . . She whispered these things now, again and again, her lips stirring ever so slightly, like red petals breathed upon. But she found no solace in them.

She felt that the gods were unnecessarily brutal. Could she have made this sacrifice so that Jock would know it was a sacrifice, she might have done it valiantly, upheld by the thought that throughout his life he would look back on her with gratitude. But it could not be made in such way, lest it defeat its own end. And instead, when it was over, he would despise her with all his strong young soul . . . and *never know* . . .

She was shaken by a sort of spasm, that quivered the ostrich-feather trimming on her evening gown and twitched the flesh of her uncovered back and arms. Its passing left her calm. She dropped her hands. The eyes that looked out at her now were steely, inscrutable—eyes of one long schooled to deny outwardly her inward feeling. The vivid lips were steady and a

shade derisive. Yvonne shrugged her shoulders. "Well,—at least I'll have done one really decent thing in my life——"

A moment later Jock's querulous knock sounded, and she opened the door to him, wearing her long chin-chilla wrap and the chiffon scarf with which she always protected her throat from the night air. She tried not to look at him. For the sake of composure, she knew it was better not to look at him. Yet her eyes were drawn irresistibly, and she tortured herself with his comeliness. Polished hair, brown laughing eyes, uneven mouth . . . and the splendid indolent length of frame. . . . These familiar things had never had such poignancy. She could have cried aloud, and thrown herself upon him.

She said evenly, "If you'll take this luggage——"

VII

After the cold ride in from the Tavern, Yvonne's apartment was blissfully warm. Fragrant, too, with the indescribable dim perfume of its owner, and illumined by a single lamp with a fringed shade that etched pencil lines of shadow up the walls. Yvonne allowed her wrap to slip off, and dropped on to the divan, where she sat plying a cigarette in a jade holder. Jock stood over the radiator, thawing his frost-bitten hands. "Glad you made me come up," he said. "This feels good."

"I wanted to talk to you," Yvonne told him.

Some such explanation was necessary, for usually after their evening's work he left her downstairs in the lobby and himself went immediately on home. "I

want to answer that question you asked me," she supplemented.

"Well, I certainly wish you would! I've asked it twenty times tonight if I've asked it once. Why you should have lied like that to Cecily is more than I can figure out."

"It wasn't a lie," said Yvonne.

She saw him wheel like one struck from behind. She dropped her eyes, preferring not to see the set of his face. "My dear boy," she said further, lightly, ironically, "what I told Cecily was quite true. I'm not going to marry you. Not now, nor ever. You haven't enough money."

Still she did not look at him. But she knew he looked at her, and her flair for the theatrical was a help and a protection. She flicked the ashes from her cigarette, laid her head against the back of the divan, and put the holder between her lips again. The whole gesture was indolent; and her little smile gave no sign that behind it her teeth gripped vise-like on the bit of jade.

"In this newspaper job," she continued, "you'll probably begin on a salary of thirty or forty dollars a week—if you're lucky. I had an allowance of seven hundred a week when I lived with Demorest. Make your own deductions. I've made mine. I can't stand poverty, Jock Hamill. I thought I could, but I can't. I've tried it out for a year. . . . You see, you rather fascinated me. Your *age* fascinated me. I'm thirty-two. That surprises you, doesn't it? But it's a fact. And it pleased and flattered me that I should be able to make you—just a boy—love me. Nutriment to some women's vanity is requisite, you know. Especially at thirty-two. They'll go to any lengths to attain it. They'll even give up luxury, for a while, the way

I have. But of course that can't last. The time comes when apartments on Park Avenue and motor cars and pearls look pretty good again, and collegiate devotion grows stale——”

“In other words, Jock Hamill,” she concluded, glancing toward him for the first time, “the game has ceased to be worth the candle.”

His face lashed her, so stark-white and stricken it was. Even his lips were white.

He spoke slowly. “Then all this—has been nothing to you——”

“But an interlude.” Yvonne stood up, actuated by an odd notion that in repose her body could no longer bear its agony. One thought was uppermost: Jock must go, and quickly, before she faltered in this hideous rôle and lost herself . . .

“You might go now, Jock Hamill. I don't think there's anything more for either of us to say.”

He did not move.

“Oh, *go*,” she cried wildly. “Can't you understand? I don't *want* you——”

In a stride he was standing close to her, holding her arms with fingers that bit the flesh, forcing her eyes to lift to his. “Yvonne—do you know what you're doing to me?”

“Perfectly. But you'll get over it.”

