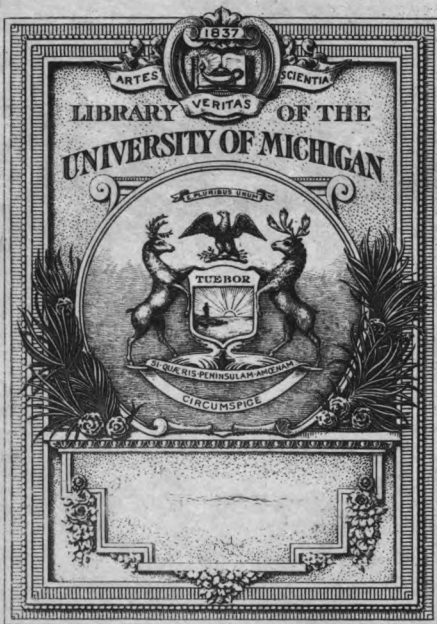


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# DANGEROUS BUSINESS







DANGEROUS  
BUSINESS

*by*

EDWIN BALMER

*Author of*

"THAT ROYLE GIRL," ETC.



NEW YORK • MCMXXVII  
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

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**Published October, 1927  
Second printing October, 1927**



**PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.  
BY VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, BINGHAMTON, N. Y.**

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# DANGEROUS BUSINESS





## I

The stop awakened Jay and he lay, pleasantly drowsy, not remembering yesterday nor trying to recall it. Indeed, he vaguely was warned against any effort to deal further with that day. It had dealt with him. Here he was in a Pullman berth aboard the Century, westbound. Well enough—but behind the train was New York.

In New York was Lida; so there he was again, alone with her in her mother's apartment on Park Avenue where she had told him, calmly at first and then crying, what had happened to her.

He stood staring at her, with fury flaming in him against Nucast and because of his accountability for Nucast. Then he had Lida in his arms, clinging to him and crying. She was soft and little and warm, and so young and so frightened, not like herself at all. Nineteen only, she was. So, never minding the cost to himself, he had offered to take Nucast's place.

"I won't let you. I won't think of it!"

"You have to let me," he pleaded with her.

"I haven't."

Finally he asked her, direct: "Then what are you going to do?"

That halted her heart. The straight question scared her and also brought to him, bluntly, the alternative. Yet she stuck to her refusal; he stuck by his proffer. So the matter remained between them when, at last, he left her.

How was it this morning with her?

Jay turned upon his side and closed his eyes in endeavor to put it out of his mind. No use. The train started and he lifted the window blind, which disclosed to him a station roof dimly etched before a gray dawn and a platform aswirl with snow which made big, gleaming balls of the street lamps.

The city must be Elkhart, two hours east of Chicago. He drew down the blind, packed his pillow to his best position for sleeping and closed his eyes only to hear his name repeated in the aisle:

“Mr. Rountree . . . Mr. J. A. Rountree . . .”

The man, speaking the name, went past. He was the stenographer who yesterday afternoon had asked Jay, when making the same request of other passengers, to give his name and berth number in case telegrams were expected. Jay had replied that no messages would come for him; but it must be that one had been handed aboard at Elkhart.

He looked between the curtains and saw the man with telegrams halt at the end of the car. Jay did not call because the idea had seized him that it was from Lida; and if it was, he wanted a minute or so to think before taking it. The morning on the train was not like yesterday forenoon with her in his arms. He required a bit of preparation.

The man disappeared; but he would return after a while or could be hunted up. Likely, Jay thought, the telegram was not from Lida at all. Probably it was from his father. Most telegrams were. The words of a recent one ran in Jay's mind, as he let the curtains close. He re-

packed his pillow and shut his eyes. No hurry about that telegram and no use thinking what it meant to him, if it was from Lida. He lay very still, not sleeping and he tried not to think.

"Jay!" Ben spoke to him from the aisle. "Jay; are y'wake?"

Ben was his nearest substitute for a brother. All his life he had known Ben; and through boarding school and college, they had been separated for but one year due to the fact that, when Ben went to Harvard, Jay had failed the entrance examinations and so had dropped back a class. But the next fall, Jay had got in and they had been room-mates at Cambridge for the last year and a half.

Until day before yesterday, there never had been an affair of any importance to Jay which Ben had not known.

Jay, pretending sleep, expected Ben to arouse him. Ben always was up early but he seldom was irritating because of this good habit. Qualities of regularity were inborn in him and Jay appreciated them and depended upon them.

"Y'wake?" whispered Ben again; and went away.

He had the telegram and Jay did not think of that. Ben supposed that it was a dispatch from Jay's father and he had seen many of the sort. In fact, he had seen a few which Jay never had read because Ben had thrown them away. There simply had been no use in letting Jay have some of them; and this, likely, was another.

Accordingly Ben took it to his own place in the next car, and after thinking it over, he pulled out the message, folded so that it displayed, first, a date line at New York at three o'clock that morning and the address to Jay on



the fourth section of the 20th Century train, Elkhart, Indiana.

Ben jerked up and reddened before the message. He knew the girl who signed it. That was, if Lida was Lida Haige of Miss Willet's School. Probably she was, for Lida was not a usual name, and it was unlikely to be repeated even among Jay's surprising acquaintance.

Ben did not hold against Jay either the number or the intimacy of this acquaintance. Ben, plain enough himself, yet had sufficient personal experience with girls in this age of unending pursuit of man by woman to appreciate Jay's extraordinary position.

Ben replaced the message in the envelope and returned to Jay's berth, where again he looked in.

Jay had fallen asleep with the serenity in which he always dreamed. What went on in his dream world, he never knew when he awoke. Ben often had asked him; for so evidently it was pleasant. Nearly always Jay smiled when touched; and he did so now.

"Hello," he said, smiling up at Ben.

"Hello," said Ben. "You lazy hat, we're past Elkhart. Telegram came on for you."

"Oh, yes," said Jay. "Heard it. Was awake then."

"Why didn't you ask for it?" asked Ben, blaming him.

"Plenty of time. I guess it's just a welcome to our city from father."

"That's what I figured," said Ben, grateful for this help. "So I took it; told the man I was you. Then I read it for you," he added, defending himself with another offensive. "The devil of a thing to have sent you aboard a train. I've read it."

"Why shouldn't you read it?" asked Jay.

Ben tossed it down and dropped the curtains, leaving Jay with his message. As with Ben, the date line and address first appeared; next, Jay read:

"I had to tell them I guess I've got to ask you to go through with it sorry sorry Lida."

He held it steadily, without surprise, his eyes traveling from end to end of the double line. "Lyda," he repeated to himself, "Leeda," he tried the name with inflection used by others. He looked up at the date line: 3 A. M.

She had sent it fifteen hours after yesterday noon, when he had left her. What else had happened? When had she had to tell "them"? Just before 3 A. M., or had that been merely the hour when she decided to telegraph him upon the train?

He considered the address to him on the fourth section of the Century and recollected how she had asked him not only the train but the section on which he would travel. Yet he had not expected a telegram from her; not on the train. She had said she only wanted to know where he was.

She had wanted, also, to know where he would go from the train; and he had promised to tell her where he would be every day.

Every day for how long? Throughout his life? Did this mean that now he must tell her every day throughout his whole life? Perspiration dampened his hands in spite of the cold draft blowing in the screen of the opened window. "Lyda; Leeda," he tried her name again. Which way would he like it best—throughout his whole life?



"I guess I've got to ask you to go through with it."

He had not expected this on the train; nevertheless he had expected it, he told himself. What else could she do? He had made his offer, meaning it; he had begged her to take it. Well, she had.

He shut the window and threw up the blind so that he could watch the storm while he dressed. He liked the swirl and violence of the wind; it met his mood this morning. Quarter to eight. So the Century, in spite of the snow, was on time. People talked about it as they passed in the aisle. On time!

Jay cared nothing at all about arriving on time except, since his father was expecting him, he might borrow a bit of the virtue of promptness from the train which, in spite of the storm, was on time.

How little avail would be his bit of promptness this morning when he was to tell to his father what was to be believed of him hereafter. That was the meaning of going "through with it": to take Nucast's offense upon himself and tell no one, not even his father, the truth—nor Ben.

Jay went to the next car and, not finding Ben, passed to the diner where Ben was at a table with a Yale man and a couple of girls from Vassar who had been in New York before starting for home. At other tables were college people homeward bound for the Christmas vacation. In contrast to them, business men breakfasted by twos and fours. Some had their wives along.

Jay looked for a seat at a college table but none was vacant. He dropped into a chair back of Ben, wondering what Ben must be thinking of him—Ben, who knew him

so well and knew a little about Lida and how well he had liked Lida, and who had read Lida's telegram.

Jay forced his attention to the talk at his own table. The man beside him, pouring syrup over corncakes, talked business to a husband and wife, opposite. Mrs. Diblon was the wife and the husband was "Diblon" to the man beside Jay who was, importantly, "Mr. Polk" to them both.

He was no more than thirty, rather younger than Diblon; but Diblon was playing up to him, constantly, and so was Mrs. Diblon, who was hardly older than the college girls. There was not enough difference in the ages of these three, compared to the college people, to account for the difference in the feeling of this table. It was because it was business here.

To say that, thought Jay as he ordered, was merely to make a name. What was it about business which made the air of this table so uneasy and unnatural and patronizing and patronized?

Diblon was a seller of something; and Mr. Polk purchased huge quantities of that same thing. This became plain; this was the trouble with the table. Mr. Polk held the fate—at least, the present prosperity—of the Diblons in his important hands; so they, husband and wife, yessed him, smiled, laughed, listened and agreed and praised to flatter him.

Last week, or even two days ago, Jay Rountree would never have bothered about this; or noticed it. It would have been nothing in his life; he would have ignored it to listen to the talk at the college tables and to cut in

where no one bore with any one else or laughed or agreed with or praised any one, unless he liked to; and where no one, man or girl, was afraid of any one else. But Jay noticed it this morning; for to-day he was taking upon himself a consequence of business—a consequence of Newcastle's having held the business fate of others in his important hands.

"Cornell?" said Diblon to Mr. Polk. "Yes; I went there. My wife went to Wells."

"I'm from Dartmouth," announced Mr. Polk; and Jay almost shivered. These had been college people and not so long ago had sat as these others at the next tables, laughing at what they liked, joshing and calling down each other and being called down, fairly and freely. By God, something got them quick in business; and Jay Rountree was to leave college, where no one controlled his fate, and enter . . . business. That was sure; that was another meaning of going "through with it."

"Lyda; Leeda," he whispered to himself. Which way would he say it throughout his life? He must tell her, throughout his life, where he would be every day? Why no; most days they would be together—throughout his life. No use thinking of that now. A mile nearer each minute, was his father; and he would be wise to prepare exactly what he was to say to him.

Not that there would be difficulty in making his father believe that he had acted badly. It was the sort of thing his father was ready to believe of him. No; convincing his father would not be the difficulty. It lay within himself; it was his own rebellion, his own recoil from that which

he had promised, for Lida's sake, to take upon himself; and which his father would believe.

And Ellen Powell would learn. Suddenly he thought of her hearing it; and the shock to himself, as he imagined her, surprised him. And yet it was the first moment, since he had awakened, that he had thought of her at all.



## II

Ellen Powell, from the moment of her awakening, had thought almost constantly of him. Already she had learned enough, from a message which had reached the office late yesterday afternoon, to know that he was in trouble; of what sort, she had little idea; but the fact of it, together with his departure for home, had filled her heart.

No one can maintain even an overwhelming matter in mind, or in the heart, without any interludes. Passions have their pulses. So Ellen found intervals when, consciously, she considered nothing more personal to her than the storm.

When she looked through her window, it surprised her, as a storm in Chicago is likely to do. As late as eleven on the night before, when she had opened the window before going to bed, she had glanced over a street of fog and had heard from the lake the blasts of fog-horns rumbling deep and steady like an abysmal Chaliapin bass bearing the baritones and tenors of honking motor-cars. She awakened to the resound of ships' whistles but they eddied and diminished and then were drawn louder and shriller again. Wind; a gale, Ellen realized at once; and she felt the cold of it and the sift of the blowing snow.

Some one had covered her in bed with a comforter and tucked her snugly in—Diana. Ellen turned to see Di's auburn head in Di's soft, white pillow. Di liked silk against her skin and she hugged her silken comforter



close to her cheek. Di slept, as always, curled up and clutching something and she slept very soundly. She looked even lovelier asleep than awake, for she never lost her clear rosiness. Her cheeks were like pink petals and her lips, relaxed, so red and soft; and her long, dark lashes lay in even ovals against her cheek.

The handful of silk, which clothed Di at evening, draped the back of a chair; Di's dress, green and very décolleté, a step-in, a pair of sheer stockings; underneath, a pair of satin slippers. These were familiar items to Ellen but not so the new leopard coat, with red fox collar, which depended from a hanger below the light-bracket beyond the bed. Whose coat was it? Ellen wondered. And had it been lent to Di or bestowed? Ellen gazed at Di, so innocently sleeping, and reconstructed a probable scene of the coat's acquirement:

Di, shivering her soft, white shoulders: "Weeping willows, who'd any time think it could turn this cold?" Next the procurement of the coat, made the more a deed of devotion because of the hour of the night. Its bestowal and Di's protest: "Why, you got this for *me*? Why, I couldn't dream of wearing it! Why, it's the most mysterious fur I ever saw. So soft and *warm* and *wonderful*! But you know I can't dream of keeping it on. You know perfectly well I can perfectly well wind a lap robe around me and be perfectly comfortable. . . ."

Well, here was the coat; here was Di. At what hour had she returned? At what hour had it turned cold? Ellen arose and closed the window, purposely testing with her pink toes the tiny drift of snow on the rug below the sill.

A ship's signal blast beat upon the wind, summoning

her mind, momentarily, to the vessels on the lake; whence it flew to a train westbound through the snow—to Jay Rountree.

She looked about and seeing that Di slept, she slipped a hand into a drawer and to the back of it, where Di would never explore for handkerchiefs or compacts and where Ellen hid her treasure. She drew forth a little leather case protecting a picture clipped from a newspaper long ago. He had been arrested in a raid upon a dance club where several college boys and girls had been "picked up" along with couples of another sort. The boys had given false names but Jay had been recognized and, when this picture had been taken, he had known he was in for it and was trying to smile it away. Ellen knew how little wrong he had done and how much blame he got for it; and she loved this picture best of all.

In the opposite side of the case, she had another, also cut from a newspaper. This showed him in an eight-oar shell on the Charles. She loved that, too; for it revealed his strong, slender arms and straight, strong shoulders and his neck slightly astrain from the stroke.

Ellen bathed, while the bedroom was becoming warm, and returned without disturbing Di. Before the pictures on her dresser, she let down her hair, which fell in a bronze-chestnut shower. She had lovely hair, thick and lustrous. When it was down, it made her look younger; she looked like a girl of sixteen with her slim, white legs, her small breasts and smooth arms and large gray eyes. When she wore a dark skirt and a blouse with long sleeves and high in the neck, and when her hair was coiled about

her head, she could look older than she was. She appeared at least twenty-five, she thought. She wanted to look older than twenty-three; not because it was actually her own age but because it was his. Only by seeming to be much older, and therefore not to be suspected of loving him, was her situation bearable.

She was secretary to his father, who was one of those men who dictate correspondence upon even the most highly personal and intimate matter. Ellen had been precipitated into his private affairs by the sudden illness of Miss Danforth, a much older woman. When Ellen was called into the president's office and seated herself, in Miss Danforth's place, she had known of Jay Rountree only that he existed, was at Harvard, and that he and his father were very different.

Immediately she was writing taunts and sarcasm at the boy which set her heart to thumping and her fingers to quivering, in his defense, as she hurried her scribbles to keep pace with the biting words. Could a man mean to say such things to his son?

Mr. Rountree entirely ignored her. She was not to him a girl of twenty-one to feel for this boy of her own age, whatever he was and whatever he had done. She was not to Mr. Rountree a new individual at all. He called her "Miss Danforth" when he gave her a direction.

She typed the letter with her mind on the boy who would read it, if it was to be sent. She could not yet believe that. But when she brought it to Mr. Rountree, he merely underscored the most sarcastic sentences and signed it. So she folded, sealed it and put it in the mail.



That night, she lay awake for a long time wondering about it; about Jay Rountree.

Miss Danforth never returned to the office. Ellen continued to take Mr. Rountree's letters. She found thirty-five, instead of twenty-five, dollars in her Saturday envelope; but Mr. Rountree never made any comment upon the nature of her services. He continued to confide to her, with complete detachment, his personal matters.

He was a tall, angularly handsome man of fifty with a strong, spare body and black hair without a trace of gray; but his face was deeply lined with unhappiness. He was a widower, having lost his wife the year after Jay was born. A tradition of her loveliness and likeableness lingered in the office, kept alive by Clancy, the white-haired usher.

"Faith, she was the beauty! Little—like that! And with the look in the eyes and the laugh on the lips. Like the boy has! And she had the high heart of him! And *him*" (this *him* was Mr. Rountree) "he loved her like he hates him" (this *him* was Jay).

"Why does he?" demanded Ellen.

"Sure, he niver got over the death of her. He holds it agin the boy."

"How can he?" asked Ellen. "The boy was a baby."

"But by her bearing him, he lost her."

This explanation never satisfied Ellen; it was too purely sentimental and substanceless. Something far more adequate was required to account for what she witnessed in the deep lines of John Rountree's unhappiness and his stubborn antagonism to his son.

She was employed in January and it was not until after the boat races in June that she saw Jay. When first she

heard his pleasant lively voice in the outer office, before he pushed open his father's door, she knew it was his.

He was tall and brown, tanned from long afternoons on the Charles River. She knew so much about him that at the moment she saw him she recognized how he had become so brown that his skin was darker than his hair. How white were his teeth as his lips parted in his pleasant half-apologetic let-by-gones-be-by-gones smile at his father. How blue and clear and lively were his eyes.

"Come in, Justin," said his father, with the same tone of challenge with which he dictated. Justin was Jay's given name, which only his father used. "You received my letter of the seventh?"

"I think so," replied Jay.

"You think so!"

"You don't expect me to remember letters by dates, do you, father? You don't suppose the date is the most impressive part of a letter from you? Now if you'd just mention a part of your opinion of me at the time . . ." He gazed at Ellen and asked, "You're E P, aren't you?"

"What?" his father inquired.

Of course Ellen understood: he meant, was she the EP of the symbol JR/EP on the letters she typed?

"This is Miss Powell, Justin," said Mr. Rountree.

"Do you remember," Jay asked her, "was his favor to me of the seventh a sort of superspecial rip-snorter?"

"Rip-snorter!" ejaculated his father.

"If it was," said Jay, "I got it and sort of started to read it—but didn't finish it, father. You know," he continued agreeably and equally to Ellen and his father, "a letter like that is great to get before a sprint race. You

can pull mighty well for a mile, mad; but you can't stay mad—or I can't—for twenty minutes. You get sort of let down in your feelings after the first spurt and you're no good. You see, I was rowing four miles that afternoon."

Ellen left the office, looking back as she closed the door upon the boy she loved; for she knew that, from that moment, she loved Jay Rountree.

It was time, she realized, for Di to be up; so she drew away Di's silken comforter and shook, gently, Di's soft, smooth shoulder. Di was healthily warm and slightly moist.

"Hmhm," sighed Di, contentedly.

"Nearly eight, Di."

"What's eight in my life?" inquired Di, grandly, and Ellen hesitated about completing the wakening of her. A few weeks past, when Di was still employed in the Rountree offices, Ellen would have had no doubt, but Di's duties, since she had been on the payroll of the Slengels, had developed variety as to hours, to say the very least.

"There's a blizzard this morning," announced Ellen. "If you're going to the office, you've got to start early."

"B-r-r-r," shivered Di, and sat up, blinking for her bearings. "Don't I know Mr. Blizzard? He sure whizzled me last night. B-r-r-r. I'd simply congealed on the street if Jello hadn't loaned me Leo. Isn't he sweet?"

Leo, obviously, was the leopard coat; Jello, by the magic of Di's nomenclature, emerged from the ranks of unknown persons likely to donate a Leo, as a male person



of poundage to quiver, like a gelatin dessert, when agitated.

“Jello who?” inquired Ellen.

“Metten.”

“Sam Metten?” asked Ellen and laughed, the two syllables set him off so perfectly. Sam Metten was the junior partner of Metten Brothers, who were customers of the Rountrees.

“Uhuh,” said Di easily. “You ought’ve been there, representing Rountree.”

“Where?”

“On Jello’s lap; there was lots of room. He liked me.”

“Who?”

“Jello; hasn’t he shown it? Art Slengel threw the party. It was perfectly proper, Ellen. I was hardly alone with Jello even when I was on his lap. Mrs. Jello’s south; so he had us up to his apartment toward the finish. That’s where he located Leo for me. I certainly went big with Jello last night,” observed Di with unaffected pride, and she curled more contentedly in bed.

“Not getting up?” persisted Ellen.

“Me?” asked Di, satisfied. “Why should I? Look in Leo’s pocket—left.”

Ellen explored and abstracted a thin, beautifully made cigarette case of gold banded with platinum in which tiny diamonds and sapphires were set.

“How do you like it?” demanded Di.

“Like?” asked Ellen.

“I mean, would you keep it? Of course, the ’nitials ain’t—aren’t—mine; but Jello gave it to me before he was

sozzled much. He distinctly told me it was my personal present. He said that about Leo, too; but not so distinctly. I know, Ellen, I ought to give back Leo. I'll give back that too," Di made disposition of her difficulty, "but if he gives it to me again, I'll keep it—if Art says it's all right."

"Art?" repeated Ellen.

"Art Slengel."

"Oh."