His laugh was dreadful to hear. “Just like that! Throw everything in the dirt and stamp on it—tear *every single goddam thing* in the world to pieces in a minute—and then say, ‘You'll get over it.’ Ha! That's very nearly funny——” His voice broke, and there was suddenly less harshness than tenderness in the clutch of his hands. He had a single instant of clear vision. “Yvonne, you don't mean these things. You *can't* mean them! You've just got that mad idea

you used to have—that you ought not to marry me——”

Yvonne pulled herself away from him and stood, cool and contemptuous, at a little distance. “‘Ought not’!” she mocked. “Stupid words! I use them now and then, but never in my life have they prevented me from taking anything I *really wanted*.” She concluded, thoughtfully, “For instance: I suppose there are people who would say that I ‘ought not’ to go back to Parke Demorest. Nevertheless I’m going back to him—tomorrow.”

There was an age-long interval while their glances clashed, fire against frigidity. Then Jock turned . . . swooped up his coat . . . and went.

Yvonne sank to her knees and huddled there on the carpet, a little shuddering heap of silk and feathers.

VIII

For months he honestly believed that he would never be happy again.

So perverse is human nature that when something we have long possessed is taken from us, we do not try to determine whether or not, in our hearts, we still valued it. Theft is theft, even though it removes the thing with which we would have parted voluntarily in a little while. Jock regarded himself as a man who had suffered irredeemable loss; and not until much later did he come to the realization that he had ceased to require what he lost before he lost it.

In the meantime, he was very melancholy, and very sure that without Yvonne nothing under heavens could ever be the same. The first sharp throes of anguish

subsided in due time, with the aid of a good deal of bad liquor. Afterward, bitterness and a sense of the futility of all dreams and all desires dwelt in him. This was his reaction. And while it ran its course he looked upon life with the eyes of a cynic, and his whole mental state was a sneer. Women? Treacherous. Love? A story-book fallacy. Ideals? As sand huts on a tidal beach, built for destruction.

But there was work. ("Thank God!" said Jock somewhat melodramatically, as young men in like plight have said since time immemorial.) Congenial work. Absorbing work. In a great dirty room full of shirt-sleeved figures, prodigious tables row on row, smooth sheets of copy paper, crumpled wads of copy paper, typewriters that chattered like a million teeth in a chill, air that was dead with smoke and must and dust and printers' ink, and alive—*frantic*—with breathlessness. . . . From the day of his introduction to the city room of the *Log* he had only to enter it to feel his spirits lighten. It was a refuge and a resort, a place where the little aches of individuals were forgotten in the mighty birth-pangs of a *Thing*.

They gave him, of course, only the most trifling assignments at the start. But the least of them thrilled him. He loved the voice of the city editor, rasping "Hamill"; the dash to some out-of-the-way place to get some unimportant item; the privilege of mentioning the name of the *Log* by way of identification. He loved to return and seat himself at one of those battered typewriters, with his shoes hooked about the legs of his chair and his body hunched over, and watch words leap out in lines from the tips of his fingers. This was fulfillment, in small degree, of his secret ambition. *Writing*. Putting things down on paper. Seeing them in print. . . . It meant much to be able to open an

edition to a certain page, and point, and say, "That's mine," even though "that" might be nothing more vital than a string of obituary notices collected over the 'phone or a paragraph beginning, "An exhibition of useful and fancy articles made by inmates of the Hudson Home for the Blind" . . .

Unfortunately, however, work did not fill every waking hour. His evenings were miserable. He spent them at home, reading a little, brooding much, stubbornly thwarting the efforts of his friends to provide him with entertainment. "For gosh sakes, Jock, anybody'd think you were in *mourning!*" Peg wailed, after her tenth invitation to Washington Square had been turned down. To which Jock replied—though not aloud—"I am."

As a matter of fact his avoidance of companionship was less in mourning than in self-defense. He feared that people might try to talk to him about Yvonne, and as yet he winced whenever that spot was touched by any finger—whether curiously prodding or gently compassionate made no difference. In this respect his mother was a source of satisfaction, for she had the great good sense to behave as though nothing whatever had happened. He appreciated this the more because he suspected she was glad of his catastrophe, and because he thought, since he had given her but the barest outline of it, she must be burning with unasked questions. He could not guess that Mrs. Hamill felt no need of questions; that her understanding was far deeper than his own, and her new thought of Yvonne a mixture of gratitude, admiration, and something akin to love. "Some day," she told Saunders Lincoln, "—not for a long, long time, of course, but some day, I'm going to let Jock know what a beautiful thing it was that that girl did."