Di procured her prospective property, opened it, obtained a cigarette, touched a hidden spring in the back which shot up a short blue flame from which she took a light. "Cute, I'd say," she commented and lay upon her pillow, reflectively smoking.

"Of course Art has really got to say," she considered, "what's best for business."

"For business!" objected Ellen.

"I'll say it's for business," observed Di, coolly. "Art slung that party, and had me at it, to get the Metten business for Slengels. Why d'you suppose I parked on Jello's knee? Art says we sure made a start with Sam Metten last night. How much business does he swing, Ellen? You know. Rountree has been getting most of it in our line. What do Mettens order from you a year? Four hundred thousand about?"

Ellen's mind flew to the files with which she dealt day by day and in which the order sheets of the Mettens composed the second most important account. It totaled, she knew, nearly half a million yearly. She nodded, unthinking, to Di's question.

"Slengels will clear ten per cent gross, anyway, if they



get it," reckoned Di. "That's tearing off forty thousand in one night's entertainment, ain't it? Not one night, of course," she considered fairly. "There was preparation for last eve; and we aren't through. But if we rip away that Metten business from Rountree and if Jello keeps my case, when I give it back, Art Slengel sure can buy me another—if I don't want an automobile instead."

"What?" gasped Ellen.

Di inhaled and let the smoke out gently through her pretty, provocative nose. "Selling," she formulated sagely, "is sure woman's work, these days. Nights, I mean. Selling the big stuff, I mean; not the little stuff; and selling the big men. The bigger they are the more they do like a little personal attention.

"To think of the weeks and months I tossed away kidding the keys of a typewriter from 8.30 A. M. to 5.30 P. M.! What difference did I make at a typewriter? All the letters looked alike, except mine; they were worse. But I certainly made a lot of difference last night in Jello's lap."

### III

Ellen could not consider the bearing of this upon the business; she could not dwell upon the effect of it upon Di. Jay Rountree was coming home; and to think of Sam Metten's fat, flabby arms about Di was to be cast, by contrast, into Jay's arms. She was cast, by her mind, into his arms, where she had never been. Startlingly this morning she longed for physical touch with him; startlingly, she felt the restraints within her broken down. She would catch them up again; she must, of course. He was coming to the office within two hours; he was in trouble again. What sort of trouble? Because of a girl?

Was he coming home from a girl whom he had held in his arms? He held other girls in his arms; many another girl, of his own sort—of course, he did.

Arms of many men enfolded Di; many kissed her. Di liked it. How could she?

Jay kissed other girls, undoubtedly. Ellen did not wonder how he could. It was different with him. The idea of it only heated her longing. She rubbed, hard, at her lips. She sat before her mirror to powder before going out and, staring at herself, she tried to imagine how she seemed to him.

She gazed at him in the pictures and realized, with a sudden throb of joy of which she could not be cheated, that she would see him and speak with him this morning, whatever happened; and hereafter each day, until the end

of the Christmas vacation, she would be in the office with him often; any opening of the door might bring him; any time she answered the telephone, she might hear his voice.

She thrust her pictures far back in the drawer, then deserted Di for the cafeteria across the street. In spite of the outside cold, which aided other appetites, Ellen wanted only coffee and a roll; and she was shaking, as she served herself, in the ecstasy of her increasing excitement. She drove her mind back to Di. Should she have said more to Di? It was no use talking to Di; something had to be done about her; and the thing could be no easy, futile shift of responsibility such as a letter to Di's father to summon her home.

Di would laugh at the idea of returning home. What would she do at home, especially in the winter? Ellen well knew Di's home, which was neighbor to her own, a quarter mile away across the white hills and deeply drifted dales of Emmet County, Michigan, at the very tip north end of the opposite shore of the roaring, snowswept lake.

Ellen's father lived there because he had been born on the land and because the house, which once had been a farmhouse, was a fine place for the family of a man who had taken to the lakes and who, on a skipper's pay, had a wife and six children.

Adrian Powell was master, now, of the ore-carrier *Blenmora*, which, from the first day in spring when the ice-breakers cleared a channel through Whitefish Bay until the zero cold of December again "closed" the Soo, must bear iron, iron, iron from Duluth to Chicago. Back and forth, ceaselessly, with the shortest possible delays for loading and discharging ore, the *Blenmora* must make



the most of its nine months season. Gargantuan loaders chuted in ten thousand tons to the holds; enormous mechanical maws—"clamshells"—withdrew the ore, a thousand tons to the hour, so that incredibly the *Blenmora* docked, full laden, and cleared in ballast between dawn and twilight of the same day.

It mattered little where the skipper's wife awaited him throughout these months while the ship steamed south, deep-laden; red iron heaped to the tops of the holds. North, light; south, laden again. So, from the spring break-up of the ice to the winter freeze-up, Selina Powell watched the lake from the old, fresh-painted farmhouse which Adrian could just see in his spyglass as a white spot against a green hill as the *Blenmora* bore west one-quarter north out of the Straits of Mackinac before the swing south around Waugoshance shoals.

When he passed at night, always—for his wife followed the shipping—a point of light gleamed for him, a love star on the black shore. It was his beacon, telling him all was well.

To compensate for his long absence, as absolute (save for the spyglass and the light) as though he voyaged to the antipodes, he was home while the winter held the lakes in leash. Winter, in Ellen's girlhood, meant her father. It meant little, loving mother happier and no longer waiting and watching the water; it meant love and man's tenderness and man's heartiness in the house—big, steaming breakfasts of meat and battercakes; pipe smoke; men in and out; the girls doubling (Ellen had three sisters) to supply a guest room for Curley, father's second officer, or for the *Blenmora's* chief engineer; guns and snowshoes;

men's heavy things drying before the stove; men's stories and talk and laughter. From this home, Ellen had come to Chicago.

Lem Dewitt, Di's father, was an automobile mechanic with a job, usually, in the garage at Hoster. He had been, once, the town beau and had married the town belle. Pansy was a faded, querulous beauty in this day, recognized by old suitors, who returned to town, by her auburn hair. Lem was lazy and let the place run down. It was a one-story, clapboard cottage, originally white, weathered to dirty gray and streaked by rusty water dripping through the rotted gutters. The roof wanted mending; the rooms wanted paper and paint; the flues wanted cleaning. Pansy complained about it all and herself lay late abed, "did" her dishes and housework in boudoir cap and a cheap, gaudy kimono. She had time to manicure her pink hands and massage her sagging cheeks but not to scrub the floor.

From this home, Diana, the eldest child, had fled to Detroit, whence she had come to Chicago to settle her dainty, dependent, man-desired self upon Ellen. In the two years since she had forsaken Hoster, Di never had returned; and she corresponded, when at all, upon picture postcards.

Her mother's letters were chiefly complaints, in response to which Di impulsively deprived herself of a flimsy blouse, worn a bit but not yet ready to be discarded, and mailed it home; or she would slip into parcel post a pair of new gloves or silk stockings from the constantly accruing meed of her admirers.

It was ridiculous to suppose that Di would go home or

pay the slightest attention to parental exhortation, especially since she had discovered her powers to delight men at a business "party."

The Rountree company did not approve "parties." Mr. Rountree allowed no item on the company payroll, or in the expense accounts of his salesmen, for the services of party girls. He directed that business be got by business methods.

The Slengels operated by far more personal contacts and after far less stern ideas; and whatever one said of the methods, no one could deny that they were getting results. In New York, they had just taken away an account from Rountree and were in full cry after the Newcastle business; and here they were after the Metten business—with Di in Sam Metten's lap.

What could Ellen do about Di? Mr. Rountree could not help her; he would tell her to make Di come back to his office. Ellen knew that Di would no more return to the typewriter than she would go home to Hoster. Jay Rountree would understand that. Why was a man like Mr. Rountree, who saw into no one, never in trouble, while Jay, who appreciated others so perfectly, forever was in difficulties himself?

What difficulty to-day? A girl? Did he love her? Ellen very well knew that he had never loved herself. No matter, if he loved, *loved* no one else. He did not have to love her to make her happy when he was at home—not happy enough, not nearly, nearly all the happiness that might be, but more than she could have with any one else. When she was with him, he pulled taut something in her heart which no one else touched at all. It hurt but she wanted



it to hurt. The sight of him and his eyes on hers and his smile at her did it; when he spoke to her, in his nice, friendly way, he drew at something in her throat so that she could not speak. It hurt but she wanted it repeated; and harder. She wanted nothing so much as more of that hurt from him; and harder, harder. That was to love; to hurt and to want to hurt harder, harder. . . .

She reached the office and laid off her coat in the little closet between Mr. Rountree's room and her own beside it. The mail-clerk delivered to her the morning's tray of telegrams and letters for Mr. Rountree and left her alone with them at the big desk. Here was one from New York; on business.

"The Nucast business is safe," it said. That was good news; that would please Mr. Rountree. The Nucast account was a big one; bad to lose to the Slengels. More business messages: from Cleveland; from Baltimore; from New York. Another from New York, not business: personal, this; Amelia Cather Lytle signed it.

This was about Jay; for Amelia Cather Lytle was Mrs. Lytle, the mother of Lida. Not of Lida Lytle; the mother had married again, as wealthy people in New York so frequently did. Lida's name was Lida Haige; that girl in her teens at Miss Willett's school; that girl . . .

Then Ellen, with her hands pressed against her breast to stop the thumping of her heart, read the message.

Jay disembarked at the LaSalle Street station amid a medley of college boisterousness and business greetings. Mostly it was a college crowd clustered about the gates;

posters in fisher and fox with small blue toques, like the girls on the train, brothers in raccoon gray, mothers in mink and fathers in ulsters waved welcome to the college people home for the holidays. The blizzard, with its blowing cold, increased the heartiness of handclasps and kisses. They shouted and whispered, laughed and linked arms. Christmas week and home again! Cold, and snow and ice sheathing the steps and flanks of the first cars of the Century which stood, in its four arrived sections on four side-by-side tracks, with two holiday sections yet to pound in; two more train-loads of college people and business men to be welcomed home. Christmas vacations and business.

The business groups broke up at the gates with elaborate handshakings and over-insisted repetitions of regard; and they separated, never looking back at one another.

Ben's mother and sister met him and Jay. They wanted to run Jay home in their car, but Jay told them he was bound for the office.

"I'll toss your bag in at your house," Ben offered; and Jay gave it to Ben before he remembered that, likely, he would not sleep at home that night; perhaps never again.

Ben had not intruded further into the affair of the telegram; and he referred to it for the first time since he had delivered it. "Want me to do anything for you?" he asked.

Jay said, "No; thanks." Mrs. Crosby invited, "Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Can't tell I'll be in town," said Jay.



"You needn't tell us," said Ben's mother, touching him. "Just come if you can; or whenever you can."

Jay went to the telegraph desk, where he wrote out the words that had been forming in his head for the last hour: "Don't be sorry," he read to himself in whispers after he had written it. "Be glad. I am." He signed it and dispatched it to Lida.

That bound the matter; that bound him. So, definitely committed, he went out to the blowing snow of the street and strode eastward, facing the blizzard. Glad? He was not glad. That was untrue; that was a lie, but of the sort that had to be told. The only way to do this was gladly; or as if you were glad; as if you wanted to. "Marry her; I marry her. Marry . . . Lyda; Leeda; my wife . . ." The idea ran into images of her in his arms; Lida embracing him; her kisses; his lips on hers.

Pleasant in a car to kiss her and embrace her; or under the trees after a dance. She was a warm little sprite. He liked her, that way. He had liked her very much as a companion in the light-hearted, reckless expeditions in Westchester county and Connecticut. She had delighted in them; and they had done no harm, no real harm—until Nucast.

When Jay had let her know that he would be in New York for a weekend, Lida would "sign out" at school but she would not go home. She and another girl would meet Jay and another man—never Ben—and the four of them would drive out in the country, sometimes to friends' houses; roadhouses, sometimes. Always, at night, he would leave Lida at some safe and chaperoned place such as his sister's home in Westchester county.

Margaret, his sister, was Mrs. Ralph Armiston and Ralph was sales agent for the Rountree Company in the East. It was at Ralph's and Margaret's that he and Lida had happened upon Nucast. For they had found Nucast as a house guest. Margaret and Ralph both were making a great fuss over him. They said nothing when Nucast, liking Lida, invited her to drive over to another party with him.

Jay had never seen Nucast before. "He's all right?" Jay asked Ralph.

"Of course he's all right," said Ralph.

He was not all right and Ralph had known it, but in the cause of his own advantage Ralph had risked Lida rather than anger Nucast. For Nucast's business was essential to Ralph; Nucast held, largely, the Armistons' prosperity in his hands. So they had let Lida go with Nucast.

Not until yesterday had Jay learned all that had happened later that night. Lida had supposed that Nucast was like other friends of Jay and the Armistons (not entertained for business advantage). Lida had proceeded in the confidence that her escort would, like Jay and his friends, look out for her, that he would stop her before she drank too much and that he would never take advantage. But Nucast had taken advantage.

Now there was nothing which Nucast could do for her; he was married. Moreover, Lida wanted never to see him again. She had come to Jay because she could trust him—and because he, having brought her into association with Nucast, was therefore responsible.

Fury flamed in Jay, not at Lida but at Nucast and

Ralph and Margaret. But of what use to Lida were words with them? Ralph and Margaret were as helpless as Nucast to aid Lida. Of them all, Jay alone could be of any service; so he had offered himself to her yesterday; and to-day, she had accepted him.

The cold cut him. The wind was from the east and his father's office was on Michigan Avenue, confronting the lake. He reached the building. Warm in the elevator; men crowding him and each other; business men spending their days at selling something to some one else, or buying; holding the fates of others in their important hands—like Nucast.

He wanted to think what to say to his father; he tried to; but his mind would make no proper preparation for the story he was required to tell. His mind went back and back again to the truth which he must not impart to any one, least of all to his father. For his father, told the truth, would intervene; he would simply smash up everything which Jay had promised and prepared to protect Lida. No one else must know; he must go through with it.

Fourteenth floor. Out here. John Rountree and Company. That door, beyond which was his father!

Jay opened it and faced his father at his desk, with Ellen Powell near him. She was standing, very white. What big gray eyes she had! What big, steady eyes!

“Shut that door,” his father commanded. “Shut that door.”



## IV

Jay closed the door and confronted his father. "You've heard," he said. It was plain; plain, too, that his father believed what had been reported to him. For a few seconds, Jay felt sick. He would not have minded, so much, his father believing him when he accused himself; but already his father had condemned him on the word of another.

Jay turned against the lie in himself; he wanted to cry out against it to his father; he wanted to clear himself of it as of nothing else in all his life. But what had he wired to Lida just now? "Be glad. I am." It meant he was going through with it; going through! So he stared at his father and took it.

"I have heard," said his father, "quite fully."

"Yes," said Jay, "I suppose so"; and his mind set to working. What had his father heard? He knew, in general, with what he had been charged; but with what special circumstances had it been related?

He realized that Lida and he yesterday should have agreed upon details implicating him, instead of Nucast. They had not, because she had denied, yesterday, that she would permit him to take this upon himself.

So Jay asked, because he had to ask: "What have you heard, father?" And he saw this strike his father as an effort of concealment. His father refused to reply and turned to Ellen Powell. "Where are those telegrams about him?"

"You have them," Ellen whispered, and cleared her voice and repeated more loudly, "You have them."

"Where?"

They were before him. She moved to the desk and touched them. He drew them from under her throbbing finger-tips. He turned them upside down, insultingly, as his son's eyes rested on them.

"You want to know how much I know, do you?"

"No, father."

"That's what you asked."

"It's not what I meant."

"What did you mean?"

Jay couldn't tell him.

Ellen Powell was standing near his father. Why did she? Why didn't she leave the room? Jay glanced at her and saw her whiter, even, than before; and her eyes so big and gray. She had read the telegrams, of course; they had come first to her. She had learned all about him.

He had begun to feel as though those telegrams told what he had done. He looked away from her, biting his lips. He was sick, sick again. He might almost as well be guilty. He had not realized it would be like this. Why didn't she leave the room?

"Do you deny," demanded his father, "any of this?"

"No," said Jay. It was his chance to see the telegrams but, unthinking, he had passed it.

"How old is the girl?"

"Lida?"

"Have you others?"

"Others!" cried Jay; he could cast off that. "No; no, father."

“What use is your word? Didn’t you deny this a month ago?”

What did his father mean, Jay wondered.

In a moment, he returned to the question. “How old is she?”

“Old? She’s just nineteen.”

Why didn’t Ellen Powell go?

His father turned to her. “He wrote me a letter on his twenty-third birthday, last month,” he said to her. “Find me that letter.”

Ellen went to the personal files against the wall and bent over; she dropped to her knees and knelt, as she searched, she was shaking so.

Looking about, she saw Mr. Rountree watching her as he waited for the letter.

Jay, watching her, remembered that on his birthday he had made one of his periodical attempts to clear up quarrels with his father; he had made a special effort of reconciliation, writing to his father honestly of what he had and had not done. In reply, his father had been conciliatory, expressing a certain amount of faith in him and a willingness to take him on trust for the future. But now his father believed, and must believe, that he had written that letter after—Lida.

He burned with flaming shame at this realization; and his father swung about and caught him.

“You now recollect your letter?”

Jay nodded.

Ellen drew it from the files and brought it slowly to the desk.



"You wrote me this after you—you must have written this after——"

Jay had to say it. "Yes, father."

So he was stripped of any defense of himself.

"Very well, Miss Powell," his father said to her, dismissing her to her little office beyond the coat closet.

Ellen closed the first door and the second. Shut away from their voices—Mr. Rountree's only it was, soon—she sat at her little desk, stifled. He had done what the telegram implied! He had said so. Yet he was the same.

When she had faced him, and heard him say so, he had been the same as before to her. He was in trouble, in far, far, deeper trouble than ever but he had not changed, to her. She had not shrunk from him or wanted to shrink from him. She had not reproached him or wanted to. She had wanted to help him, to defend him as never before. He was hers, hers to help and defend, whatever he had done. She did not, she could not care; she loved him never, never so much as at this moment.

Suppose he had done wrong, terribly wrong, unforgivably wrong with Lida Haige! She forgave him! Whatever it was she ought to feel against him, she felt for him. She yearned to be with him. He did not love Lida Haige. This was not as he would have come if he *loved* her. He had done wrong with Lida Haige; that was all.

All? It was a great deal; oh, it was a very great deal! But it was not all. To love was all.

That letter which he had written upon his birthday and

which she had just found in the files; his fine, fair, frank letter. She knew the substance of it for his father had dictated to her the reply and quoted many of Jay's words. How fine and fair and frank the boy had been! But if he had written it, with Lida Haige on his soul, how false and low and utterly base!

Ellen sat up straighter, with her heart pounding harder and more slowly, with stifling hardness and slowness, as she recollected phrases of Jay's letter. If he had written it, with Lida Haige on his soul, she could not forgive him. But never, never could he have written it then. She could imagine him doing wrong with Lida Haige but she could not imagine him, having done it, composing that letter.

Her heart pounded and pounded but it was ceasing to stifle her. Slowly, pulling herself up on her hands upon the desk, she arose. She had to return to the other room. She went to the first door, opened it, heard their voices—Mr. Rountree's voice. She opened the second door.

"Do not come in!" Mr. Rountree faced her. Jay faced her, very white. He, too, wanted her out.

She clung to the door and gazed at him, holding his eyes on hers. He looked away but his eyes returned to her and with the flood of her faith in him, color crept into his cheek; and her faith filled her, filled her again.

"Do not come in!" Mr. Rountree forbade her.

She almost cried out in reply. Cried out what? That Jay had not done that which he had admitted—but there he stood before his father, having confessed it.

"You don't want me?" was all she could say.

"No."

She retreated; and through the door beat and beat the

voice of his father, who believed the boy had done that thing and, so believing, was making disposition in these minutes of Jay's years ahead; of all his years ahead.

"Marry . . . marry," Ellen heard. It was plain that Mr. Rountree commanded him to marry Lida Haige. It was plain that this was what Jay proposed to do; so it was the very thing which his father, instead of enforcing, should prevent! For there was an element in this affair of which he was completely ignorant, and which Jay would not tell.

At last the buzzer under her desk sounded and Ellen reëntered the big room.

"Put in a telephone call for Mrs. Imbrie Lytle on Park Avenue, New York City," Mr. Rountree directed. Then he shot at Jay, "Possibly you can supply the telephone number."

"I can," said Jay, and gave it.

"I will return before you complete the call," Mr. Rountree said, and was upon his feet, tall and towering over her. His black hair was damp with sweat, as though he had been through violent physical struggle. Tiny beads of sweat stood on his forehead and wet his deep wrinkles.

He passed Jay without glancing at him and went into the general offices.

Jay had remained near the door but he came toward the desk after his father had gone.

"That's over," he said to Ellen; and she replied, "I've got to put in that call."

She tried to tell him, by the way she said it, that she was acting against him only under orders; *she* was not against him.



"Go ahead," he said. So she sat in his father's chair and started the call, while he watched her. He was paler and his eyes were wider and he was astrain. He was astrain somewhat as he was in that picture which she kept in her room, showing him at his oar at the end of a race.

Jay turned from her and went to a window where the storm offered violence enough to draw away his thoughts to the lake. Her father was on the lake, probably, guiding his great ship through the gale.

"Where's your father?" he inquired, turning to her. "Still with his ship?"

Ellen swung about in Mr. Rountree's swivel chair. "Yes; he ought to be beyond the Straits. Navigation's lasting late this year."

"This'll soon close it," said Jay. "Then he'll be home; you'll all be home for Christmas, won't you?" he asked, attempting to speak in his old, eager way.

"I suppose so," said Ellen dully. Christmas! What would Christmas be to her this year, though she was at home, with Jay Rountree married to Lida Haige?

"Your mother well?" asked Jay.

"Yes."

"And the rest of your family?"

Ellen nodded; and to save herself she could not keep tears from her eyes.

"Some one's not," said Jay, with his swift concern and came closer to her. "Who is it? What's the matter?"

"Nobody!" She tossed the tears away. "They're all right. It's nobody at home. It's here."

"Oh," said Jay, "I've bothered you."

"Yes; it's you."

"Don't bother!" said Jay. "Don't! You—you've always been mighty decent to me."

"I mean to be! I mean always to be!"

How little she was in his father's big chair with her toes not quite touching the floor! She had pretty, slender feet. Her big, steady eyes were on his; very unlike Lida's eyes. Lida's were small and brilliant and restless, and Lida's lips were restless, even in a kiss. This girl's would be gentle and steady. What a fancy to fly through his head!

He returned to the refuge of impersonal talk: "How's Miss Dewitt?"

"All right," replied Ellen, not thinking at all. "I mean she's left us."

"Oh, has she? Trouble here?"

"No trouble. She's gone to the Slengels. They offered her a party job; or that's what it's turned into."

"Oh."

"The Slengels are going after our big accounts, you know," Ellen reported. "They're out for the Metten business here; and they've been after the Nucast business in New York. But that's safe, we heard this morning."

"What?" asked Jay. "What?"

"Your brother-in-law wired last night." She picked up a telegram from the desk and handed it to him.

"The Nucast business is safe," Jay read and rocked on his heels. So yesterday Nucast had given Ralph his order; yesterday Nucast had paid Jay Rountree.

For this must be payment—or what Nucast would consider payment—to him for his offer to Lida.

It dizzied him. Almost he lost control of himself before he dropped the telegram and went out.

Ellen picked it up. She thought in some way she must have handed him, instead of the business message, a telegram about himself; but she read again: "The Nucaſt business is ſafe." Only the business message; yet it had affected him more than all elſe this morning. Why? Why?

Holding it, ſhe put away Mrs. Lytle's telegram. What it told was not ſo! The five words of this business message referred, ſhe knew, to what had happened to Jay Rountree.



## V

In the waiting room outside his father's office, Jay was hailed by an agreeable, vigorous voice and a bald, neatly barbered man of forty-five extended a broad, firm hand cordially, at the same time repeating Jay's name. Jay had no idea of his, but supposed that he had met the man with his father. Evidently this was a buyer, and an important buyer or he would not be in this inner room nor would Lowry, the salesmanager, be so full of fidgets because Jay had forgotten him.

"Mr. Metten and I were speaking of the round you shot at Skokie last summer with Melhorn—or was it Hagen?" Lowry said quickly, to supply Jay with the name.

He was Metten, of course; one of the Mettens, for there were two; a younger, fat brother and this one, Phil Metten. Jay shook hands and said it was Melhorn who had showed him up.

"Not at all," protested Metten. "You shot one beautiful game. Par, my God! A sandtrap is nothing to you. A birdie; an eagle; a birdie, you drop in a row like that! If just once I drop a birdie . . ."

Metten embarked upon a vivid description of his own game, gratified that Jay stood listening or seeming to listen. Actually, Jay's mind had gone again to New York and to Nucast who was paying him for marrying Lida.

He could put no other interpretation upon the message wired by Ralph last night. It could be no mere coinci-

dence that on the same day that Jay Rountree had assumed responsibility for Lida, Nucast had called Ralph and promised to Rountree his profitable business for another year; the business which had been in doubt until yesterday. No; this was reward to Jay; and reward extended in such form that it could never involve Nucast, personally, and also could not be refused. How could Jay step back to his father's desk and demand the rejection of the Nucast business without exposing everything he was pledged to keep from public view?

"Where do you play, South?"

"What?" inquired Jay, aware that a question was asked him.

Metten repeated it, drawing him toward the chairs, where they all sat down. Metten, it seemed, was going to the South to play after Christmas and he wanted to know about southern clubs.

"Some place with good golf and nice people," particularized Metten; "not the crowd."

Jay mentioned a few resorts, while trying to recall what Ellen Powell had just said about Metten. Oh, yes; the Metten business was up in the air, as the Nucast account had been. Slengels were after the Mettens. So that was why Lowry had Phil Metten here this morning and was so nervous about the impression made by Jay.

He realized that he had been keeping Metten waiting for an appointment with his father; but Metten did not seem to mind or to be in any hurry now. He made a joke and Jay smiled; at what, he wondered afterwards. The funny thing was in his own mind; and it was that Nucast

was paying him, and he was put in the position of receiving payment, but no penny of it went to his empty pockets. You might as well smile at being broke, absolutely, and marrying under the conditions.

Of course, he could not marry without obtaining funds somehow. So, while he discussed southern golf courses, he inventoried his assets with regard to new necessities. What, in cash, did marriage cost?

Metten mentioned a wish for a place pleasant for his wife; and Jay wondered how much Metten estimated as the cost of taking his wife to the South after Christmas. How much must he have to take Lida Haige away with him? Not Lida Haige, then; Lida Rountree. She would require much more than Mrs. Metten.

From fifty dollars, which Jay had borrowed from Ben in New York, he had sixteen left. Not even the fare back east. In his checking account at Cambridge, he had, at best, ten or twelve dollars; at worst, and more probably, an overdraft. Every month a forgotten check or two surprised him. Bills at Cambridge and in Boston would total a couple of thousand more, maybe. They had not bothered him before; he had planned to pay most of them when he would leave next June. But he was leaving now. In fact, he realized with something of a start, he already had left. He would never go back to his rooms on Mount Auburn Street.

“Tryston?” said Metten. “Do you know Tryston?”

“No,” said Jay. What was Metten talking about?

“Certainly you know Tryston,” Lowry rebuked him. “You won a cup there.”



"Oh; the Tryston club!" Jay was listening to his father who, by another door, had returned to the office. Had Ellen Powell completed the call to Mrs. Lytle?

"Tryston is a good, sporty course," he said to Phil Metten. "The best mountain course I know in the South."

"You think, Mrs. Metten and me, we will like it? Nice people go there? You know them?"

"Yes," said Jay. There was his father's voice, phoning to New York while he talked southern golf courses. No matter. His father could not bind him more firmly than already he had bound himself to Lida. "You'll like it. I know the people."

Ellen Powell appeared in the doorway and Jay jumped up. Her eyes lingered on him but she had not come for him; she did not speak to him; she invited Phil Metten, "Will you come in, please?" And she apologized, "Mr. Rountree is very sorry to have kept you waiting."

No harm done from that, Jay thought; for Metten stayed where he was, asking more details about Tryston. Lowry was over his fidgets and was keeping Metten there with Jay, instead of trying to move him on into the office.

"Can you lunch with me?" Metten asked Jay.

"What?"

"I'd like to take you to lunch."

"Oh, thanks," said Jay, "I can't to-day."

"How is to-morrow for you?"

"All right," accepted Jay, absentmindedly, as Lowry jostled him. "That is, if I'm in town."

"We make it to-morrow. Very glad to know you better," said Metten, again grasping Jay's hand before he went with Lowry and Ellen Powell.



She looked back, as she closed the door, and smiled soberly at him. For the moment, he wondered about her; then, left alone, he dropped upon his chair. No; he would never return to Mount Auburn Street; Ben would go back to the rooms, after Christmas vacation, and pack up his things and send them to him. Where? Where would he be having his room with Lida? How would he pay for it?

Not with Lida's money; so much was certain. But what would Lida do with her money? She had a great deal, which she surely would spend. How could he stop her? He had not reckoned with the difficulty of Lida with a lot of money; he with nothing and less than nothing—debts.

He went out and, upon Michigan avenue in the blowing snow, he wandered as far as the University Club. There he turned in upon Christmas meetings of college groups, undergrads and grads, sons and fathers, Harvard, Yale and Princeton people and boys whom he had known in prep school. They called to him noisily and claimed him.

Late in the afternoon, he took a taxi home. It was a gay, cheery house, in its exterior aspect—his home. It was of tan brick, with its wooden trim painted a light blue which, with the help of little heaps of snow on the sills, held the last brightness of the failing day. The windows were wide and here and there they flickered with firelight. Beedy had built for him, Jay realized, a wood fire on the big hearth in the hall:

The gayness and color represented, to Jay, his mother, for she had "built" the house here on Astor Street amid the duller dwellings of wives of men who were presidents of banks, of railroads, of companies manufacturing things.

His father had restored, with each repainting, the bright, agreeable hues and tints which denied the nearness of the huge, surrounding city, denied even the close-neighboring mansions on both sides. Eastward, to be sure, the fringe of the city was scant; behind the house was only another house faced to the Drive which was saved from the waves by a narrow strip of snowy parkway and a buttress of stone and concrete upon which the breakers beat and beat.

Jay let himself in with his latchkey and halted before the flaming hearth in the hall. Silence in the house, except for the snapping of the maple wood; silence and oppressiveness.

His father had not maintained, when redecorating the interior, the original papers and hangings. Perhaps he could not; perhaps he had not tried. Slowly sombreness had overtaken the hall, the drawing-room, the dining-room and spread through the house.

Defying it, Jay had a habit of whistling when coming in; but he did not whistle now. He went up to his own room, which he could remember when it had been the nursery with a glorious band about it picturing Jack and Jill, Humpty Dumpty and the Cow jumping over the Moon. That had been a bit of his mother who, he had been told, had had the room so painted when Margaret was the baby.

Since Jay was the younger child, the nursery had remained his room and his sister had been moved to the chamber which still was Margaret's, though she had been married for two years and lived in New York. Her door was closed; it was always closed. The doors of the rooms

in front were closed; his father's door and the one which had been his mother's. In front, on the third floor, were the chambers of Lloyd Dill and his wife, who had come to keep house after Margaret had married. Lloyd was a second cousin and worked in the Rountree offices.

Ann Dill was not about. No one was about, though some one, Beedy undoubtedly, had unpacked Jay's suitcase, which Ben dutifully had delivered.

Mail heaped Jay's table, the large white and cream envelopes, thick from containing another, enclosing cards of invitation to holiday teas, dances, dinners. He pulled the switch of his lamp and opened the envelopes. Some of them were from people whom he knew, but more, after the modern manner, were from persons of whom he had never heard. He stopped before he had opened all, switched out the lights and threw himself across his bed.

Marrying—marrying Lida Haige! Not just dancing with her; not just kissing her and pressing her close within his arms. Marrying! A bedroom like this somewhere with her . . . his wife . . .

There was a knock, Beedy's knock. "Come in," called Jay, and rolled to face the door. "Hello, Beedy."

"I didn't hear you come in," said Beedy. "I was in back. If you'd called—or whistled . . ."

Beedy remembered he whistled. Beedy liked his whistling; Beedy, Jay knew, liked him and he felt Beedy's fealty to him more than to his father. Beedy was fifty, grayish, lonely—a butler.

"Beedy," said Jay, sitting up, "thanks for unpacking me. I wish I were staying; but I'm not."

"You're off before Christmas?" said Beedy.



"To-morrow, I think."

"Oh," said Beedy, retreating a little, and reported: "Your father's come in."

"Any one with him?" asked Jay.

Habitually, indeed almost invariably, his father brought home a guest; a member of some missionary board, a bishop, a field worker in the Near East Relief, a man from China Inland Missions or some one of the same kind. If he had not a guest, he would come home only to go out to a dinner of some board of relief or well-doings.

"No one is with him," said Beedy; and Jay knew that this was intentional to-night and that his father would not go out.

He found his father in the alcove where the piano was playing. It performed electrically and was rendering Chopin's A-flat Polonaise while his father stood ten feet away watching the ghostly miracle of the keys moving without fingers.

"Hello, father," said Jay.

His father looked at him, stepped to the piano and stopped it. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, club and here."

"I expected you again at the office. I have talked with Mrs. Lytle. I have told her you are returning to New York. I have made a reservation for you."

"Century to-morrow?" asked Jay.

"Miss Powell has your ticket."

"I'll need more than tickets—marrying," said Jay.



"I have arranged more," replied his father, and switched on the piano.

Ellen had his tickets, but she had not left them at the office. She had kept them in her handbag. How could she give them to him to send him to marry Lida Haige?

She had returned to Di, who was in negligée, never having stirred from the room during the day. Di possessed the ability, incomprehensible to Ellen, to idle and loiter hours on end at small bodily ministrations. She liked to bathe leisurely and lie on the bed when the room was hot, day dreaming and dozing or telephoning or munching marzipan and turning the pages of picture papers. She could employ hours with complexion creams and over her hands; she stained and polished not only her finger nails but toe nails, as well.

Marzipan, in a red lacquer box with gold dragons, reposed beside the bed.

"Art Slengel," said Di, carelessly, indicating its source. "He's phoned me, too. He's bringing Jello around at seven."

"Here?" asked Ellen.

"Silly," laughed Di. "He's picking me up. We're going out."

"Where?"

"Where I certainly hope and pray dinner'll be ready," replied Di. "We'll have cocktails in the car. Art has the cutest cubby for his shaker. . . . I don't know where we're going, Ellen, and I don't care long as dinner'll be

ready when we land. I'll say I'm starved. . . . Ellen, listen. . . ."

Ellen gave up, guiltily. She had done nothing about Di all day and had returned with nothing better than words. Even now she could not consider Di, solely. What Di was doing linked itself with what Jay Rountree was about to do.

She watched Di bedecking her lovely, soft, seductive body with silk gathered close or left loose with Di's instinct to tantalize a man; almost any man. Di was bedecking herself to please Sam Metten to-night; to-morrow night, another man, likely; or even to-night, if it happened that Art Slengel brought with him another than Jello.

Di simply felt no sense of need of inviolateness of her body, no joy of saving it until she could consecrate it in love to one man.

Jay was leaving, to-morrow, to marry Lida Haige, whom he did not love. For some reason, other than love, he would marry Lida Haige, not regarding, not imagining, probably, what it would do to him.

Jay did not dine with his father and the Dills. He decided to go out, indifferent as to his destination except that it would not be Ben's table or an entertainment of other friends. He looked in the heap of invitations for a dance being given that night by some one whom he did not know; finding one, he put the card in his pocket.

Arriving at the door of a strange mansion, he did not produce the card. No one knew him; but it was not neces-

sary that any one should. Many of the young men within were, Jay knew, complete strangers to the hosts.

The hostess, having daughters, had bought, from a professional purveyor of such things, a list of eligible and presentable young men. Jay and Ben were both on such a list in Boston; Harvard Yard and Mount Auburn Street mails were heavy with invitations to strange Back Bay ballrooms.

Jay went to the ballroom.

A girl whose looks he liked danced by and Jay tapped her partner. The man yielded. The girl—she was a nice little thing with pretty shoulders and pleasant gray eyes—smiled at him and clasped him for the dance. He was tapped in turn and yielded; but he obtained the same girl later; and later, again. He realized only when he was searching for her, the third time, that she was somewhat like Ellen Powell.

There was a girl a lot like Lida, with bright, black eyes; very lively, full of the devil. He watched her but did not tap her partner.

He discovered plenty of "stick" in the punch.

Beedy awoke him. "It's eleven, sir. Miss Powell has telephoned from the office. She said to remind you of your train."

At the office, Ellen Powell handed him tickets and currency. He did not count the money until the train had started; then he ascertained that his father had given him a thousand dollars.



## VI

New York! It was calm and sunny in New York, not gray and clouded with blowing snow. It was crisp, cheery, not cold.

The sun, striking the topmost windows on the west walls of the Avenue, gleamed back in sharp slants to the east and glinted again upon panes which dispatched, deeper downward, shafts of the diminished light. At street intersections, the sun lay yellow and lent shadows to escort cars and people over the crossings.

In the sheer sides of the buildings, in the gleaming windows, in the pinnacles of the roofs, in the resound underfoot, in the snatches of talk, in the click of canes and women's heels, in soft scents, colors, smart shoulders and hats, in the glance of eyes, in the air itself, because it was New York, was excitement. To marry, marry Lida Haige, was become much more a matter of mere procedure than could have been conceivable in Chicago.

Here, people enterprised in intimate experience easily, lightly, expertly. In Chicago, the idea had done more violence; more crudely it had lain on the conscience. Chicago in comparison seemed, this morning, not only grayer and stormier but duller and sterner. Perhaps it was merely because his father was there.

"Do it!" bid New York. "Do it without bothering. It'll be an experience."

Jay walked on, up Park Avenue, his thousand dollars



in his pocket. He had checked his bag at the Grand Central. Probably Lida and he would leave, married, from that station. He had halted near a booth with an idea of phoning his sister or Ralph that he had returned to New York; but what could he say? Likewise, he had considered calling Lida, but she wouldn't be up.

Improbably, she was out of bed now; yet he entered the big building on the west side of the avenue where the doorman spoke his name and the elevator boy did not inquire what floor. Eighth, it was, lofty enough to welcome the sun shining in upon a niveous Parian Psyche forever nude near a window. A cat slept in the sun, an enormous cat mistakable by its size and color for a mottled tiger cub; Lida's cat.

Mrs. Lytle was not in, nor was her husband; Lida was. "Jay?" she called, her voice coming past a door ajar. "Hello, Lida," he hailed.

"I'm in here."

Jay handed his hat and coat to the manservant who had admitted him and he went to that half open door halting a moment, with a catch of breath, before he pushed it gently. How easily it opened! There was Lida; there she was, looking at him.

She was seated at a table, a tiny breakfast tray of a table, in the sun beside one of her windows where white, black and slashes of scarlet assailed him. The white was her skin. How white she was; her forehead, cheeks, throat and shoulder half bared and her hands below the big sleeves of her boudoir gown. The black was her hair, cut and clipped like a boy's; her brows, neat and jet and narrow; the big pupils of her eyes; and the satin sheen of

her loose, looped gown. The scarlet slashings were its lining exposed at the neck and in the sleeves; scarlet, or near to scarlet, was the spot of her lips. The spot pursed and parted but she did not speak. She was looking at him.

Between them, off by the wall to his right and badly concealed by a Chinese screen, was her bed, as she had lain in it. She had arisen from it, thrusting her toes into scarlet satin mules which left her white heels bare. The black and scarlet peignoir parted and exposed her blue silk pajama jacket clinging close to her firm, small bosom. He noticed her, with no stir at all—and he needed to feel stir; he wanted to, and he couldn't.

“How glad you look!” she cast at him. “How damn glad you look!”

It was his own word of the telegram he had sent her, binding himself to her, binding himself to go through with this. “Be glad!” he had told her. “I am!” But now she saw him.

“How damn glad you look!”

He closed the door behind him, and after this half second of halt, advanced to her, smiling, or meaning to smile. An arm's length from her, just before he could touch her, he halted again as though something external stopped him. For he had meant to go directly to her and seize her. With her in his arms, he could do it gladly—or seem to do it gladly. She stirred him, excited and warmed him when he held her. But now he had stopped.

She darted a look into his eyes, down at his lips, at his forehead, at his lips, into his eyes again. She sat not still, as she seemed from a little distance, but constantly

aquiver. He knew her aquiver; he knew the excitement of the slight, tense trembling of her in his arms; and suddenly he seized her, quivering, quivering against him and within his arms.

“Lida! Lida!” said his breath, leaving him. Sinking to one knee, he pressed his lips on hers. How hot were hers! How hot had become his own! Hers moved, quivering upon his in her kiss. Hers never were quiet. He had known that; but she was less quiet, warmer and wanting, requiring, claiming more than ever before.

He drew back a little; and a little, she let him. She put him further from her, pushing him away with both her hands on his face as though, if he drew back, she would have him not at all. Then the feel of her fingers changed; while she still thrust him away, her hands caressed him. More than caressed him; she drew him toward her; and her bright, black eyes danced and danced in little tempting, tantalizing circles about his eyes. Suddenly she surprised him with a second of steadiness; then her eyes set to dancing again, eluding him, teasing him, daring him. Catch me; catch me; catch me and hold me even for a minute, her eyes and the quiver of her and the hot, soft, soft caress of her fingers on his face, said. So he caught her and kissed her again; and she kissed and kissed his lips.

“Who’s here?” he asked her, at last.

“No one; just us.”

“When did they leave?”

“Last night. They’ll be in this morning; or they might be. But they aren’t yet.”



"When may they be in?"

"Why?" she asked, with lips against his—her hot, soft, caressing lips—and her hands on his cheeks.

"No why; no why," he said.

"You want them to come in?"

"I don't care."

"What do you care about?"

"You."

"You do?"

"Of course I do. That's why I came back."

"It wasn't because I wired you?"

"Anyway, I was coming back to you."

It wasn't true, he knew; or he had known it and would know it again; but he felt no falseness in it, saying it with lips upon hers.

She tightened her clasp. "You wanted me to wire you?"

"Thank God you did."

"What?"

"Thank God you did!"

What was he saying? Did he know? The stir he had sought, and tried to force, had seized him like drunkenness. It was like knowing he was drunk and doing a thing because he was drunk and knowing it, yet not stopping himself.

"Why were you coming back to me?" Lida said.

"To marry you."

"Why to marry me?"

"When can we do it?"

"When do you want to?"

"Now."

"Now? Right away?"



"I don't see why we should wait for anybody, not even your mother. Do you want to?"

"No reason," she said. "No reason."

He had had no notion of such immediateness as marrying her this morning. It had come to him because he had found neither her mother nor stepfather here. What had he to say or do with them? He need not see them or speak with them. Better not, in fact. He need only marry Lida; only that. And get it done before he came out of this God-sent drunkenness.

"I don't want to wait for them," she said.

"Then we won't."

He loosed himself from her and arose, and she sat looking at him, her eyes steady upon his, at last—steady for her; not steady for Ellen Powell. What a comparison to hang in his head—Ellen Powell's steady eyes!

Lida arose slowly, letting the black and scarlet peignoir part to her toes. "I'll get dressed," she said.

"I'll go out."