IX

He saw Peg only four or five times in as many months, and Cecily he did not see at all. Through Peg and Johnny, who had evidently adopted her as one of their intimates, he kept track of her goings and comings. She was at Palm Beach with her parents. No, she wasn't married yet, but Bill Burnholme had followed her down there. . . . She was back from Palm Beach and would sail for Europe in two weeks. (During those two weeks he telephoned twice "just to say hello," but did not find her in.) . . . She was in Europe. She was having a wonderful time. Her letters, Peg said, spoke enthusiastically of some young French count she had met at Deauville. She expected to return to the States the last of May. . . . She had returned, and was visiting friends in Cleveland. No, she wasn't married yet. No, nobody knew when she intended to be married. Yes, Bill Burnholme was still reported to be slavishly attentive. One never knew, of course . . .

In June Johnny began to talk vacation plans to Jock.

They were lunching one day, as they often did, at a little café across the alley from the *Log* office where the sandwiches were ready to serve and the beer as "near" as could be expected. And Johnny said thickly, through a mouthful, "When you gonna take your vacation?"

"I don't rate one. I've only worked four months and a half."

"Sure you rate one! May be only four months and a half, but you've worked harder than any other six men do in a year! Don't think the old man doesn't

know it, either. He'll see that you get a week off at least, any time you want it."

"I'm in no hurry," said Jock.

Johnny regarded him solemnly over the rim of his mug (supplied by the management to heighten the illusion). "Listen to me, boy," he ordered, setting the mug down with a thump. "My well-earned rest starts a week from Saturday. Peg and I are going to spend it down near New London, where dad has a summer place which he's agreed to turn over to us, and we're going to take a bunch along for a houseparty. And you're coming too, d'you hear?"

"I *hear*," Jock smiled.

"Meaning, 'but won't obey', huh? Listen, Jock——"

"I know what you're going to say. It'll be a peach of a go, of course, but—thanks just the same. Ask me again sometime, Johnny. Sometime when I'm—more in the mood."

"If ever!" Johnny said despairingly. "Look here, Jock, there's no damn sense in your acting like this. It's all nonsense. Nearly five months since the thing happened—isn't it about time you staged a return to normalcy?"

There was no answer, and for some moments the pair munched and gulped in silence. Then Johnny said, "Well, if you change your mind, the latch-string's out, remember."

"Thanks. But not this time, I guess."

"Cecily's going to be there——"

"Is she?" Jock queried politely.

. . . As Johnny remarked later to Peg, "What can you do with a guy like that?" . . .

X

The return to normalcy took place suddenly and painlessly.

Madelaine Hamill, opening the door to her son at five o'clock of a blistering afternoon in early July, saw instantly that it had. A dozen little things told her. The look of his eyes. The ring of his voice. The what-care-I tilt of his hat. The long skinny paper-wrapped package under his arm, which could be nothing whatever except a new golf club. . . . When he kissed her his lips made a *smack!* sound on her cheek, indicative of enthusiasm.

But because she was a very wise woman, who understood Jock very well, she did not say, "Tell me about it!" Nor did she dance a jig, nor sing halleluiahs, nor give way to any of the impulses that surged in her maternal breast. Instead she went back to the chair in which she had been sitting and flopped down with a tiny moan.

"Isn't it hot!"

"Hell was never hotter," Jock agreed cheerfully.

He removed his hat and let it sail in a neat arc to the divan across the room. He peeled off his coat. He planted his feet astraddle, and with the new golf club, wrapping and all, took several terrific practice swings in air, barely missing the chandelier.

Mrs. Hamill waited.

Jock leaned the brassie tenderly in a corner and approached the victrola. He selected a record with maddening deliberation. While it tinkled a glad tune he stood over it, and twice he moved the needle back to repeat a few bars which he seemed to find particularly pleasing.

Mrs. Hamill waited, and wished she could spank him.

Finally he stretched himself in a chair near hers, poked his thumbs in the pockets of his vest, dropped his head back, and said, "I saw Yvonne today."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And *it didn't mean anything!*" With his elbows he impelled his body forward and looked straight at his mother, and there was a sort of wonder in his eyes. "Can you beat that? After all these months of—of moping around like I have, it simply didn't—mean—*anything!* I didn't feel anything."

"Did you—talk to her?"

Jock shook his head. "She didn't see me. She was in a machine" . . .