He thought, as he turned to the door, that only an hour later, after some one—some minister probably, perhaps a justice of the peace, perhaps a priest, he did not know—had mumbled a few words over them, he would stay. He would be her husband, she his wife, for all their lives.

"I'll not be long," Lida's voice said.

"Don't be."

He was in the sunlight of the drawing-room with the white Parian Psyche and the sleepy, enormous cat; and his stir was slipping from him like drunkenness with soberness coming on. Where was Nucast—Nucast, this morning? He could not keep it out of his mind, try as he

would. The Nucast business was safe. In Chicago already this morning they would be working on the Nucast order, counting upon it, depending upon it for the next year's business. The order must have gone through by this time and been accepted.

Lida was not long. She was very quick; and slim and smart when she appeared in a dress of brown so deep it was almost black, like her eyes. She had on a hat which made her head small and smarter and accented the slightly upturned tip of her nose. She stepped into the sunlight and the warm brown in her dress and in her eyes flashed forth. She smiled confidently and kissed Jay, coolly.

"How do we get married, you and I?" she said.

"License, I suppose, first, I guess."

"You go for it; or must they look us both over?"

"Both, I seem t've heard," said Jay.

"So d'I."

"City Hall. I don't know it's the only place; but must be a place."

"All right."

The cat in the sun under the Psyche was waking up. The cat stretched herself languorously, sensuously and rubbed back and forth against Jay's leg. He withdrew. He hated that cat with its thick, tawny coat. Lida stooped and caressed the cat. "Good-bye, Raca," she said. It was her sole word of parting and, apparently, her sole sensation. How much more had been his at leaving his home in Chicago, after Beedy had called him?

The coat, which Lida chose this morning, proved to copy the color of the cat. He did not like it; he wanted

to tell her, "Take another." But how absurd to-day to stick on a point of objection to the color of a coat!

At City Hall, they stood with clerks, with a street-sweeper, with an earringed groom of black, oily curls and beshawled bride, with a pallid pair of lovers, exceedingly frightened. An odd lot to carry photographed in your mind all your life. Jay knew he would see these people, at sudden moments, throughout his life.

"Now how'll we be married?" he asked Lida, when in their cab again. Nothing beyond the next, imminent step had they talked over; not even in the interminable drive to City Hall. One step—take it; now another—take it. They had their license.

"No church," said Lida.

"Minister?"

"Oh, pick one from the phone book; 'Piscopalian preferred, if I don't know him—and he's not on Staten Island or in Brooklyn."

Jay visited a cigar store and consulted a classified telephone directory. It was while there that suddenly he realized the need of a wedding ring; and he went out the back of the cigar store, found a jeweler's and purchased, guessing at the size, a platinum band.

He was standing beside Lida in a small, stuffy, living-room, a minister with prayer book in front of him, and three women, two of whom would be witnesses, present. He said once, "I will" and repeated, after the minister, four or five words at a time, the till-death-us-do-part promise. So did Lida. Then they knelt, to please the minister. When they arose, they stood rather stupidly. They were married.



Jay took the minister aside and, from the packet of banknotes which Ellen Powell had handed him, he drew a fifty dollar bill. It was altogether too much for him to give, he knew; but he had besides, in his pockets, a couple of fives only. That was too little; and one did not ask change in a marriage fee. He gave the minister the fifty. He grasped Lida's hand and led her out. He had not kissed her in the little, musty room of their marriage; he did not kiss her while on the stairs, but hand in hand with her, ran down to the door.

"Where to?" inquired the taxi driver, when they were again in the cab; and they knew that he knew they had, in the last ten minutes, been married.

"Grand Central," said Jay gaily; or apparently gaily. Lida, his wife—for now she was his wife who sat beside him—said nothing until the cab had started.

"Why Grand Central?" she asked, then.

"Let's get away," said Jay. "Let's get on a train."

"What's the matter with getting on a boat?" his wife asked him, in her quick, cool voice.

"Boat for where?"

"Across," said Lida, coolly as before. "Europe."

"Oh."

"Nothing'll be crowded, Jay. We can get a cabin on any boat at the dock."

"We can't get passports at the dock," said Jay, and immediately refused the evasion of this excuse. "I can't manage Europe, you see, Lida."

"I can."

"I know you can," said Jay. "I know you can."

There was her money at him, already. She had not



waited with it; she could not wait. Married, he, beside her, was feeling bound, constrained; married, she, beside him, was feeling freed, released. With him, she could go where and as she pleased and when she pleased.

"I want to get away, Jay!" she told him. "I'm going to get away."

"Of course you are," said Jay, "but not to Europe now."

"Bermuda?" she asked, in one of her instant shifts with which he was familiar. "Can you manage Bermuda?"

He shook his head.

"What can you manage?"

"Mountains," he said. "Mountains south."

"What mountains?"

"North Carolina; near Tryston."

"Oh, Tryston!"

"You know it?"

"I know it."

Only in the emergency of the moment had he found the destination in his mind. Tryston; he had been talking it over with some one, recently; with whom, he did not recollect.

"How d'you feel about Tryston?" he asked her.

"Let's go there," she yielded suddenly to him. "But you don't go from Grand Central, do you?"

"No," said Jay. "My bag's there."

"Mine's home. I don't want it. I'll buy what I need tonight; and wire for things to be sent. They're mostly at school, anyway. You go get your bag. I'll shop. When'll we meet at the Pennsylvania station?"

"In an hour?"

"It'll be all I need."

On Fifth Avenue near Thirty-fourth Street, he left his wife. He paid off the cab, with the tip expected from a man just married, and walked to the Grand Central.

Married! Married! He had married Lida Haige. How strange, how constrained, how bound, to be . . . married. If you felt it so. Lida didn't; she felt far, far more freed. Back on Fifth Avenue, she was spending her own money for her own things. How quickly she had yielded on Europe and Bermuda. Too quickly; she only had put off, he knew, this matter of her managing Europe, for both of them, on her money.

He counted, with a bit of panic, the amount remaining of the thousand dollars which Ellen Powell had handed him. Nine hundred and twelve; now tickets for two for Tryston, and the berths; no, a compartment, of course.

Western Union! He wrote on the yellow pad his father's name and office address; and wrote, "I have married Lida."

In a yellow envelope, it would be laid upon his father's desk; and he thought not of his father but of Ellen Powell opening it. How little she looked in his father's big chair with her toes not quite touching the floor!

At the appointed pillar in the Pennsylvania station, he met Lida; very slim and smart she stood. A red cap held a new, small, smart bag.

"I've the tickets," said Jay. "Shall we go out to the train? It's ready."

The porter, knowing the newly married, quickly departed after the bags were placed in the compartment. He closed the door behind him. Lida and Jay stood in

their compartment alone. He began taking off her coat. Quivering, she was, quivering again, with her eyes dancing, daring, daring.

She put a hand to the light-switch. Darkness, in which her coat dropped; she was in his arms, her lips hot, hot upon his.

## VII

The marriage announcement in four words, flying to the gray, windy skies and heavier conscience of Chicago, never reached Ellen, for she was out of the office when it arrived. Mr. Rountree opened it and pocketed it before she returned.

So she was in suspense and excited, constantly. At one hour she felt able to do any amount of work and she wanted to work, work with her hands and head; at another she wanted never to see work again, never to scratch another line in a notebook, never type another letter, telephone another business message; she wanted, at these wild, sudden moments, to be only . . . a woman.

Lida Haige, who was Lida Rountree now or soon would be, had been only a woman and she had him. Something more was to be known about it, to be sure. Here was the Nucast order upon Mr. Rountree's desk; and this—a mere business matter, apparently—was tied to the motive in Jay's return to New York to marry Lida.

Ellen spread the sheets of the order pages before her and looked them over and over, scarcely noticing the items. It was as if the secret lay between the rows of figures, if she could read it. Mr. Rountree, watching her, asked:

“Anything wrong with those totals?”

“Not with the totals,” she said.

“It is an excellent order,” he commented.



“Yes.”

She sat close beside Mr. Rountree scheduling, on the sheets which would go to the shops, the work on the Newcastle order. She did it quickly and competently, with her fingers flying and her head alert and clear; soon Mr. Rountree ceased even his suggestions and merely waited until she had finished with a sheet, when he would pick it up and hold it at arm's length, studying it with his deliberate, farsighted eyes.

“Very good,” he approved her.

It was the week when all orders were scheduled and estimates made for the next year; and, in spite of this excellent order from the east, the schedule was scant; for two big pieces of western business, which had been with Rountree last winter, had gone to the Slengels; and, as Di had warned Ellen, the Metten account was uncertain.

“Sam Metten, who does the buying, is strongly influenced toward Slengels,” read the office confession, in Mr. Lowry's own hand, on the report sheet of this account.

Di, this meant; Di was “ripping it away”—Di, in her décolleté, upon Sam Metten's knees.

Ellen thought of Di here in the outer office, tapping at a typewriter, with her mind never on her work, her fingers perfectly manicured, always, but fumbling. Her head (the inside of it) and her hands (the skill of them) held no threat to Rountree, though the Slengels employed her. Her loveliness and femininity and allure for men endowed her with a different power, when she ceased trying to be a working-girl and became just . . . woman.

There were several men to whom Ellen was attractive not for the competency of her hands and head, but for

her femininity. The most important of them, rated by worldly rank rather than in the scale of her regard, was in the Rountree offices to-day. He was Lew Alban, the son of old Stanley Alban, of the Alban Appliance Company, down state, and he was by all odds the best customer of Rountree's. The Albans, indeed, had been associated with the Rountrees so long and so intimately that they could scarcely be called mere customers.

Mr. Stanley Alban was over eighty. He had put old Mr. Rountree (who now was dead) in business. The Rountree Company had originated with an order from Stanley Alban. In Stanley, Illinois, Stanley Alban and John Rountree together had founded and built the first Baptist church.

Their friendship and intimate business relations had survived the removal of the Rountrees, thirty years ago, from Stanley to Chicago; the friendship, and business relations, had survived old John Rountree, for the younger John had stepped, securely, into his father's place.

Twice a year, regularly, Mr. Rountree went down state and visited in the Alban home; he kept up membership in his father's church and club at Stanley; he sat in his father's chair at the town missionary board meetings. At least twice a year, until recently, old Mr. Alban had journeyed to Chicago and been a guest in the Rountree home.

Hardly like a guest, he was, Ellen knew; he was more like a member of the family. Certainly Lew felt himself one of the family when he was about the office. He was on far easier terms with Mr. Rountree than was Jay; he

was the only person, except his father, who walked freely into the private office without knocking.

Ellen liked it in the old man but not in Lew Alban. She did not like him and his habit, not only of entering unannounced, but of lingering near her while she worked, especially when she was alone.

He was thirty-five; very thin and ascetic-looking, if you gave him only a glance; but his thinness, as Ellen happened to know, was no indication of his appetite. He was one of those men who ate, hugely, without adding an ounce. He was dark, slightly bald, slightly sallow. He was tailored in New York, whither he traveled twice yearly and saw all the new shows. Every fortnight or so, he came to Chicago; but he always returned to his importance in his little town. He liked to lounge in the Rountree offices because there, at least, in Chicago he was important. He, or the Alban company of which his father was still nominally president, kept the Rountree company busy for nearly half the year; the Alban order made up forty per cent of the business of Rountree. Lew always let you know it.

"Well, Big Gray Eyes, nearly through?" he asked her, in his smooth, smiling way.

"Not anywhere nearly," said Ellen.

"It's Christmas eve."

"Oh," said Ellen, "I've done my shopping."

"Bought my present?" he said and laughed when she shook her head.

Mr. Rountree being out of the office, Lew seated himself behind her, as he often did. He held a newspaper but



she felt, without knowing it, for she would not look about, that he was watching her. He usually gave her that sensation, which she acknowledged by pulling down her skirt every few minutes. Occasionally smoke rings floated by her, aimed at her head; and when a cigarette burned out, he struck matches loudly.

While she was totaling the last entries of the new schedule and the sheets of it were spread over the desk, he arose and bent over her. Swiftly she covered her figures with a blank paper and she twisted around to him, whereat he patted her shoulder and laughed.

"You're not showing secrets," he told her. "Think I don't know all that?"

"What?"

"How you're losing business. Do you suppose the Slengels never see me? What'd you think I supposed the Slengels were operating on? Air?"

"We're doing very well," Ellen denied, loyally. "Volume isn't everything."

"Not while you have one old faithful account which carries you by itself," he agreed with her, coolly; and Ellen started at the suggestion of threat. Lose my account, now, and see where you are, was what he implied.

"I'm taking over, down at Stanley, on New Year's; did y'hear?" he asked.

"No."

"Yes. The grand old man retires."

"Oh!"

"Don't you like it?" he asked, his hand resting on her shoulder.

"Why," Ellen denied, "I've no feeling about it."



But she had; and he, with his hand upon her, discerned her opposition to the idea of him in control of the Alban company.

“Of course I congratulate you,” she added, hastily.

“Thank you,” he twitted her and laughed, enjoying her.

What bothered her was, he knew, not the thought of his new position in his father’s firm but her realization of his increased power over the Rountrees. It was precisely what he wished to impress upon her.

He squeezed her shoulder and she ignored it, not to offend him. He was not the sort to have people at his mercy, she was thinking; and at the present moment, with two big accounts lost and the Metten business doubtful, he had the Rountrees more or less at his mercy. Suppose he stopped his order, how could they replace it? The Alban business had been fundamental, never questioned, like the sun rising to-morrow.

Suddenly she saw that he might take away his business, not for any cause but solely to flourish his self-importance and to impress his power upon the Rountrees. He did not really like Mr. Rountree she knew, and he liked Jay less. He was jealous of Jay for being naturally a sort which Lew Alban wished to be. He betrayed that Jay was now in his mind.

“By the way, when’s Jay Rountree returning?”

“I don’t know.”

“What did he leave in the East that he had to go back for?”

So Mr. Rountree had not told him! Ellen shook her head. Lew laughed again and returned to his chair. So

there he was when the call came from a newspaper office for Mr. Rountree.

He was wanted because there was news from the East about his son. What news?

"Jay ran off the day before yesterday and got married," the voice said.

Married! Ellen clenched tight the telephone transmitter and receiver; yet the word was no surprise. She had known he was to be married; but she had not known he had been married to Lida for two days. She had to keep her head about her; for the newspaper was asking something and Lew Alban, leaning close, was listening.

"Hadn't you heard of it? Didn't his father know he was married?" the voice challenged her.

"Of course Mr. Rountree knew," she said.

"Did he? Did he know who to?"

"Miss Lida Haige, the daughter of Mrs. Imbrie Lytle of New York."

"Tell us about her. She was in school, we hear. He was in Harvard . . ."

Close beside her, Lew Alban bent, listening to the clack in the telephone receiver. She shut off the conversation quickly and confronted Lew, who licked his thin lips before he said:

"So he went back to get married."

Ellen sat shaking, but not because of thinking of Jay married to Lida Haige; her mind did go to that, but to Jay, married, and at the mercy, perhaps, of Lew Alban.

"His father knew, you said; was that true?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Jay came west, first, to tell him?"

"Yes."

"Funny John Rountree never mentioned it—or sent word to my father."

"Oh, no," denied Ellen, gasping a little.

"Father would certainly expect him to; and I was right here."

"The boy ran off," said Ellen.

"You seem to know he was running. Who's his wife?"

"A New York girl."

"In school, didn't the paper say?"

He was seizing, gloating over every point to Jay's discredit. Again he referred to his father's certain offense. He wanted his father displeased with the Rountrees. Why?

Ellen's head (the clear, competent inside of her head, filled with business affairs) explained it to her. Lew Alban, planning to bestow his business elsewhere, knew that his father, though retired, would have his firm remain faithful to his old friends—unless he became offended at them. Here was a happening, made to Lew's hand to fashion into a cause of offense.

At last Lew was off to his train for home. Ellen phoned the house on Astor Street, speaking to Beedy, who promised to inform Mr. Rountree, as soon as he appeared, that the newspapers had word of Mr. Jay's marriage in New York; also that Mr. Alban had heard of it.

In the hall before the elevators, a tall young man in a blue ulster awaited Ellen and greeted her in a deep, shy voice.

"Hello, Denny," she replied, slipping her hand out of



the glove, which she had half on, to meet his big, rough grasp.

“You didn’t get down to home,” he said.

Home for her, when he mentioned it, was not her room with Di; it was really home—her home with the light in the windows, the sparks streaking in the night from the chimney as the sled hauled you up the snowy hill in the clear, creaking cold of the starlit silence at the other end of the lake. How blue and sharp, in the still zero air, would be the stars to-night; and now and then, sudden and loud: Crack! Crack! The cold was snapping the ice in the frozen strait.

Denny’s home was near by in Hoster. Denny, once, had been on the boats and had shipped for a season on the *Blenmora* with her father. He had abandoned the lakes for the city and was become a clerk in an insurance office; yet the sight of him and the firm, friendly hold of his red hand and his shy, bass voice overwhelmed her with homesickness here in the heated hall of an office building on Christmas eve.

“Goin’ down to-night?” he questioned her.

There was his “goin’ down” again, in the homely speech of her own people, of her father who would be home, home to-night. She could hear him laugh and call; she could see him, in the exuberance of his strength, swing little mother off her feet and sweep her against his breast, kiss her, and hold her higher and then let her to her feet; gently, so gently.

The lake people, her own people, her father said “down” when others, the city people, said up.” Up north, the city dwellers went. The lake people journeyed and



thought just oppositely; they sailed and steamed from Mackinac, in the north, "up" to the "head of the lake," up to Chicago; they returned "down" to the straits.

"No; I'm not going down," Ellen said.

Yet there was a train to-night which would deliver her to-morrow at the little snowy siding of Hoster where horses blew white breath from black nostrils and stamped, hock-high in the snow, their triumph over vanquished motor-cars. Home and the hills, her country!

In her handbag, she held the fare; she owned the holiday over the week-end Christmas into the early days of next week. She had completed the schedules of every order that was in. Mr. Rountree had told her to go.

Why didn't she? Di. She dared not desert Di this Christmas. Yet Di supplied only an additional reason. In any case, she would not go. What held her was Jay, married though she knew him to be, married for two days, the husband of Lida. Married and at Tryston with his wife—the newspaper had said they were at Tryston—on a thousand dollars.

At the end of the thousand, what and where for him and his wife? New York again or Chicago?

Word of some sort, a wire for money or another message from him must soon arrive. Perhaps on Monday. Not likely, so soon; but possibly. And possibly he, himself, with his wife would appear. Ellen would not be away; she would run no chance of being away when he, or even a message from him, arrived.

"No; I'm not going down," she said again to Denny.

## VIII

At Tryston, where it was cool and misty on this Christmas eve, Lida Rountree, who never remembered her new surname, was entering her room. She had one of her own and Jay had another beside it; for the best rooms at Tryston were in suite.

They had the best, which were very expensive; but Jay, who was lying across his bed in the dusk, bothered little about the cost. He could not afford the rooms but neither could he afford marriage; and here he was married to a girl to whom dollars were merest details.

He did not know how many of his thousand dollars lingered in his pockets; he scarcely cared. Not only his finances but all his affairs had fled so far beyond his reckonings.

Lida entered her room from the hall, flicked on her light and stood whistling, as she looked about. She did not notice him through the doorway and he watched her strip one glove and then the other to her finger-tips when, one after the other, she suddenly snapped them away. She removed her hat, stared at it and twirled it and skipped it, spinning, over the foot of her bed toward her pillows.

She whistled not lightly or cheerfully but with a sort of plaintive sharpness. Not with plaintiveness, exactly; for in plaintiveness is something of repining; and Lida

did not repine. She teased and taunted; she whistled a plaintive air, *La Paloma*, over and over, with a sort of defiant, cynical challenge.

"Make me happy, happy, happy," she seemed to taunt. "Is this being happy?" her thin, whistling lips inquired.

Jay was not happy; but her whistling snatched him from his own to her discontent. In the midst of a measure, she stopped short and called, "Y'there?"

He leaped up and went to her. "You were 'sleep?" she asked him.

"Just about."

"You weren't."

"No; I wasn't," he admitted.

Her eyes were doing their dancing, daring, dancing above, below, about and about his.

"So y'heard me come in."

"Yes. And I saw you; I wanted to watch you."

"What d'you feel, watching me?"

"Love."

"Love for who?"

"Love for you."

"Liar," she cast at him coolly and kissed him. "You don't love me. I hope to God I don't love you."

He jerked a little from her. "I hope to high heaven, there's more than this coming to me," she explained, seizing him. "And it may be from you, Jay. Nobody else gives me more kick."

"All right," he said.

"D'you know we're happy, marvelously happy? Y'ought to read the New York papers."

"About us? Are they here?"



"Not yet; but on the way. Announcements are out in New York; and I bear, darling, congratulations."

Telegrams, he now noticed, lay tossed on her dresser. Lida laughed.

"Mamma evidently employed a poet. We have refreshed the jaded world, sweetheart, with a breath of youth's romance, running off in old-fashioned manner because we couldn't be kept apart a second longer."

"The subway, darling, sighs and languishes over your picture. I hope they're printing the one they took when you were pinched, because they certainly pass out the most poisonous poses of me. . . . Are we sitting down?"

He dropped upon a chair, she flicked out the light and was upon his knees, her warm, soft, restless fingers upon his cheek, smoothing his hair, touching his temples, at his cheek again.

"How do we get it, husband?" she whispered.

"Get what?"

"More. Oh God, I want it—more, more."

"We'll get it, Lida," he said, and her lips were upon his, leaving to ask:

"You and I, Jay?"

"Why not?"

"You don't want it."

She was up; she was out of his arms, or trying to free herself, but he held her. "Let me go," she fought with his hands. "You don't love me as I love you."

"You don't love me, Lida."

"But I want to. You don't even want to."

She was away from him and at the window. She flung



up the blind and lifted, next, the sash. She drew deep breaths of the cool evening air and returned to his arms, from which she watched the gray spread of the last twilight over the soft summits of the mountains. Here and there on the slopes below the Tavern twinkled tiny lights, motionless, mostly; but one crept slowly into the wide expanse of misty darkness which was the golf course. A little negro boy, Jay thought, a caddie with a lantern; and whistling came from the darkness; haunting, happy notes.

"Have the niggers got it on us?" Lida asked.

"Change with 'em, would you?" asked Jay.

"Nothing in that," Lida denied. "But what's in this?"

"We're young," said Jay. "You're very young."

"That's the trouble; what'll be better, older? They'd sell their souls, older, to be back where we are. It's all here at our age; we got to have it now or there's nothing at all."

"We'll have it, Lida."

"Will we? . . . Why are we staying here?"

"I like it. I thought you would."

"I don't. It isn't exactly cheap, is it?" she demanded.

"Not exactly."

"Then why are we staying?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Kamchatka, unless you know some place further."

"I see," said Jay, quietly.

"Where were you thinking of going from here?"

"Chicago."

"My God, why Chicago?"

"I was born there," said Jay, stirring with a slight de-

fensiveness and feeling far more; so much, indeed, that it surprised him. "The family business is there."

"I greeted the grim and growling world from Santa Barbara," observed Lida, "but that doesn't impel me in the least toward the consecration of the rest of my young years to the spot. I don't even know where my business is. Its name is Anaconda. I can find it on the ticker; that's enough for me."

"J. A. Rountree and Son," said Jay, "used to mean grandfather and father; now it means father and me."

"Then you own some of it?"

"No; but I will if I work."

"In Chicago?"

"That's where they keep the bottom of the ladder."

"Why do you worry about the bottom?"

"I've got to begin getting in money."

"For whom?"

"You."

"My grieving God, d'you see me needing money?"

"I need it," corrected Jay. "I know you don't."

"Then neither do you. *We* have it; *we've* all we can want, don't you see? Spend it; spend it with me, Jay. God knows I need help with it. We'll spend it. What'll we do with work? What'll we do with more money? We have what we want; we can go where we want, live as we want, do as we want right now—now . . ."

For the moment, in the dark, he held her tight in his arms; for the moment, he had the sensation of being lured to leap with her. It increased, when he shut his eyes; it was like a sensation of height, like standing at the edge of the roof of a very tall building and feeling drawn to

step over. How simple a step of escape from all complication, to step with her over the edge and drop down, down with her.

He opened his eyes and shook it off. She lost her moment; she knew it and arose.

From the window, she inquired, "How in heaven did you happen to wish us into this place?"

Not yet did Jay recollect. He had no mind for memory of a trifle, at the time so inconsequential and unconnected with his fate, as the chance which had caused him to recommend Tryston, in his father's office, to Philip Metten.

Mr. Phil Metten also might have forgotten, or at least have neglected, the recommendation, had he not been reminded of it by the newspaper which he opened at his breakfast table on Christmas morning. Upon the picture page (to which Mr. Metten turned after a glance at the headlines had reassured him that no disaster immediately menacing to money rates had happened overnight) was the portrait of an unusually smart-looking society girl.

New York society girl, the paper designated her; and as such, Mr. Metten admired and, in the cause of his own womenfolk, coveted her smartness. Without having noticed the newspaper's guarantee of her, Mr. Metten himself would have seen that she was in real "society." He flattered himself that he could set apart at a glance on the Avenue, and almost as infallibly upon a picture page, the authentic from the spurious; the blue-blood society girl from the Follies girl or even the banker-married ex-Follies girl, though she obtained from the



same modiste an identical gown, chapeau and furs, and was driven, identically lounging, in a replica of the society girl's Rolls-Royce.

Now the subscript trailed into Mr. Metten's eyes:

"whose runaway marriage to Justin A. ("Jay") Rountree of Chicago, yesterday was announced by her mother, Mrs. Imbrie Lytle. The young couple are honeymooning at Tryston, N. C."

Mr. Phil Metten stared and straightened, with a flush of pleased importance; he wiped his moustache and preened it with his fingers as he gazed across the little round breakfast table at his wife, Emma, and to his right and left where sat his daughters; Ruby, twenty, and Rosita, nineteen.

Before each member of the family, a fine, yellow half grapefruit, embellished by a rich, round cherry neatly set in the center, nested extravagantly in cracked ice; delicious coffee, in a silver pot with a long, narrow neck, steamed with aromatic aristocraticalness above a spirit flame; red carnations and little sprigs of holly (Christmas compliments of the hotel) bestrewed the white damask. Mr. Metten reviewed all this with appreciation which was increased by his consciousness that he had deliberately special-ordered eggs *Mornay* and also buck-wheat cakes, spurning the set combinations of "club breakfasts" with their various choices for one dollar.

This breakfast would come, with tip, to eight dollars, although it was served in his own suite on which his room-rates really took care of overhead, independently. Sixteen dollars and sixty-six cents daily, he paid for this



suite. (Thirty days into five hundred dollars the month.) Christmas dinner, already ordered, would cost twenty-five dollars. Forty-nine sixty-six, not counting supper, he would spend on living to-day; and he would not feel it. Phil Metten could spend it every day, and not feel it. The fact was still fresh enough to seem, at moments, incredible.

Phil was dressed for the day in a new, gray suit; Emma amply was clothed in a new, gold-brocaded kimono; their daughters, slim and dark, drew close to them breakfast robes, one of blue and the other of salmon satin.

"A friend of mine, mamma," Phil announced, catching his wife's eye, "is married."

"Uh?" said mamma. "Do you give him a gift?"

"He is a very nice boy, mamma. I give his papa business; four hundred and forty-five thousand, gross, he has from me this year. That is some business. Look who he married."

Proprietorily, he passed over the paper which Emma received in bediamonded hands and held close to her soft, near-sighted eyes. Her daughters arose and read, over her shoulders.

"She is certainly swell looking," approved mamma.

"She is in society, mamma."

"Do you know him, personal, papa?" asked Ruby, looking across at her father with her lovely, liquid eyes.

Personal association with such a young lady as Lida represented to Emma, and her daughters, a goal manifestly impossible of complete attainment yet perhaps to be approximated in the wonderful, unfolding world of papa's prosperity.

Phil himself scarcely knew what would open, and what remain sealed to him, when touched by the wand of his increasing influence in the world of business; daily he plummeted new potentialities of personal favor from his control of purchases of four hundred and forty-five thousand dollars to be bestowed at his desire.

"Certainly I know him, personal," boasted Phil. "I was taking him out to lunch with me. He is a golfer, too. But he had to go off and get married. I give his papa a business of four hundred and forty-five thousand in one year. We are very good friends."

"She looks very swell," repeated Emma, enviously.

"Papa," reproved Rosita, "mamma should not say swell."

Papa was persuading himself into a fancy too pleasant to permit expeditions into cavil. Fled from Phil's sensitiveness was all offense against Jay for having ignored the luncheon invitation. The boy had been running off to get married; Phil excused any one, under such conditions. He imagined that at the time of his talk with Jay, the boy had had Tryston definitely in mind as his destination for his honeymoon.

This endowed his recommendation of the place, to Phil, with an exceedingly flattering significance. Jay Rountree had, practically, invited Phil Metten and family to visit Tryston after Christmas when he, himself, would be there. The matter magnified itself most agreeably.

"Do you remember, mamma, the other day," asked Phil, "I say to you, 'Maybe after Christmas we go South?' I tell you why I said it. That day I was talking to this boy; and he says to me, 'Mr. Metten, I tell you where to

go; you come to Tryston. It is the best golf course I know; and very nice people. Your wife she will like them . . . I know them. I see that you meet them. . . .’ ”

Phil inflated the incident recklessly, as he became aware after he was embarked in the relating. Three pair of soft, liquid eyes were admiringly upon him and he wanted to prove how intimate, with his swelling consequence in the business world, was his acquaintance with such a boy as Jay Rountree. Moreover, it was true that the boy had told him about Tryston. Never had Phil Metten thought of going to the place until Jay suggested it.

Before the waiter served the eggs *Mornay*, Phil Metten inextricably had involved himself in a family expedition to Tryston; and starting to-night. An advantage of residence in a hotel was that, after deciding to travel, you could be out and away at once.

“Any day,” warned mamma, after a scrutiny of the news columns failed to reveal assurance of the duration of the Rountree honeymoon, “they may be going.”

Phil arose soberly, with the splendid ornament of the invitation suddenly stripped to recollection of the boy’s bare, absentminded mention of Tryston. The fact of the four hundred and forty-five thousand dollar business remained, however, real. Phil Metten had done such a business with Rountree this year; next year, he had still more to give or withhold at his wish—if his brother had not already signed up with the Slengels.

Since Phil was the senior partner and the president of the company, his approval technically was required to bind so large a contract; but, in practice, Sam did the



buying and his signature sufficed upon ordinary orders.

Recently, as Phil very well knew, Sam had been swinging toward the Slengels. He liked their goods and service, he said; their prices and terms met the Rountrees'. Sam "liked" the Slengels, and Phil had appreciated, without especial feelings of offense, some of the reasons for Sam's liking. He knew that Sam had been out with the Slengels at a party last night.

Hastily Phil retreated into his bedroom and nervously called the phone number of his brother's apartment, without response. When later attempts were devoid of results, Phil descended to the snowy boulevard and, by taxi, journeyed to Sam's apartment and found it deserted.

Sam's wife, as Diana had reported to Ellen upon the occasion of the procurement of the leopard coat, was in the South. A wife should not be at Palm Beach, Phil believed, nor anywhere away from her husband. Himself, he had a good and ever-present wife and two wonderful daughters; he was a good husband and father. Sam should be at Palm Beach, too, or Sophie should be here so Sam should not be out at parties with the Slengels. Suppose Sam last night had signed an order giving the business next year to Slengels; a fine figure Phil and his family would cut, coming to Tryston as personal friends of Jay Rountree.



## IX

Diana, drooping with sleepiness, was alone in a taxi returning to her room without an inkling of the Mettens' dilemma. She believed that she, or rather the Slengels, had the Metten order practically put away. For Jello had promised it, repeatedly, both when sober and after the cocktails. Sam had assured her of his highly superior regard for the Slengels, personally and as business men; he was for them and with them from now on. He would sign an order on Monday and his brother would O.K. it.

So Di had won the Metten business, practically; and she had given nothing for it. No, not nothing; but no one could say that she had given all. It had been a great party and Jello had passed "out" about 4 A. M. Di wished, now, that at that hour she had gone home; not because of any subsequent occurrence, for the party really had lost its pep by that time, but because it would be a bit easier for her when she should see Ellen.

Church bells chimed and she remembered that it was Christmas. She sat up; Ellen would be awaiting her, with a Christmas gift, and would be bothered, extra, because she had been out all night. It had been silly, sticking in a party gone completely dead on your hands; but it had been her business to stick and try to think up improvements.

The whole party had been business and Ellen ought to see it. She would, when Di told her a few things. Di drew

closer about her the soft, warm folds of Leo—not the original Leo of the light-bracket above her bed but a twin to him lent her by Art Slengel and to become her own, irrevocably, when Sam Metten signed that order, and Phil Metten O.K.'d it.

Di disembarked, airily leaving the change of a two dollar bill for a Christmas tip to the driver. Ellen opened the room door. "Happy New Year!" hailed Di and kissed her.

Ellen kissed her and Di clung, impulsively, and suddenly having had no plan of diversion of question from herself, Di demanded, "Ellen, seen the morning paper?"

"Yes," said Ellen.

"So've I. Somebody brought one in to the party 'bout midnight. One of the men; we were all speaking about it," Di related, conveying an idea, she hoped, of the size and propriety of the party. "Jay Rountree ran off and got married, they say."

Ellen stood away from Di.

"D'you know who had the paper?" Di queried, not dropping the inspiration of this tack. "Your friend Lew Alban."

"What?" asked Ellen.

"Sure. He came to the party."

"He went home," said Ellen, more to herself than to Di. Lew Alban, she thought, had gone on the six o'clock train.

"Yeah; he did drop out 'bout one. Had to catch the late St. Louis train. But we had him for a while. Nice man."

"Have you slept at all?" asked Ellen.

"Some; at May Cobbel's. But I can sleep some more;

I sure can inhale some sleep." Upon a chair, she laid Leo and fell, face downward, on her bed.

Ellen unbuttoned her slippers and removed them, whereat Di wiggled her toes satisfiedly and volunteered, yawning, "Well, the Metten business is certainly in the bin."

"Slengel's bin?"

"Yea," yawned Di. "We got it. Sam signs on Monday. And while we're speaking of business, don't drop with astonishment if you begin feelin' pretty soon a sort of slump in the business influence of the First Baptist church and the foreign missionary society of Stanley, Illinois. Lew loosened a bit last night."

Ellen listened.

"That boy's seekin' a change, Ellen."

"Lew Alban?"

"Lew. The old boy, who's retirin', is still sold on J. A.'s singin' hymns with him and shippin' missionaries off to China; he gets his big kick out of hymns and missionary meetin's. He has to; he's eighty. But Lew—well, he's a fairly vigorous young man and naturally he appreciates a different sort of entertainment."

"The Slengels' sort!" retorted Ellen.

Di turned over and lay on her back. "What's so sour with the Slengels' sort of entertainment?" she defended. "What's the matter with giving a man a pleasant little party?"

"To get his business!"

"Sure, to get his business! What's the matter with that?" Di demanded directly and sat up. "Art Slengel can't go after the Alban business by suggesting another



Baptist church; Art ain't a Baptist; and besides, it's been done. Lew's bored to tears with it and missionary meetin's. He wants an agreeable time; so that's what we're givin' him."

"Mr. Rountree," objected Ellen loyally at this gibe. "Mr. Rountree never——"

"Never went down to Stanley in his life," taunted Di, "except for the purest reasons. He believes that a missionary to baptize the Chinks has to start from that town or he'd fall on his face in the river. Honest, Ellen, look at me. Can you imagine J. A. rushin' down to Stanley to sit in the old pew to hear more powerful Baptist preachin'? Can you see him takin' a day-coach so as never to miss a missionary meetin', if old Stanley Alban wasn't waiting for him in the Sunday school room—with his million dollar a year business?"

"Yes," declared Ellen.

"Then let me sleep; and get a lot yourself; you need it worse'n I do." Di lay prone. "Let me sleep . . . I don't need any dinner . . . God, the amount men give you to eat! . . . Got 'nough for a week."

With little assistance from Di, beyond small twistings and wriggles, Ellen removed Di's dress and got her under the bed covers. When Denny called, Ellen went with him alone to a restaurant Christmas dinner.

Jay married; the Metten business in the Slengels' bin; the Alban business shaken. How her world was spinning. Home! She longed for home, for her father's voice, his kiss upon her cheek, his strong arms about her. Yet on Monday, at the office, might be word from Jay; on Monday at the office might be himself, though married.

On Monday, there was neither Jay nor word of any sort from him. On Monday, with Lida, his wife, he was still at Tryston, where he received, while at breakfast with Lida in her room, a calling card engraved with the name:

“Mr. Philip Metten.”

Written in ink, under the name, were the words, “and family.”

## X

"Where is he?" asked Jay.

"Downstairs, sir," replied the bell-boy. "He came in this morning."

"With his family?"

"Three ladies are with him."

"I see," said Jay, while recollection of the incident at the office stole over him.

"What do I tell him, sir?" appealed the boy patiently. Lida extended her slim, white hand for the card.

"How quaint! Who are they?" she inquired.

"I know the man," said Jay, as casually as he could.

"Know the three ladies, too, Jay?"

"No."

"Nice of him to include them," Lida commented, brushing with her restless finger-tip the written inscription. "Is it a Chicago calling custom?" she inquired, turning over the card as though hopeful of a list of the ladies on the back.

"He's from Chicago," admitted Jay.

"Unquestionably," said Lida. "He makes me feel drawn to the place. Take me to your home soon, Jay."

He turned away, uncomfortable because of his memory of Phil Metten's warm greeting of him and the man's frank enthusiasm at a chance to better his family acquaintance through golf in the South. Jay remembered that he had praised Tryston and advised Metten to try it. So here he was, with his family.



"Tell him I'll be right down," Jay dismissed the boy.

"Not we?" suggested Lida.

"I'll see 'em," offered Jay.

"Expect me," warned Lida.

He descended, with no mind for Phil Metten and family. Lida, he plainly recognized, was in a mood for amusement.

In the lounge, near the doors, waited a bald, plaid-clad golfer with two black-haired girls, very slender and in very new sport suits, and a black-haired woman of ampler girth and girdle, all standing in a close, uneasy covey, overaware of the eyes upon them.

"Hello, Mr. Metten," hailed Jay, hurrying toward them with never a thought in his head of that which, at this difficult moment, sustained and comforted Phil Metten—his possession, as yet unsigned, of a business of five hundred thousand dollars for the coming year.

"Ah; here you are!" cried Phil, warm with his relief and extending both his big hands. "Here he is, mamma!" Triumphantly Phil introduced to Jay, in order, mamma, Ruby and Rosita, who each in turn congratulated him upon his marriage.

"Mrs. Rountree, the lovely bride," reminded mamma with coy boldness. "She is not up yet, so?"

"Is it a good picture of her in the papers?" inquired Phil, flatteringly.

"The one of him is not so good, is it, mamma?" appealed Rosita, shyly.

"Hardly would I have known it was him," complimented mamma.

"My wife will be down in a minute," promised Jay, but

with a pulse of panic which he sought to assuage by initiating a migration of the Mettens toward the veranda.

“She will meet us outside?” inquired mamma, suspicious of some evasion.

It was a moment, Phil felt sure, to mention, as if inadvertently, that his business of five hundred thousand gross for next year had not been pledged to the Slengels.

“It does a business man good to get a good holiday, Mr. Rountree,” he observed. “Always I like a little golf before making a big decision. I say to my secretary: ‘Let everything wait, even the purchase contracts for next year, till I get back.’ My brother Sam, he does the buying, but I must O.K. all orders over ten thousand dollars.”

“Should a man like him give personal attention to such details?” mamma grandly referred the matter to Jay.

He shook his head, as he caught sight of his wife upon the stairs. At full view of the Mettens, Lida had halted. Whatever had been her anticipations, plainly they had been exceeded by the reality; but now she approached and Jay, as simply as possible, made the introductions.

Coolly and charmingly, Lida shook hands when hands were proffered and smiled and bowed when they were not. Perfectly she did it, so perfectly that mamma and Rosita, who had shaken hands, flushed with satisfaction that they had done just right and with embarrassment for papa and Ruby at their remissness; precisely contrary was papa’s and Ruby’s impression. Every Metten blushed, not for self, but for another of the family. Each felt personally approved, personally preferred and thrillingly uncomfortable.

It was strangely agreeable and reassuring to feel so ill-

at-ease and inferior; for it removed any possible doubt of the social superiority of this girl with whom each Metten felt in a privileged position. This was the sensation they had hoped for; this was why they had come. So mamma and her daughters blushed far beyond the borders of their overgenerous rouge, in the delight of this embarrassed meeting.

Jay, watching his wife, drew a bit into the background. Lida was amusing herself, he saw, but also doing something more. What? What was she after? Bother over the Mettens' sensitiveness was fled from him. Lida completely enchanted them. He realized that he, in comparison with his wife, had disappointed them. Closely and eagerly, they clustered about Lida.

Over mamma's substantial shoulder, Lida smiled at him with her lips and with her dark, flashing eyes, she laughed at him. What did she mean to do next?

No use trying to guess. He noticed how her eyes, although almost the match of these Mettens' in color, yet in no way were reproduced by theirs; he noticed how she stood out from them, as she did from most women, not merely in smartness and manner, but with more vitality. It was remarkable in contrast to these people, characterized, as they were, by extraordinary energy and eagerness. Lida was quicker, lighter, incomparably pleasing, incomparably alive.

Thrills of admiration and envy warmed Phil Metten as his brown eyes searched her for her secret. It was altogether too late for him to make over mamma into such a woman as she should be, even if Phil at this moment discovered the formula of "class"; too late, even for Ruby



and Rosita, Phil realized with something of dismay; but not too late for mamma, as well as Ruby and Rosita, greatly to profit from their privileges of association with this girl, based upon his five hundred thousand dollar gross business.

“She is just the wife of this boy, whose papa had from me four hundred and forty-five thousand last year,” Phil assured himself; and he considered, with increasing confidence, how much more important was his account to Rountree and Company this year.

Did this girl know it? Phil wondered. Had Jay Rountree told her who Phil Metten was? Unquestionably he had, Phil thought; and if he had not, it was no moment to bring up business. Not before ladies, at their first meeting. Besides, everybody was liking everybody else. Phil, catching mamma’s eye, flushed with pride and his proprietary satisfaction in spreading before his wife and daughters such a social opportunity. Beyond even what he had boasted on Christmas morning, was this reception by the Rountrees.

Mamma drew beside him for a moment and, under his hand, Phil whispered instruction: “Pay for her lunch.”

“Certainly,” said mamma.

“Don’t let her buy anything.”

“Where are you going?” appealed mamma, in a bit of a panic.

“Mr. Rountree, how is your golf game?” inquired Phil boldly. “Shall we leave to themselves the ladies?”

Jay, looking back at his wife, moved off with Phil Metten, leaving to themselves the ladies. Eagerly Ruby and Rosita seized the offer to have Lida alone; and mamma,

after her moment of panic at being deserted by her more sophisticated mate, applied herself to the advantages of personal companionship with Mrs. Rountree.

Lida, Jay felt sure, for the present was dependable. He did not yet know what she was doing but she was not merely amusing herself.

It was a glorious morning for golf, cool and clear except for a light, midwinter haze hanging in the air, softening the slopes of the distant hills and screening the glare of the sun. There it stood in the sky, a great, gleaming copper plate, half noon high.