Mrs. Hamill, from the sentences that followed, got this picture:

Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street at high noon. A procession of motor-cars, and, on the corner, a damp impatient host of people, waiting for them to slide by.

". . . And a fellow standing next to me said to his girl, 'There's the new Demorest Straight Eight.' Demorest is *the one*, you know. I looked" . . .

A magnificent two-passenger racing car, low slung, painted gray, without a top. In the deep well of it, lounging recumbent behind the massive steering wheel—Yvonne. Yvonne in a gray gown and a tight gray turban with long uncurled feathers that sprayed down on one shoulder. Yvonne, with hair that was a loop of flame on her cheek, with diamonds that glittered in the sunlight on her hands, with a Russian wolfhound in a jeweled collar sitting stiffly on his haunches beside her.

A picture almost indelicately sensational. Beauty on parade, demanding every eye.

“ . . . And I kept thinking. ‘This ought to hurt like hell. This ought to just about kill me.’ But it didn’t. It just left me absolutely—at peace. Glad for her, because she’s got everything money buys to make her happy. And *glad for myself.*”

The room was quite quiet for several minutes. Then Jock lounged to his feet and stood smiling down upon his mother. “And it woke me up,” he said, “to a lot of things.”

Mrs. Hamill smiled back, but did not speak.

He left her, and she heard him whistling down the hall—heard his voice and Bennett’s, remotely, from the kitchen. When he reappeared he bore two long glasses. “Here,” he said, giving her one. “Inhale that while I tell you more tidings. Maybe this isn’t a red-letter day!” He assumed an oratorical stance and with his left hand beat upon his breast so violently that the ice in the glass he held in his right clicked and jumped. “I’ve been promoted!

“Oh, not far, not far,” he hastened to add, laughing at his mother’s face. “Don’t get all stewed up. I’m not managing editor yet, or anything. But—well, let me begin over.”

He perched on the arm of her chair. “When I got back to the office this p. m. I began thinking the situation over, and that bid of Johnny’s to the house-party he and Peg are throwing right now down near New London began to sound very cagey. Everybody’s down there, you know. Johnny and Peg, of course, and Larry, and Joe and his wife, and Dinny Purviance—” He fairly rushed over the next words “—’n’Cec’ly and the whole crowd. I sort of thought I’d like to go after all, now that things are as they are. So I braved Mr. Havens in his den, and he not only gave me a week off, starting tomorrow, but he told

me that as soon as I get back they're going to let me take a shot at feature stories! Said he'd been watching me personally and thought I had the stuff. Said—get this, mother!—that Mose Blake, he's the city editor, told him I was a *writer*, not a reporter, and that for the sake of brevity he was having to cut out of my copy, every day, stuff that was 'so well written it's a crime to throw it away,' and that I ought to be given a chance to spread a bit.

"Of course," he added, Jock-like, "that's probably mostly applesauce. But anyway, I'm going to get the chance—and more salary."

Then he was hugged and exclaimed over and beamed upon. And the two long glasses were touched together and drained. . . .

"Fill them again," said Madelaine Hamill. "I want to drink to the houseparty, and—" she smiled impishly "—as my ingenuous offspring puts it—'*n' Cec'ly*'—"

XI

Peg and Johnny met him at the station the next morning, and fell upon him with cries. "Look me in the eye!" said Peg immediately. "Are you cured? You must be, or you wouldn't have come. Praise the Lord, Amen. *Now* we'll have a *real* houseparty!"

They hustled him along the platform, jabbering as they went, and interrupting one another.

"When we got your wire——"

"We didn't tell a soul you were coming——"

"Wanted to surprise 'em——"

"And believe me they'll be surprised! Like having a visitor from the Styx, or something!"

He was ushered to an automobile of incredible antiquity. "This is Lulu," said Peg. "We think she'll take us back to the beach, but we wouldn't want to put it in writing."

"How far is the beach?"

"'Bout five miles."

Throughout the ride, Peg and Johnny reasoned gravely and often with the car, as with a refractory child. "Come on, now, Lulu. You can make this all right. Let's see you go up sailing." . . . And then, disappointedly, "Aw, *Lu!* Have a heart!" . . .

They sat three in the front seat, and in the intervals of Lulu's chastisement yelled conversation above the ructions of her mechanism.

"Everybody's in swimming," Peg announced. "Or at least, they were when we left, and I imagine they still will be. That's all we do. Swim, and dance, and swim, and eat, and swim. We practically live in our bathing suits."