Jay sent to the lockers for his bag; Metten picked up his from the veranda and, as a torrent of negro caddies surged about them, Phil followed his own advice in regard to permitting no Rountree, in a Metten presence, to pay for anything.

"I hire you and you," he engaged two boys, handing each, in advance, a dollar. "You carry Mr. Rountree's clubs. . . . Well," he observed genially to Jay, "a nice place this is, just like you said it. A nice change from the north. A nice change from business. . . . A man sticks too close to business these days, I say. . . . You, perhaps," Phil ventured, "are going now into business?"

"Next week," said Jay, "if not sooner."

"So?" asked Phil, with some surprise. "With your papa, perhaps? What will you do in the firm? Sell?"

Jay shook his head.

"Not sell?" rebuked Phil, kindly. "Believe me, there is the money for a young man."

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Jay explained, halting and swinging at a clump of grass, as he felt sud-

denly the relation of buyer and seller between Phil Metten and himself. Of course, he was not yet a salesman, but he was returning to Chicago to work for the firm. He had told his wife so. This man was a customer of the firm and a most important one. Moreover, at this moment, his business was "in the air"; the Slengels were after it, Ellen Powell had said, as they had been after the Nucast account in New York. The Nucast business which, after having been nearly lost to Rountree, had become "safe" for the next year, through Lida!

Jay turned toward the Tavern, at recollection that he had not told Lida that these people were customers of his father's company. When they had been announced, he had thought of them only as people out of their place and looking to him for help. But they were, of course, customers. He must tell Lida. What would she think of him, if she learned it from them?

Lida and the Mettens had disappeared; and Jay, regarding Phil's paternal, friendly face, dismissed any comparison of his character with Nucast's. There was no likeness at all between the two men, except that both were buyers and each used the power of his position. What was it that Phil Metten meant when he mentioned, in the first minute after meeting Jay here, that he had left Chicago without signing up his order for next year? He was holding it open, in other words, as a possible reward to Jay and Lida Rountree for good behavior.

Jay went on with Metten to the tee where a couple of young men, guests at the Tavern, were waiting for a four-some. Ramsey and Harris were their names; from Pittsburgh, both of them, and here at Tryston with their wives.



Jay had played a few rounds with them, spotting them six strokes on eighteen holes. At that he had made a little money.

Phil Metten was delighted to meet them and preferred greatly playing foursome, as partner of Jay Rountree. He gave the impression, indeed, that he had come to Tryston to team with Jay.

“How do you shoot?” Harris inquired of Phil, cautiously.

“Me?” said Metten, temporizing, as the fairway, the bunkers and the distant, very distant flagged hole (to be reached in five par strokes) for the moment dismayed him. He realized, with a sudden sinking, how completely he was out of his class. Yet at all costs he would play as partner with Jay Rountree and against these nice young society men. Prominent, probably, they were, too; at least in Pittsburgh. Phil Metten’s name might be with theirs in newspapers to-morrow. “I don’t know just how I will shoot this course,” said Phil modestly. “I just came this morning. Is it very sporty?”

“Par is seventy-two,” explained Jay.

“Par is little in Rountree’s life,” commented Ramsey, ruefully. “He’s cracked it twice. He averages seventy-six. Harris and I kid ourselves that we’re steady eighty-two.”

Phil, with his assurance in his boots, calculated how recklessly he dared endorse himself. Once, memorable day, when the Gods of Fair Beginnings had bounced back to the fairway, from trees out of bounds, four badly sliced drives and when Phil, privately, had subtracted several swings which, having missed the ball, he had called mere practice, he had broken a hundred. In fact, he had given

himself a ninety-six. But even such a score, he could not bring himself to mention in this company. He subtracted ten.

"I can crack eighty-six," he asserted boldly, yet with a slight catch of breath. "Oh yes," he confirmed, more easily, once he had said it, "on a par seventy-two course."

Ramsey again looked him over. "Suppose we allow your friend eighty-eight," he suggested to Jay, sportingly and politely. "That just evens the sides. You play your total scores on each hole against our total," Ramsey explained to Metten carefully. "We aren't playing your best ball, you know. Harry and I don't mind riding to Pittsburgh in a box car, but our wives may mildly object. Ten dollars a hole all right for you, with fifty on the round?"

Phil Metten was caught. He tried to encourage himself with thought of Jay Rountree's, his partner's, miraculous shots; he tried to persuade himself to the imagined possibility of himself shooting the eighteen best holes of his career, one after the other, *seriatim*; but his thumping heart told him that at golf he could not make good. He must back down before these society people or his boast of the minute ago would cost him much money. Phil Metten would not back down; and he had the money. What was a hundred, even two hundred dollars, to him now? More than that he made every morning. Whatever he betrayed at golf, he would show them that with money he was no piker.

"Twenty a hole will be all right for me," he raised the stake recklessly.

"Then you want a hundred on the round?"

Phil, somewhat choked, nodded.

Harris and Ramsey both made another inspection. Appearances, they knew, might deceive but not this much. If Phil Metten could crack eighty-eight on this, or any other par seventy-two course, cheerfully they would pay for the demonstration.

“Twenty and a hundred are all right with us,” Ramsey accepted. “Right with you, Rountree?”

Jay was staring at his partner, somewhat staggered. He wished he had more accurate reckoning of the relics of his thousand dollars upon which he depended to pay his hotel bill and fare for Lida and himself to Chicago. He had been cutting it close, he knew, and here was a chance—a chance was a mild way of putting it, certainty was nearer it—of dropping in one round of eighteen holes, three or four hundred dollars; and if he merely lost the round, without counting costs of holes at twenty dollars each, he was stranded. However, here he was, forty dollars ahead on yesterday’s rounds with Ramsey and Harris; his own partner had made the new proposition.

“All right?” Jay referred to Metten; and, boldly, Phil nodded.

“Let’s start,” said Jay; and they gave Phil the honor.

In three, he was off the tee; hole high in eight; down in eleven. Jay shot four for a birdie. Harris and Ramsey took six apiece. The second was short, a par three, so Phil stayed inside double figures; he sank a six. Jay’s midiron from the tee went to the edge of the green and he putted twice, for a three. His opponents were down in fours.

“My God,” breathed Ramsey sympathetically, as he walked close to Jay toward the third tee. “I’ll scratch stakes with you—after I’m square for yesterday—and



split with Harry the proceeds from your friend. That'll satisfy me."

"Let my partner get started," retorted Jay, the fight in him aroused. "He's nervous and'll improve."

"He'll have to, old top," agreed Harris, appreciatively. "You can't, unless you're counting on cutting out putts altogether and sinking your approach shots."

"This game is young," returned Jay, stubbornly.

"Oh, all right," Harris accepted, "if you're pleased. We got to look out, Ram. We'd have lost that hole, d'you realize, if Rountree had just sunk his drive. That's all he had to do."

Jay hurried on to his partner, who was walking alone, and patted him on the back.

Phil flushed gratefully and responded with a terrific, smacking swing which soared his ball a clean two hundred yards, out of bounds. On the seventh hole, a similar smack stayed on the course and Harris lost a ball; Metten and Rountree won that hole and halved the ninth, so they turned only six down. Phil, on the nine, had taken sixty-eight strokes.

"Pardon the not unnatural curiosity," appealed Ramsey, accompanying Jay down the fairway from the tenth tee. Phil's second swing on his drive had sliced his ball into a forest at the right and, with uncountable crashes, he was hacking his way out. "Who is yon bald Bobby Jones? Do you mind taking us into the secret of your mercy? Why do you let him live?"

"Why?" asked Jay.

"It will make it more comfortable for us, when cashing your check, if we know what's in it for you," explained

Ramsey. "You take him with such superhuman calm when homicide would shock nobody."

Jay was wondering about it, himself. He was sure to lose and, at the end of another hour, have to pay a couple of hundred dollars which he could not at all afford. He would be short on his hotel bill and obliged therefore, if he would not borrow from his wife, to wire his father.

He would not ask or receive a loan from Lida; upon that, he was determined. He had resolved, also, not to send to his father for money; he would not have remained until he had run up a bill which he could not pay; but here he was, put in that situation by Phil Metten—more than enough to anger any one.

Jay did not anger easily; but he could not assign his calmness this morning to the score of mere good temper or manners, nor could he credit it, entirely, to his feeling that, having advised Phil Metten to come to Tryston, he was responsible for certain consequences. Another element entered; and this was the fact, which his partner never for a moment forgot and had mentioned at the minute of meeting, that Phil Metten was a buyer and Jay Rountree was a seller of the same thing; prospectively as yet rather than actually, but already, and surprisingly, it influenced their relations. Jay Rountree was restraining his exasperation this morning because he knew that, when his pockets again were empty, he must refill them by his own efforts in business; and rewards, in the Rountree line of business, came from friendly relations with Phil Metten and others like him.

That was why Lowry, the salesmanager, had been so

full of fidgets when Jay had met Metten in the office and forgotten his name. Jay had not yet progressed to the point where he felt fidgets over Metten; but he was on the way. Here he was, enduring the man's boastings and foozlings with a tolerance which consisted, in part at least, of prospect of future favor from Phil Metten; here he was, partnered with Metten in a game, for business advantage.

He colored slowly as he considered it and replied to Ramsey, frankly: "Metten's a big buyer from my father's firm."

"Oh," said Ramsey, preparing to play his ball. "Then you can charge it to the firm."

Jay turned, thoughtfully, and watched his partner emerge from the wood, hot and disheveled, pecking at a ball with dirt and divots flying. Phil dubbed on and on, bunkered and out of bounds in the very depths of despond. The hotter and more humiliated he got, the worse he played; but Ramsey and Harris had a certain mercy and when Rountree and Metten had any chance at winning or halving, their opponents yielded; yet the score at the eighteenth was appalling.

Phil demanded the right to liquidate both his own and his partner's losses, but Jay paid his money before Phil made out a check. Momentarily, Jay felt sick—suppose he received no response to a wire to Chicago!

His opponents noticed nothing of this reaction, after he had paid; they supposed he merely would charge it to entertaining and, in any case, that expenses were no problem to him; but Phil, in this matter, was more perceptive and he bobbed up a bit from the very bottom of his hu-



miliation. Since money meant something to young Rountree, Phil possessed means to rehabilitate himself.

He marched toward the Tavern with his partner, seizing Jay's arm familiarly as they paraded past the peopled verandas. Everyone should see that he had been Jay Rountree's partner. A few later might learn the disastrous scores; but most of this swell gallery would know only what they now saw. So Phil felt his assurance returning. He was getting here something for his money and he wanted Jay to have something, too.

"My boy," he promised heartily, patting Jay on the back as though in congratulation at their golf score, "you will lose nothing by this morning. Not for playing partner to Phil Metten. No! I said it."

Mrs. Metten rushed down from the steps to greet them. Her girls were not in sight. "Ruby and Rosita, they are horseback riding," mamma announced loudly, "with Mrs. Rountree, of New York."

Jay went up to his room and, from his own, opened the door of Lida's where the sun, cleared of its morning haze, was pouring in yellow and warm. There was no sound; no motion; no ordinary proof of presence; yet, at the opening of the door, more liveness in this room than merely the light of the sun.

He had believed that his wife was riding; now he knew she had returned. There was something electric in the air of the room. Lida was here; but he did not at first see her.

He would not test his impression by calling to her; he would discover her, so he entered and came upon her in the startling way she liked. Black and white and crimson contrasted in the yellow sunlight. Lida lay at full length

in the sun. The white was her skin; the crimson, the silk of a scarf below her. She had flung pillows on the floor and spread over them the scarf upon which she lay, her black kimono half covering her.

Flown were all thoughts of the Mettens and what she might have done with them. He gasped, standing over her; and she, looking up at him, said: "Let's go to Levuka."

"Where's that?" whispered Jay.

"The Fiji. I just found out. I've always known the verse. It's in Kipling:

"So one will Baltic pines content  
As one some Surrey glade,  
Or one the palm-grove's droned lament,  
Before Levuka's Trade."

"He means the trade wind. Let's go to palm groves and trade winds, Jay. I'd like a lamenting wind and palms and shore and south seas."

"So would I," said Jay.

"Kiss me," said Lida; and he knelt and seized her, warm with the sun. "Then let's go! . . . Why not? Why not?" she challenged, clinging to him, lifted in his arms from her crimson scarf. "One day we'll be beachcombers, bathing bare in the shining sea; and sleep under stars which'll be strange. Even the stars, Jay. No Dipper; no old, stale northern stars. The Southern Cross!

"We'll awaken and sail—we must have a sail, Jay, no spluttering motor—and skim into the lagoon of a coral

island on the rim of a crater of a sunken volcano. They're round, you know, a circle of sand with palm trees and parrots; and frigate birds and albatrosses over the sea. Let's shoot an albatross with a cross-bow, Jay, and for our punishment have the wind drop down.

“ ‘Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,  
'Twas sad as sad could be;  
And we did speak only to break  
The silence of the sea!’

“We'll parch on the painted ship, Jay, upon the painted ocean. Then the wind'll rise:

“ ‘The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free;  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea!’

“There's some place, Jay, where no one's ever sailed, some path in the sea! Let's sail it, you and me!”

“Let's, Lida,” he whispered with lips on hers and holding her close, trembling as she; more, in fact, than she, for she ceased to quiver.

“It's merely a matter of nerve enough to break away from this crazy thing called civilization. Have you the nerve, man married to me?”

“It's not nerve,” denied Jay.

“What is it?”

He held her, staring into her black eyes, aware of her



heart beats in her white, warm body. "It's what has come down to you; it's what is put up to you," at last he said. "Something like honor."

"What makes honor for you?"

He could not think, holding her; with her heart beating, beating against his. He had never imagined, when he had married her, this. He shut his eyes but it only increased the intoxication of the thump, thump, thump of their hearts together, hers hurrying, hurrying and now his after it. He lost his breath and, in order to breathe again, he let her go, releasing her to her crimson couch, where she lay, breathless like him, and looking up at him.

"You'd like," Lida gibed, "to love me. You're my sort, inside you. I felt it a second ago. You'd like to go with me to Levuka; but I know you won't . . . yet . . . because, because . . ."

"Because why, Lida?"

"You don't dare," she taunted him. "You don't dare even to love me yet. But you'd like to let go and love me."

"You were born a barbarian, Lida," he said.

"Thank God for that. What d'you feel you were born to be? A merchant of Chicago like your friends the Mettens?"

With a start, he recollected them and that he had not mentioned to her that Metten was a buyer, as Nucast had been. Now he told her, but without referring to Nucast.

"Yes," said Lida. "Mr. Metten gave your papa a business of four hundred and forty-five thousand dollars last year." Plainly it was an indirect quotation. "He has a bigger business this year; and he likes you very much.

The whole family likes you very much; also, they like me. By the way, we're lunching with them."

"No," objected Jay.

"Oh, yes we are. I accepted. For you're not letting go yet; you're not," she flung at him, "leaving with me this morning for Levuka."

Barbarously black and crimson and half-covered white, she lay before him; and the languor in the sun of her smooth, shining limbs was like the languor of the sea. She was restored to her rim of sand under the palms lamenting in the winds of the Fiji; but he, with his hand upon a pocket where his banknotes had been—one thousand dollars, when it had been handed him a few days ago by Ellen Powell in his father's office—he was returned to Chicago.

## XI

Ellen had clipped with his, from the newspaper, the companion picture of Lida which the Mettens had admired and she bought all the New York papers, as well as the Chicago ones, to study every mention of Jay and Lida, but she could make no more than before of their marriage.

Where would he go with his wife, what would he do when his thousand dollars were spent? Ellen debated over and over. Beside her in the office, his father was waiting for the same event, she felt—the end of his thousand dollars. It was as if his father held him on a tether, shortening each day as Jay's money melted. When all was spent, his father would have him completely in hand.

Such was the sensation of working beside Mr. Rountree during this winter week wherein the newspaper correspondence from southern resorts twice mentioned the runaway bride and groom at Tryston, but Jay gave no account whatever of himself.

Wednesday upturned everything. The day began with a letter from Lew Alban upon his new stationery as president of the Alban Appliance Company, addressing Mr. Rountree and instructing him—there was no other tone to it—to complete delivery upon unfilled orders by January thirtieth. The more ominous feature of the letter was the omission of reference to February requirements. Ellen gave the letter to Mr. Rountree as soon as he ap-



peared and, watching him read it, she thought of Di's warning: Look out for a slump in the business influence of the First Baptist Church of Stanley.

Mr. Rountree sent immediately for Mr. Lowry, who brought no reassurance in regard to the Alban business. On the contrary, he had learned yesterday that Lew Alban was figuring seriously with the Slengels, who appeared to be confident of winning the business, for they were leasing additional space in a plant next to their own. By February, Mr. Lowry thought, the Slengels would be prepared to supply the Alban company.

By February, then, the Rountree plant, losing the Alban business, would be half idle and the other half operating at a loss. Nobody mentioned this but it was in the minds of both men and of Ellen.

"You'd better go down to Stanley, sir," advised Mr. Lowry; and in spite of herself, Di's image of Mr. Rountree and old Stanley Alban singing hymns together flashed into Ellen's mind. Would they together dispatch another missionary to China, with the immediate result that Mr. Rountree would return to Chicago with the usual Alban order?

"I'm leaving on the noon train," replied Mr. Rountree, and told Ellen to phone Beedy to bring down his bag.

"Now for something more cheerful," announced Mr. Lowry. "What do you hear from Jay? Is he still at Tryston?"

Mr. Rountree nodded, obviously wondering what cheer the salesmanager felt from that fact.

"Something has saved, temporarily, at least, the Metten account. Last week I wouldn't have given a nickel for

our chances. Slengels had sold Sam Metten; they had him sewed up. We couldn't even reach him. But Sam didn't deliver the order. Brother Phil blocked it."

"Did he?" said Mr. Rountree. "That's good; but I'm not much surprised, Lowry. He was very friendly with me, when you had him here."

Ellen saw Mr. Lowry smother a smile. "Are you writing Jay this morning or, by any chance, phoning him at Tryston?"

"Justin?" asked Mr. Rountree. "What has Justin to do with the Metten account?"

Mr. Lowry ventured, in the emergency, upon unusual frankness.

"Phil Metten's friendliness toward you, which you've remembered, was only a sort of hangover from his enthusiasm over Jay, to whom he was talking in the waiting room. Phil certainly fell for that boy. I could hardly get him to come in to see you. He wanted to fan golf with Jay. Phil is one of those golfers who took it up in time to shoot a steady hundred and twenty on a public course and would sell his shoes to be in an exclusive club, and get his wife and daughters in. He was asking Jay about a good place for his family. Jay told him about Tryston.

"Now on Christmas morning, the papers say that Jay and his wife are at Tryston; on Christmas night, Phil Metten and family leave town, for Tryston. At the same time, Sam Metten is stopped from delivering a half-million-dollar twelve-month order to the Slengels. I can't see that simply as a coincidence."

"Do you imagine," inquired Mr. Rountree, coldly, "that my son had anything to do with it?"

"I know it," returned Mr. Lowry. "Phil left word at his office that nothing is to be done about that order until he gets back; but this morning, his secretary calls me. First she has to tell me that Mr. Metten has been in golf games with Jay; and they have all met Mrs. Rountree, who is very wonderful. Phil seems to have written a full account to his secretary with instructions to broadcast it. Then the woman tells me that we are to go on supplying Metten Brothers, at the same price, temporarily—a two-week stop order. Mr. Phil Metten will definitely decide on the twelve-month order when he gets back. If you don't want to, I'd like to talk to Jay at Tryston."

Ellen, in her own excitement, was watching Mr. Rountree, whose moods and mannerisms she knew so well that it was like looking into his mind as he opposed and struggled with his contradictions. He would not accept his son as valuable to him; he would not have Jay, by no effort greater than a game of golf, accomplish for him a matter so laborious when undertaken by himself and so important to him at this moment as the retention, even temporarily, of the Metten account. Yet on Monday the Metten business had been lost; to-day it was regained through Phil Metten, whose office boasted that he was the companion of Jay Rountree at Tryston.

How much more agreeable for John Rountree to journey upon his first call upon Lew Alban having in hand the Metten business, and let Lew know it; how much more dignified his personal position and how much stronger his business situation. Yet he would not admit that this advantage accrued to him from the efforts of his son.



"I am not phoning Justin," he replied at last. "If you want to, Lowry, that is your affair."

Consequently, at Tryston, a caddie summoned Jay from the fairway because of a long distance call from Chicago. His father was on the wire, he supposed, as he went to the telephone, and he was rather glad of it. He hated the idea of telegraphing for money; abominated it. Better make a clean breast of the whole business by phone and put it off no longer, for Lida and he must be leaving. The Mettens were about Lida every minute they could manage it, and Lida was tiring of her game with them. Not merely a game she played; something else, too, but she had had enough of that. Better be off to-night.

"Hello, Jay; this is Bob Lowry," hailed the salesman-ager's cheery voice, and congratulated him upon his marriage. "And great work with Phil Metten! In fact, wonderful! Keep him happy. . . . Anything I can do for you?"

Thus Jay obtained, without any embarrassment whatever, the difference between the amount he possessed and the sum he required to pay his hotel bill and his railroad fare home; and Lida's.

Home, he discovered, took an amazingly different aspect to a married man. The house on Astor Street, whatever had been its deficiencies, at least had been an establishment in which one could sleep, eat, have linen laundered and clothes pressed without any one presenting a bill. It was a place where you went when you had no money. Likely enough, its advantages and accommodations would be extended gratuitously, for a time at least,

to Lida and him; but Jay never considered taking his wife home.

He engaged two rooms in a hotel on the Lake Shore Drive, upon the jut of land which commands the long, northward sweep of the shore and the reach of the water unbroken, endless to the northern and eastern horizons. They arrived at night and Lida had her first look at the lake after lights were out and the window lifted.

The moon was shining. She could not see its sphere; the moon was overhead and behind the hotel, meridian high in the clear, cold midwinter sky. Stars gleamed before her. There stood the Dipper, half spilled, with its pointers, whatever their position, stubbornly pistoling the steady, still Pole Star. Alderamin was there, Kochab and Cassiopeia's Chair—all Lida's stale northern stars.

The rim of them ran down to the sea—no sea of sandy coral and palm groves. Floes and ice choked the sea; the floe churned and spewed. A wind, an arctic, frigid wind was blowing, displayed in the brightness of the moon as spray flew sparkling from the splash of the churning ice.

"You didn't tell me this was here," whispered Lida, clinging to Jay.

"You knew Chicago was on the lake."

"I didn't know it was on the Polar Sea. I thought ships crossed it."

"They do," said Jay. "A few, all winter; but the big ships are laid up. They can't get out of the lake through the Straits and into Superior for iron ore. Navigation's closed. Navigation's closed," he repeated, not thinking of what he was telling his wife but cast by it into his sensa-

tion when last he had looked thus at the lake and talked navigation.

In his father's office, it had been, with Ellen Powell.

Morning, which banished the magic of the moon, spread a gray, cold shore, overdrift with city haze, below Lida's window. Lida slept, lacking an alarm of need to awaken her; so her husband left her undisturbed, breakfasted alone and went to the office.

He had learned from Beedy, last night, that his father was in Stanley; now Ellen Powell told him that his father would remain a few days with Mr. Alban.

"You've been home?" he asked Ellen. "How's your father?"

She shook her head, watching him, trying to make out, was he happy? Where was his wife? Ellen directly asked nothing about his wife. She inquired, generally, "When did you get in?" So he told her and mentioned also, where "we" were staying.

How could they stay there? Ellen knew that his thousand dollars was gone and Mr. Lowry had sent him more money because of his meeting the Mettens. Mr. Lowry, she remembered, wanted to know as soon as Jay arrived. Ellen wanted to keep him with her; but what had he now to say to her or she to him? She called Mr. Lowry.

Mr. Lowry had no reservations about inquiring of Jay's wife and discussing her. Where was she? Mr. Lowry immediately wanted to know. Had the Mettens returned on the same train with them? When were the Mettens following to Chicago?



"Next week," said Jay.

"They won't wait till next week," prophesied Mr. Lowry. "Tryston's gone tame for them. I bet they're packing this minute. You and that wife of yours, Jay, gave them the thrill of their lives. I was in Phil's office yesterday. Apparently he bought out this week's edition of the local Tryston paper. His secretary had a hundred copies, at least, which she was mailing out to friends; the one with the picture of you all lunching in the solarium together, with names of everybody below it. You were good, boy, but your wife was wonderful! You'll find your friends again, I figure, not later than day after tomorrow."

"Not here," protested Jay.

"Why not? Are you leaving?"

"No; I've come home for a job."

"Your job, in the next few days, is to be nice to the Metten family—you and your wife."

"But good Lord," said Jay, "we won't be with the Mettens here. That's over. That was just at Tryston, because he came down there. He sent up his card to me. That's over."

Lowry laughed. "Over, boy? You've just begun; you're just tuning up. You don't imagine you've satisfied Phil Metten by sitting with him for his picture at Tryston with your wife and his family? You've just whetted his appetite." Lowry looked about the room, seeing that the door was closed and nobody else but Ellen Powell present. "Do you know what the Metten business amounts to?"

Jay smiled, in spite of himself. "If I don't, repetition makes no impression on my ears. Four hundred and forty-

five thousand last year; it'll be more than half a million, this."

"And we've just exactly absolutely got to have it. Do you know where your father is and why he's down there? Lew Alban has taken over the works at Stanley and his first presidential gesture was to give us the gate."

Jay flushed and drew up, as Lowry meant to make him.

"Lew never liked your father and you," the sales-manager added.

"It is completely mutual with me," said Jay.

"Lew knows it; that's what gives him such particular pleasure in having you in his hands."

"He hasn't us in his hands!" denied Jay, flaring up.

"Hasn't he? If you lose the Metten account? Who'll we have left? Nucast, who we damn near lost——"

"Yes," said Jay, suddenly white, while Ellen watched him. "Yes," he repeated, deeply breathing.

"And half a dozen little ones who altogether won't keep our doors open. We have to have volume to keep our costs down to a level to sell in competition with the other fellow who has volume; and Slengels are getting the volume; they're after both Metten and Alban. If we lose Alban, we're groggy; if we lose Metten, too, we're down and out.

"Now Metten's a growing account, thank God. They're talking half a million next year because it sounds so big to them they can hardly believe it; but I bet their business goes to three-quarters of a million—almost enough to take the place of Alban with us when we lose Lew.

"We have a little time before Lew leaves us, for your

father's down there and his father's living. (Singing hymns and shipping off missionaries, Ellen could not help thinking.) But his health is just rotten. It can't be long before Lew shuts us down."

"He will not shut us down," Jay defied.

"He won't only if he can't. If we hold Metten and Metten grows—and Providence has put the matter of Metten pretty much into your and your wife's hands. Phil Metten and mamma have more money in their checking accounts than they ever thought was in the world and they're depositing more. Money has ceased to be the big thing ahead of them; they've got it, so now they're hot on the trail of the next thing—social recognition. You gave them a taste of it down at Tryston and they sure liked it; so here they come with their tongues out for more."

"Lida," said Jay, very tense and tight, "I mean Mrs. Rountree, played around with the Mettens at Tryston because they asked for it and they interested her; or amused her. She didn't know they were buyers until they told her. I played golf with Phil Metten because he asked me; then I found I was playing him for business. That's all right between him and me. I've come home to work for the firm; but the Metten family cannot buy, with their half million dollar order for goods, the right to run around with my wife. I'm not trading personal friendship with my wife for business."

"Too late," retorted Lowry warmly. "They're already your friends—and your wife's. They've told it to the world. They've mailed the Tryston papers around to all their friends to prove it. Your wife's in this and she's got



to stay in. The women come to count more than the men in any affair like this. You let your wife cool toward the Mettens and the Angel Gabriel couldn't hold to Rountree the Metten business, which is like lifeblood to this firm just now."

## XII

Lowry proved to be a prophet; the Metten family, reduced to insignificance at Tryston, promptly entrained, and upon the morning of the second day, resumed the occupation of their five hundred dollar suite in Chicago.

While mamma was still scanning the society columns, in hope of a personal Metten mention, Phil phoned the Rountree office, inquiring not at all for Mr. Rountree but for Jay and his wife. The call was referred to Ellen, who replied that Jay was not in the office, though he was in the city.

"Certainly; I know it," said Phil. "His wife, too. Last night they were entertained at 999 Lake Shore Drive. But where are they stopping?" The paper had not supplied that item.

"When he comes to the office, I will tell him you have returned," said Ellen.

"Also with me Mrs. Metten and the Misses Metten," amplified Phil, employing proudly the phrase of the Tryston journal, describing his family; and he repeated several times the name of his hotel and its phone number.

Ellen talked, by long distance, with Mr. Rountree at Stanley; and a little later looked up to see Jay. She started with some confusion, for he had happened to come in, silently, the door being open; previously she had had a little preparation for him.

"Good morning. My wife called me?" he asked, noticing but trying to ignore Ellen's agitation.

"No . . . but you've had a call."

"Father?" he asked. Ellen shook her head and her confusion fled as she warmed with excitement familiar to the moments when he and she, before he had married, banded together against his father.

"Mr. Philip Metten phoned for you," she related and delivered the message, adding, "Your father didn't ask for you, but he said something about you. He's returning to-morrow and told me to invite you and your wife to dine at home with him."

"Exactly what did he say?" demanded Jay, smiling but also reddening. "I want his own words."

"Well, he told me to see that you and your wife dined with him."

"That all?" insisted Jay.

"He asked, were you still at the hotel? He said you were to move home."

"At once, I suppose."

Ellen nodded, gazing up at him, and he considered her, half absently, half realizing her in the manner of their odd intimacy which surprised him only when, suddenly, he remembered Lida.

"Is father bringing back the Alban business?" he asked.

"I don't know; and I don't think he does. It makes Metten so mighty important, doesn't it?"

Did he think, she wondered, that she urged him to use his wife to help hold Metten? She wanted *him* to hold the Metten account.

"It's a rotten row," he said, "business."

She opposed him, quickly. "No, it's not!"

"Do you like it?" he challenged her.



"Of course I like it or I wouldn't be here."

"You're not here merely for money?"

"No."

"No; I know you're not," he agreed, puzzling over her in a new, surprising way. Here she was; here she had been, working beside his father for pay. Previously that had sufficiently explained her. Now he asked: "What else do you work for?"

"What?" repeated Ellen and confessed: "I don't know."

"You like the city better than the country?"

"That's not it," she denied, "for I don't like to live in the city so much of the time. I like business and the people in business."

"Do you? Do you like them better than the people at home?" he demanded, and glanced out the window over the lake—Lida's sea, choked with ice and floe. "Your father works at a clean, clear job; he sails his ship; he sets his course and keeps it; loads his ore, goes back in ballast, and loads again. No Nu—" Jay caught himself quickly. "No Lew Alban and no Metten brothers can make any difference to him. Nothing but wind and weather can touch him. Would you like your father in business . . . holding Metten?"

"Not father," said Ellen quickly, and gasping a little so that Jay laughed at her.

"Why not, if you like business so?"

"I don't know."

"What do you feel about him; that he's above business?"

"Not above it," Ellen denied.

"Certainly not below it."

"No; not below," agreed Ellen; and she gazed at him for long seconds with her gray, steady eyes. No one knew so well as she the hounding this boy had received to drive him to seriousness, to work, to duty; no one knew so well how it set up, inevitably, antagonism. Then there was some experience, something to do with that Newcastle order and his marriage, which she did not know. She asked, very gently; "What is it little boys want to be?"

"Why," said Jay, wondering but seeing she was completely earnest, "why, firemen and Indian fighters and——"

"And ship-captains, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Then what do they do?"

"What?"

"They grow up."

"Wow!" said Jay softly. "Wow!" and he was fiery red and perspiring and felt it.

She bent forward from his father's big chair, in which she was sitting, and caught his sleeve. "I'm not criticizing my father!" she cried. "He's the finest, finest man I ever knew! I wouldn't have any one else for a father! I wouldn't have him off his ship! I'm proud to be his daughter. You know him!"

"I know him," said Jay. "I know your remark was meant solely for me. Thanks."

"I meant——"

"I said 'thanks,'" Jay repeated and, gazing into her gray eyes, he thought of Lida's black ones and her white body on her crimson scarf when she would have

lured him to Levuka. "What's Phil Metten's number? D'you mind getting him on the phone for me?"

Ellen dialed the call with trembling fingers and gave over the instrument. Shortly after he hung up, the bell rang and Ellen, answering, heard a cool, alert, confident voice say: "This is Lida Rountree. Is Mr. Jay Rountree there?"

"Your wife," said Ellen to Jay, and slipped into her own little room where she waited to see if he wanted her again. He did not, but departed; and after he was gone, Ellen stayed alone, upset by her excitement at what she had said and its effect upon him. She was glad that she had said it, glad that she had stirred him so. Could his wife, the possessor of that cool, confident voice, put him upon another path?

In spite of knowing that Lida Rountree at Tryston had charmed the Mettens and had served the business cause, Ellen was unable to visualize Jay's wife as an ally of endeavor. Nothing that she had said and nothing that Jay had put into words betrayed her different allegiance, but every instinct screamed it. Ellen Powell and that girl, who had married this boy about to grow up, were completely opposed.

Upon her return to her room, Ellen underwent twinges of doubt of her own declaration. Di was there and was preparing for another foray on business. Di had not received the irrevocable donations pledged to her by Art Slengel when the Metten order should be signed to Slengels, but Di was not despairing about it.

"Sam signed all right," she reported. "Jello did his



little duty, but Phil had to put off writing his name. He's sprained his wrist, you see, at the golf game—and then turning over all the pages of the social register.”

Di had benefited from an exceedingly frank interlude with Sam.

“The bride took them on quite a ride,” commented Di, indolently draping and revealing, with minute care, her pink, soft body under the rose tints of her shaded light. “She certainly has them hoping high. I bet they're listening at the phone this minute for a call from the Potter Palmers or the Armours, at the very least.” And Di inspected the satisfying reflections of her mirror.

“Seen Mrs. Jay Rountree?” she demanded suddenly.

“No.”

“Me,” said Di, somewhat indignantly, “I had that ——— order. Sam shot it across. Then that bride had to kick in and spill everything. My God, what'd she want from me? Why can't a rich dame like her leave a working girl alone?”

“Who're you out with to-night?” Ellen ventured.

“Jello.”

“Why?” questioned Ellen, dropping other argument and adopting, for this occasion, only Di's practical point of view. “What's the use, when he can't give you a good order?”

“He'll have to make it a good one—with brother Phil's moniker all over it,” retorted Di, confidently and cryptically; and refused to elucidate. But she nursed her personal grievance against Lida Rountree; and this, Ellen slowly understood, was to whip herself up to something she was yet reluctant to do.

Shortly before eleven a cab came, not summoned by Di, but sent. The cab, as Ellen saw from the window, was empty; no escort offered himself to accompany her to the affair planned, to-night, to counteract and overwhelm Lida Rountree's sudden and successful incursion into the contest for the Metten account; and Ellen, desperately in need of a new point of protest, seized on this.

Di laughed at her. "I know the driver," she said, and kissed Ellen good-night. "Look here," she added, "you've been wrong every time before. You're wrong now. I can take care of myself." So she escaped.

She did know the driver; and she sank into a corner of the cab without a word to him. He had his orders, in obedience to which he sped along the snowbound boulevard, soon reaching a region where brilliant display lights flooded show windows of gowns, negligées, hats, slippers, jewels.

Di stared and desired; Di drew back, shivering a little. A new, splendid limousine, with liveried chauffeur, passed and Di imagined Jay Rountree and his bride in it—that rich girl who had to kick in and kill a big fat order which Diana Dewitt had got without having to give too much for it.

The cab halted at a corner and a rotund townsman, jowled and smiling, rat-tatted playfully upon the window before, jerking open the door, he bundled in.

"How's my dandy Di-light?" Jello greeted Diana, smothering her slim hand in the grasp of his large, soft fingers as he bulged in the seat beside her.

"How's my snappy little Sammarino?" flattered Di, in return, smiling at him but trying not to see his fat face.

Soon he would kiss her with his thick, soft lips. All right; she could go it again for the sake of a half million dollar order; but she must make sure of it this time, with that smart society girl kicking into the game.

“Love me a little?” demanded Jello.

“Lots,” lied Di. She despised him.

The cab, she knew, had been sent for and paid for by Art Slengel; the appointment at the corner and all other arrangements as to destination and entertainment there had been made by Art. Jello played merely a passive part in the proceedings. He had not the nerve and courage of his own to go after a girl, but he would drop into a date made for him, with his way paid and everything prepared.

He enfolded her with a soft, round arm and kissed her several times. Sometimes she responded. It was not far, thank God, to the studio where they were bound. There would be dancing for a while; Jello loved to dance. It was awful to dance with him—sweating, puffing, pushing his heavy, fat feet after hers—but it was better than being in a cab with him.

They drew up before an entrance distinguished by a striped canvas canopy and sentineled by a tall, obsequious mulatto. Reluctantly Jello released Di and she jumped out and ran into the vestibule and up iron stairs, with him lumbering behind her.

At a door, behind which dance music beat, she waited for him and together they debouched into a large, studio-like room, cleared in the center for dancing, and remarkable, as to its perimeter, for its convenient nooks. Some of these were architectural, following actual recesses and



bays in the wall of the building; others had been contrived with potted palms and oriental hangings.

Two couples trotted to the cacophony of piano, saxophone and drum ambushed at the end of the room.

Di fluttered gay and care-free fingers, "'Lo, people!" But Jello regarded the dancers more cautiously, especially the gray heads. The blond heads he did not doubt; they were party girls, paid for this entertainment and dependable. Art Slengel had assured him that the men would be strangers from out of town, but he put on his glasses to make sure. Over their partners' shoulders, they studied him; then they nodded, somewhat relieved. They were strangers to each other.

Di, having waited to witness this formality, fled into the refuge of a little room where five girls, four of whom she knew, prinked and powdered before the mirrors.

"'Lo, Di!" three of them hailed.

"'Lo, everyone."

The number of girls here was no proof, Diana well knew, of the presence, now or prospectively, of an equivalent male population in the gentlemen's room; for the requirements of a business party were exactly contrary to the code of a merely social affair where extra men, or at least an even number, were essential. At a party for business, there must be no stag line; every man at every moment must be entertained; there must be extra girls to compete for them.

The girl whom Di knew, but who had not spoken to her, was peering at Di in her hand mirror. She was white-skinned, blue-eyed, blondined and with overstained finger nails.

"'Lo, Rene," hailed Di, pleasantly; and was glad she was here, for Irene Pierce was her understudy although, in another sense, her rival for Jello. She was employed this evening to make it particularly joyful for Sam Metten. A couple of the others occasionally would assist in the cheer, but Irene was paid to specialize on Sam.

She peered at Di but did not speak, being peeved at Jello's pronounced preference for Diana. Not that Rene liked Sam—she shared, indeed, Di's aversion—but he was a man with a choice of two playmates and, invariably, he preferred the other.

Di, fresh from the cab, was perfectly willing that Irene take on Jello first. Di could hear just outside the door an elephantine thumping on the floor which she identified as Jello's toes tapping his boyish eagerness for the dance.

"Shove him from shore," urged Di, generously.

"Oh, Di-anna, Di-anna; don't you hear the pi-anna?" chanted Jello in the tenor falsetto of his lighter moods; and Irene relapsed into her chair.

"I'll jump in," agreed Di, "but for God's sake row out with the water-wings and tow me to the beach." So she sought her partner.

Jello perspired in black broadcloth with wide, plaited shirt bosom already wilted. He was very bald and very nearsighted; when he discarded his glasses, he had to hold his eyes half closed to obtain any clear vision at all.

He squinted at Diana to make sure of her before tucking her under his arm and parading her to a tray of cocktails, which he already had sampled. Di drank one; and danced.

“Oh, Baby!” puffed Jello appreciatively; and Di, dancing, patted gently his fat hand.

Sam soon was steaming up. He had ceased to regret the solo opportunities of the taxi; he greatly preferred a party, after he got there; provided it was a guaranteed, discreet party with no comebacks of reports of him in embarrassing quarters. Sam considered himself a performer; he liked to bring into a group, previously lacking it, a little spontaneous gayness and life.

“I see Meth and Mo have come to our city,” he panted, *sotto voce*, as the music stopped.

“I’ll bite,” offered Di.

“Methuselah and Moses,” explained Sam and pointed them out.

Di identified them, by matching them up with her mental memoranda of Art Slengel’s descriptions of the guests’ physical peculiarities and their business importance, made for her guidance during the evening. Methuselah must be the manufacturer from a small city in Wisconsin; eight thousand a year, he might throw to the Slengels. Moses owned a plant in Iowa capable of consuming perhaps ten thousand dollars worth, yearly, of the Slengel—or the Rountree—product. Neither was to be compared, in present or prospective importance, to the Mettens.

Loudly Di laughed at Jello’s quip, eliciting from Mo’s partner the demand: “Hey, if it’s that good, broadcast it!”

“*Impossible!*” shrieked Di. “Oh you censors!” And she slapped Sam’s fat wrist.

Jello, delighted at the imputation of devilishness, ex-



uberantly swung her off her feet as the encore commenced, and whirled her about him.

The drummer, expert at such parties, was watching the floor with especially vigilant eye to the fat, bald Lothario who, controlling a business of half a million, was worth all the others in the room. Instantly he beat a roll on the snare drum, timed to the swing of Di in Jello's grasp. It aided in the excitation of Methuselah, who not unnaturally was slightly sensitive as to his obvious years and who determined to deny them by a feat of perilous emulation.

Age, however, had diminished him to a meager, bony frame, undoubtedly to be envied, on the score of longevity, in comparison with Jello's but deplorably deficient in avoirdupois to qualify him as a competent pivot about which to swing a hundred-and-ten-pound girl. He started bravely and beautifully enough, with a snare drum accompaniment tempting him on to increased efforts by its cheering crescendo, br-r-r-at-atat-tat.

Meth tried to meet the challenge of speed and acceleration. He swung his partner from the floor, turned with her, spun with her. Faster rattled the snare drum, and Methuselah tried to keep up. His spirit was willing, but his shanks were weak. He twisted his legs, turning, and tripped. Up went his shoes, down went his seat, and he plumped upon the hardwood, his partner sprawling.

Boom! beat the bass drum, celebrating the thump at the finish. "Attaboy; attaboy!" shrilled Jello, in high humor, while Mo, of Iowa, started to him, out of the sympathy of common years. Art Slengel also hurried toward him, but Methuselah waved them away. He refused first

aid, to scramble up and limp after his partner, beckoning to her to try it again.

“Game girl!” Jello audibly approved her compliance; and Methuselah caught her and braced himself again. Br-r-at-atat-tat! applauded the snare drum and stayed with him about one turn—two. Then thump! Boom! Boom!

Old Meth, game but groggy, sat up rubbing his bumped head and bowing to the plaudits and laughter. Art Slengel supported him from the floor, patting his back and praising him.

“Now we show 'em,” whispered Jello to Di, and he seized her and started spinning.