"Who's on the party?" Jock wanted to know. "How many? Just the regular bunch?"

"Ten," said Peg, and listed them.

"Bill Burnholme not among those present?"

Peg looked blank. "Of course not. Why should he be? I've never even met the man—though of course I know all about him."

At this point Johnny shouted to Jock across Peg's lap, "Talk to Dad?"

"Yup!"

"Suppose he told you about your new job?"

"You bet he did! I don't feel *very* swell about it! Guess I've got you to thank for that, Johnny."

"Like crazy you have! You've got nobody to thank but yourself——"

Peg planted a firm palm on her husband's chest and

pushed him back into place. "Subside," she commanded sweetly. "Devote yourself to Lulu. I have certain somethings to whisper in this gent's ear before we get home." She turned to Jock. "What made you think Bill Burnholme would be here? Of course I know. You thought, being Cecily's fiancé, we'd naturally ask him."

"That's about it."

"Listen," said Peg, and prodded his ribs with her elbow to be sure that she had his attention. "I'm going to tell you something which I haven't any business telling you and which I wouldn't tell you if I didn't feel sure you'd be—well, call it interested. I know all about Cecily's affairs. I know how she met you, and what happened, and everything about it. And listen: as long as you are alive, and single, she'll never marry Bill Burnholme or anybody else. *There!* Bite down hard on that one!"

"Did she *say* that?"

"Words to that effect. And if putting you wise was a bum hunch I hope somebody shoots me!"

Jock, his face radiant and his heart doing strange alarming things within him, wrung her hand wordlessly, in token that it was not.

"Axiom One for Young Men," chanted Peg, "established by Jock Hamill of New York City, after intensive personal research work: 'The way to find your ideal girl is, bring her up yourself!'"

XII

They came upon their destination unexpectedly, over the crest of a little hill. Below them lay a green incline bisected by the road; at the foot of the incline

a great house of white clapboard, with spacious porches at its sides and front and green-and-white awnings astir at its windows; and, on beyond the house, the stretching blue of water into sky. . . .

"Whew!" sighed Jock ecstatically.

"See that float anchored out a way?" Peg said. "Those little insects crawling around on it are the houseparty. Part of it, anyway. The rest are probably on the dock—you can't see that from here, it's under the bluff.

"Jump into your suit quick, Jock," she concluded, as the car executed a sniveling stop beside the house; "and we'll get right down there."

Johnny conducted him upstairs into a huge bedroom boasting several cot beds and a tremendous litter of masculine effects. "This," explained Johnny, "is the bachelors' boudoir. All in here together, have more fun that way. Make it snappy now, will you, Jock? We'll be ready in five minutes. Meet you downstairs."

Jock needed no exhortations to hurry. In several seconds less than five minutes he descended to the first floor again, and waited, full of a sense of expectancy so exquisite that it was scarcely to be endured. Johnny and Peg, descending a little after him, found him standing on the porch with his eyes toward the water, looking, as Peg whispered, "Like a statue of Adonis in tights."

She approached him and stood on tiptoe to lay a solicitous hand on his forehead. "Poor boy, how're you bearing up?" she begged. "Why, he's feverish! He ought to be put to bed!"

But Jock was past the point where he could jest. "Come on," he said. "Let's move." And then, as Peg and Johnny laughed at him, "That ole sea's going to feel *good!*"

"Dissembling to the last," Peg murmured.

When they reached the dock, however, he dissembled no longer. He surveyed the wet welcoming faces that surrounded him, listened to the cacophony of delighted voices for an instant, and then said quite simply, "Where's my girl?"

Of course they twitted him a little, being modern young people; but they answered. And in obedience to their answers he directed his glance toward the float that was anchored offshore. There were two figures on it, one large and mannish ("That's Larry Vane," somebody volunteered) the other little and slender and somehow breath-taking. Cecily. With a scarlet suit. . . . As he looked she flung up an arm in recognition and greeting.

"See you later," said Jock, and dived, and swam, using a swift crawl stroke and making a great churn of foam.

Half way to the float he lifted his head and saw Larry Vane almost beside him, going the other way. Larry grinned at him, and panted, "I abdicate—by request—you lucky stiff!"

Cecily was alone on the float. He could see her sitting there, at the edge, hugging her bare white knees in the curve of her arms, resting her chin upon them, smiling at him . . . just ahead of him. . . .

All the things in the world that he wanted were just ahead of him. . . .

He buried his face in the cool green, and swam faster.

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