Sam was become a triumphant whirling dervish in the center of the floor, with Di a flywheel around him. She shut her eyes. Sam was bent on showing how it should be done, since the clown act was cleared away, and Di, opening her eyes, got skipping glimpses of palms, wallpaper, piano and staring faces. She felt herself slipping in Jello's sweaty hands; she tried to tighten the grasp and he tried to hold her but their fingers failed and she flew from him, tripping, sliding and skimming at last on side and shoulder and cheek over the waxy boards.

Jello, stumbling back, kept his balance and staggered to a divan in a nook before he fell from dizziness. Di turned over and sat up, soiled and shaky in the face of loud applause. She saw Irene cross the spinning room and go to the nook after Jello. Di arose and retired for a wash, re-rouging and repairs.

More determination than distinguished either of her parents, in the little unkempt cottage near the Straits of

Mackinac, sustained Diana Dewitt when she returned to the floor.

Jello was not dancing. He had one-stepped and done his dervish whirl, again, with Irene, but the act had not gone so big at its repetition and he had not thrown Irene. Jello was tired and he rested for refreshment with Irene in his palm-screened nook.

Di, scouting, caught a view and tactfully postponed her intrusion, accepting an invitation to foxtrot from Methuselah who, favoring his left ankle, rejoined the fray.

Under the conditions, Meth was not a bad dancer; but he talked about his children in Wisconsin and explained, twice, that he was a widower—thereby proving, if further testimony were needed, that he was new to a party. It took very little indeed to make him feel hopelessly compromised.

He kissed Di, clumsily and with an air of rising to expectations, when they went to their nook, and he was so fussed that she sat further from him and held his hand, merely to tell his fortune. He was going to make a business change, she assured him, which would bring him prosperity and peace of mind.

Meth agreed that he was making a change; he said plainly that he was giving his business to the Slengels. He liked Art for helping him from the floor; besides Art had told him not to worry about the sprained wrist of his partner. Slengels would take care of it.

Di saw in his old eyes fear of his reputation in his little town. Suppose the girl followed him to sue him for the sprain or other injuries. His account was in the bin, and



the lid nailed down, and nothing more need to be done about him. Di was rather sorry for him.

She was not at all sorry for Jello. Her cheek felt rough and itchy under its rouge and she suspected that a shoulder would be black and blue in the morning. Besides, hadn't Sam, after promising her that half million dollar order at another party, failed to deliver it? No matter that maybe he couldn't; he hadn't.

He whistled at her as she passed his sheltering palms, so she looked in and he patted the divan beside him. Under his other arm, he held Irene.

"Come on!" he invited, having been refreshed by highballs until a company of three, provided the other two were girls, no longer composed, for him, a crowd. "Havin' supper soon. Lot's supper. Plenty f'rus all. Come in."

Irene refrained from seconding the invitation but Di did not require such a formality.

"What you been doin' with old Meth—Methuselah?" Sam managed with jealous dignity.

"Talking to him," replied Di, carelessly.

"What tubjects," demanded Jello, with pompous preciseness, "did you such on? What tubjects, I say, did you such on?"

Irene reached for a drink for him, which Di forbade by a shake of the head. In spite of her Rene pushed the glass at him. Di thrust it back, spilling half the highball over Irene's skirt.

"—— you," swore Rene, and dashed the rest over Di.

"Girls!" rebuked Jello, much pleased. "Ladies!"

The whisky and soda trickled in tiny, teasing rivulets

down Di's white shoulders, which Sam found the more fascinating.

"Dewdrops!" he poetized, admiringly.

Di failed to appreciate the embellishment and reached across Jello to slap at Irene, who struck back and clutched Di's hair.

"Ladies!" protested Jello, preserving strictest neutrality as he felt himself the prize for the scratch and scramble. He wanted, however, Di to win him; and she did. At any rate, she was on the divan beside him; Irene was gone. Jello did not question why or where.

"Now you'n me have highball," he suggested comfortably.

"No," refused Di.

"How 'bout supper?"

"Supper," agreed Di.

With it, they had a drink or two, but Di did not let him become insensible. She had brought him home drunk, before; and she knew that there was nothing in a repetition of such an incident to force from brother Phil an O.K. to Sam's signed order. Jello was no aged widower and manufacturer from Wisconsin, to scare himself pink over a mere drink party; nor was Phil one to go into a panic for him.

When she left the party with him alone, he had a flask which, since it would have been surplusage in the studio, he had kept corked. Its contents were sufficient, in quantity and potency, to finish him for the night; and after Di refused it, he started at it.

From within the bend of his fat arm, she watched the flask and his lips. Let him gurgle a little more and his ex-

citement and recklessness would become mere stupidity; his head would drop heavy; he would be "out" for the rest of the night; the taxi-driver would need help merely to deposit him within his door. Then Diana Dewitt would be driven to her own room and to Ellen, much the same girl she had been.

It was calm and quiet in the night with snow smooth and shining in the moonlight as the cab traversed a park. It was like, for a moment, the moon on the snow of the field outside Diana Dewitt's window at home in Hoster.

She saw herself a little girl, kneeling beside her bed to say old, childish prayers—silly things about being always a good girl and her soul being kept while she slept.

Di shut her eyes but they only gave her a glimpse of her mother, pettish and complaining about her own troubles but always with a fond, lingering touch for Di. "Good," her mother wanted her to be. "Good." Her mother made a sort of fetish about being good. When she was younger, many a man with money had liked her. "But," her mother used to say, when she boasted of this, "whatever else I got or ain't, I got that. I've always been a good woman."

Well, what had it brought her?

The gin gurgled from the flask. Here was the Metten order; half a million, maybe, going, going. . . . Di snatched quickly and knocked the flask from him, and the gin drained upon the floor.

Jello bent for it but she blocked him; and he swore at her. "That's all I got."

"I know it."

"What y'do that for?"



Di looked up at him, and he forgot the flask to stare down at her.

“You’re goin’ to give me somethin’ for that!” he threatened her.

Di’s eyes merely widened.

With both his fat arms, he enveloped her.

Two minutes later, he tapped upon the pane behind the driver. It was to announce a different destination.

### XIII

Jay set out to establish his first connection with a payroll, encouraged by a wife eloquent with hopes contrary to those usually entertained upon such an occasion. Lida hoped his father wouldn't employ him and that Jay, after having offered to go to work and having been refused, would feel satisfied with the gesture.

Lida had awakened, after he had dressed, and beckoned him to her bed where she had extended her white arms to him.

"Try to be through with him in time to catch the Century, Jay," she urged. "I'll have us packed."

Her temporary enthusiasm for Chicago, surprised in her by the revelation of the lake and the floe a gleam under the moon, was quickly worn. The lake, under daylight, did not develop any diversions; it was scenery in winter.

The city was not impressive to a New Yorker. It was flat and smoky; the people talked just like their streets, Lida observed, with flat, noisy, uninteresting voices; and they kept themselves simply spattered with business.

"You never see a gentleman, born here," she told her husband coolly. "Every man who isn't working apologizes for it or looks like he expected to be arrested, no matter how much he has. It's the slave psychology. It simply screams out loud how recently you've all been scraping. You can't get away from it in Chicago, so you love it and praise it—like your rotten weather."

"I was born here," Jay reminded her.

Lida nodded. "Yes; that's my trouble. If you were an Englishman, now—if you'd generations and centuries behind you when you'd never been anything but a gentleman—you'd have the confidence and pride in yourself to use your wife's money. You'd not only use it; you'd demand it. Imagine an Englishman marrying me without seeing to a big settlement on himself first."

"Hmhm," said Jay. "You'd have respected me for that?"

"It would show you respected yourself."

"You'd have liked an Englishman like that," he said, not putting it as a question, but a statement of realization. "Well, the English certainly get away with it."

"Because they know what's in them."

"What's in me, unless I show something by working?"

"Chicago," said Lida, hopelessly. "Go down and see what the Mettens gave you; and what your father'll give you for it."

Jay went to breakfast, upon this morning, not in the hotel dining-room at a dollar-fifty for cereal, egg and coffee, but in a cafeteria a few blocks away in the company of clerks and stenographers where he saved a subtraction of a dollar and fifteen cents.

How it would amuse Lida's bright, black eyes to witness this bit of economy! It would not amuse at all the steady, gray eyes of the girl to whom he was going and who had suggested to him, so gently, that he "grow up." By going into business, she meant, by taking another attitude, than his own, toward business. What was his own attitude? Not Lida's surely.



He sat in his chair, with his coffee on the wide arm beside him, and smiled at the idea of Lida's imaginary English husband here. Of course he wouldn't be, but would be sound asleep beside his wife, with his boots outside the door. When he awakened, he would order, haughtily, breakfast for two in their room—on her money. And every hostess would fall over herself in her haste to entertain them. He would patronize the men, and they would like it and brag that they knew him.

Nothing fanciful in that picture; it would merely be history repeating itself. Jay laughed a little; certainly there was something to be said for Lida's theory, if a man could get away with it within himself.

His father's idea was pretty much the polar opposite—work, keep everlastingly at it; long hours and close attention to detail; go to bed tired; and rise to work. This never had made any appeal to Jay; he always had combated it. He believed in some work but in joy, too; short hours and plenty of play and pleasure. He had taken, in college, too much, perhaps, but he felt that altogether he was more right than his father. He had felt, also, that the one other person who knew most about him, although she worked with his father, in general agreed with him. Her suggestion that he "grow up" was her first personal pronouncement of any sort of criticism of him throughout the many months she had known his most intimate affairs and had had to deal with them. It was, indeed, her first personal intrusion, except when she had cried a little, talking to him, on the morning in the office when he had taken upon himself . . . Lida. Consequently, except when he had been with her, he had never given Ellen Powell

much thought. He had never had reason to; she always had approved him.

He swung along Michigan Avenue in a cold, raw wind under gray, gloomy clouds comprising weather which Chicagoans, making the best of it according to their slave psychology, called invigorating. From a less practical point of view, and probably a more honest one, it was rotten weather, Jay admitted. He was hurrying along, hoping that this morning Phil Metten, making good on his hints of yesterday, would send over a big order, which would be a reward for social favors extended—and that was rather rotten, Jay thought. What had been behind those gray eyes of Ellen Powell when she had said “grow up”?

He entered the office, determined not to be affected by strictures upon his marriage, because his father did not know the facts of it, but he hoped for no discussion of Lida. And there was, immediately, none.

His father, who was at the desk with Ellen, arose and she slipped away. His father extended a hand, slowly and with a grave, steady inspection. In spite of being affected by the solemnity of it, Jay tried to study this reception according to his knowledge of lines his father would adopt. A visit with Stanley Alban was, especially in these last years, an emotional and prayerful event. Beyond doubt, his father had discussed the marriage with his old, ailing friend; beyond doubt, they had prayed together over Jay and, probably together, decided what was to be done about him. It was a guess, only; yet Jay felt sure of it; and the idea of the two disposing of him, and without knowing all the facts, offended him.

"I'm the prodigal son," he said to himself. "They've agreed to forgive me." And he asked, as soon as he had spoken formally to his father, "How's Mr. Alban?"

"Not at all well."

"You mean he's very bad?"

"Comfortable enough," replied his father. "He may go on as he is for a year; he may be gone to-morrow."

"Sorry," said Jay, pressing slightly his father's hand and with the offense gone from him. Sincerely old Stanley and his father were friends, he knew, though he felt no force, for himself, in the tie of emotionalism and religiosity which bound them. To pray together was simply their way of seriously deciding a question. He had wanted to ask whether his father had brought back the Alban business but he did not and, indeed, he needed not. He knew that relations remained much what they had been.

"How's Lew?" he inquired.

"How is your wife?" asked his father.

"Fine," said Jay.

"You have not yet come home."

Not moved to the house, his father meant.

"No," said Jay.

"It will welcome you," assured his father, withdrawing his hand. "You will both be over this evening."

"I want to talk business with you," said Jay, seating himself on the edge of the desk as his father resumed his chair.

"What do you mean by business?"

"Payroll," replied Jay plainly.

"I will employ you," his father offered. "Your place is with me." And Jay recognized in this an echo of discus-



sion and prayer with old Stanley. "Good Lord," he thought and realized how rigid was the decision regarding him. It made him want to break away; but already, in a sense, he had been at work. He remembered Metten.

"An order come over from Mettens this morning?" he asked.

"No."

"Not yet, I guess," said Jay; and now he inquired, "By the way, the Alban account all right? Lew trying anything?"

He saw his father color slightly. "Lew is not yet in control," said John Rountree, vengefully. "I will start you in the stockroom."

"What at?"

"Learning stock."

"I meant the pay envelope."

"There will be consideration of your necessities," said his father. Another echo of the prayer, thought Jay. "I will pay you fifty dollars a week. Also you—both of you—can have your home with me."

It was generous, Jay very well knew: a home, for his wife and himself, without expense and with more pay than any one else, purely as an employer, would offer him at the start; yet it was, under the circumstances, impossible. What was, for him, feasible?

"Thanks, father," he acknowledged, uneasily.

"What did you expect? You must learn stock before you can sell."

"Lowry sent me some money at Tryston," Jay reminded. "Did I earn any of it?"

His father reddened and looked down. "That has been charged off," he said. "Not charged to you."

He rang for Ellen and Jay recognized the signal that he would take up his own work.

"It ought to be charged to selling," said Jay, in spite of Ellen's presence in the room, "for it sold Metten. We got a two-weeks order out of it, anyway. Ask Lowry."

His father looked up at him.

"I know I've got to start, father; but I've already begun. I want to go on and land the rest of that Metten account. I'll never land it in the stockroom."

"How shall I put you on the payroll?" his father demanded. "As a golf player? Shall I put on your wife, too?"

Jay went fiery red. "Not my wife," he said.

"Why not? She seems to have done as much as you." And he turned to Ellen and gave her directions.

Jay waited in the room, apparently looking at the newspaper but listening and attending. He caught a change in his father's voice since, months ago, he had lingered thus in the office with business going on. His father's certainty of himself, reasserted positively enough when he was stirred to personal argument, was lacking; a confidence was gone. It bothered Jay to feel it; finally he arose and went into the general offices, to return after his father passed on the way to the plant.

"What happened to him down at Stanley?" he demanded of Ellen.

"He just managed to bring back the business," said Ellen frankly.

"Do you know anything?" Jay challenged her.

She knew, through Di, a good deal; she knew the sneers and jibes at Mr. Rountree for holding the Alban business through his church and prayer meeting association with his old friend. She would not tell that, but some of it showed in her eyes.

"I think," said Ellen, "Lew Alban was as unpleasant as he could be."

"He'll not bring father to his knees," denied Jay.

"The order—I've seen it—" said Ellen, "is cancelable on ten days notice. There's no way to figure our running without it . . . if it's not replaced."

"It'll be replaced."

"Yes," said Ellen, looking up at him and catching breath quickly. "Don't go to the stockroom. Learn the shapes, sizes, qualities, prices, of course; but they're mostly in a book. You can carry them in your pocket. Don't let him keep you in the stockroom."

"No," said Jay; and it was like a promise to her. Without either of them consciously approaching, they had drawn together so that they almost touched. Warm, clear color spread over her cheek: her forehead. What a fine forehead she had with her hair parted near the pretty point of a widow's peak. What large, steady eyes lovely with thought.

"I'm married," suddenly he said to himself; and the next second, it startled him. Why, close to her, gazing down at her, disposing with her of himself, had he thought of that? Married! Why had it occurred to him? Because this girl, with her eyes so lovely with tenderness and thought, was become at this moment woman to him?



Lida. He thought of her urging him away, hoping he'd be through with his father, and that his father would have refused him, in time to catch the Century to-day to New York—on her money, as an English husband might have done.

He smiled, looking down into Ellen's eyes; and she crimsoned with confusion and drew back, thinking he was laughing at her. He was laughing at Lida's slave psychology with her opinion of Chicago and work. He wanted to tell Ellen Powell of it and say that he was not laughing at her, but he could not do this so he turned it into a smile at himself.

"Am I growing up a little?" he asked Ellen.

"A little," said Ellen; and in her confusion, fled.

## XIV

Left to herself in her little room, Ellen put up no pretense of working; she had felt again, and more undeniably, a flow of response from Jay, and the tasks of her head and hands were become of no importance to her.

She could not be calm or still under the excitement of his notice of her; it had been brief and constrained but overwhelming in its separation from every other sensation. It set her supposing. Suppose it increased! Jay would be about the office daily and in and out with his father; he and she would be frequently together; and now he noticed her as a woman.

She glanced over the business letters heaped upon her desk, only to ignore them. Where was he gone? To his wife?

“His wife,” Ellen whispered to herself, in reminder that he had married. He had done it without love, she believed, yet for whatever reason he had taken Lida Haige, she was his wife.

Ellen had become a city girl too recently to have exchanged, with her clothing, her ideas. She had substituted, even in winter, silk for wool overwear and underwear. Outwardly she conformed to metropolitan appearance; she went about in short fur jacket, offering silk stockings and oxfords to the winter wind, showing as trim an ankle and as slender a leg as any girl of the Avenue; but she clung to dreams about marriage which had been dreamt first in the hillside home where one woman waited upon

and waited for one man with whom, God sparing him, she would go to the end of her life.

The land of her home was fashioned for fidelity—a sparse, sandy farmland settled by couples who had little company but each other, who had to bear with each other and count upon each other, whatever happened, if they were to survive at all. Marital faithfulness was, therefore, no pretty bit of virtue for them; it was necessity; and they scorned and cast out transgressors.

A city of three millions made no such rigorous requirements; city people prospered according to a different code, as Di swiftly had discovered. Di was adapting herself; Ellen was not and would not. To her, marriage must remain a permanent relation, entered into once and for all. It formed, incomparably, the transcendent act of a girl's life. She came in contact with, only to deny, the idea of it held by girls born and bred like Lida under conditions which never made of constancy anything more serious than a matter of choice and where marriage was only one of the innumerable expedients of a girl's social career.

Accordingly Ellen did not think of Lida's relation with Jay from Lida's point of view; she thought of Lida as likely to claim Jay for life. Yet in spite of this—indeed while feeling it—Ellen went to her mirror in the coat closet to see how she had looked to Jay this morning when he had gazed so at her. She needed powder and, opening her compact, she was reminded of Di, who had not returned to their room before Ellen left for the office.

Nor had Di been located when Ellen had phoned an hour ago; however, now she was in.



"She's asleep; and she'd best be left to sleep; she needs it," reported the landlady over the wire.

Ellen agreed that Di should not be disturbed; and when she learned from Mr. Lowry that Mr. Sam Metten was absent from his office, she assumed that Jello, also requiring rest, was profiting from a similar respect for sleep. The situation, whatever it was, evidently paralyzed progress on the issuance of orders.

"Anything new?" Mr. Rountree inquired of Ellen, when he returned from the plant late in the afternoon; and she was sure that he meant, "Is the Metten order in?" but he would not admit his anxiety over it.

"Nothing," said Ellen.

"Where is my son?"

"He's in the stockroom. Do you want him?"

"No. Put him on the payroll; fifty dollars a week. Make out the slip."

While writing, obediently, the memorandum of the amount to be paid Justin Rountree, weekly, Ellen's fancies flew again to the hotel on the Lake Shore Drive where Jay and his wife dwelt.

Jay had lunch with Lowry and he had spent the afternoon, at the salesman's direction, in the stockroom picking up a casual acquaintance, at least, with the more important shapes, sizes, weights, patterns and prices of the articles which he had sold to Phil Metten, to an amount totaling twenty thousand dollars on the two-weeks order, in total ignorance of the practical details.

Of course Phil was completely familiar with the stock; he had known exactly what he was buying, upon the ma-

terial side of his transaction. This was all standard stuff, indistinguishable (except for the trademark) from the stock upon the Slengels' shelves. The prices of the Rountree company and of the Slengels and of the other chief competitors differed not by a penny, Jay learned; and he thumbed some of the things, not to test the quality, but while thinking over them and himself—and Lida.

As Lowry had suggested to him in a frank interchange during lunch, there was no good reason in God's world why Phil Metten or any one else should come for these things to Rountree rather than to Slengels, except for what went to Phil with the goods. For a time, Lida and Jay Rountree had been going with this stock; Lida and he had been giving Mr. and Mrs. Phil Metten, and the Misses Metten, something which the Slengels could not supply; he had been including rights of society with Lida and himself as a sort of premium with the order . . . .  
Nucast had reached his original association with Lida in a similar fashion.

Jay recoiled from the stock shelves; yet, as he gazed about, he was surprised with the force of a conflicting sensation. As long as he could remember anything, he had known the look of these neat, precise piles of "parts." His first expedition into the city, of which he had any recollection, had been to the plant and to the whir and hum of marvelous machines at which stood countless men, in straight rows, working. Upon that unforgettable occasion, and nearly always afterwards, a switch-engine tooted outside pushing and pulling at cars which were loaded with Rountree goods. Big boxes slid and tumbled, most thrillingly, down long, shiny chutes.

Jay had been allowed to "work" in the shipping room, sometimes hammering long nails into box covers, sometimes delightfully and proudly daubing black paint through the stencils; but put on his honor, consequent to the discovery of certain private experiments, not to ride crates down the chutes.

Here upon maps of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia were the spots of bright-headed pins showing Rountree shipping points. Here, that impulse of proprietorship stirred unwittingly by Lida, when she had laughed at him in Tryston, whipped up in him at the thought of a definite threat to these things.

"There's no way to figure the factory running without the Alban order, or the Metten order to replace it," Ellen Powell had put the threat into words for him.

The plant closed and silent; the shiny chutes empty; the switch-track deserted by the tooting engine; no boxes and crates, in shipment to New York, London, Paris, Buenos Aires, Singapore, or Tokio. The pins in the map of the two hemispheres would represent past performance only in the Rountree family; the Slengels, in their map, would thrust fresh, triumphant pins.

Jay's pulses pricked with the instinct of fight for these things; it was the feeling that Lida summed up in her epithet of the "Chicago" in him. It was amusing and irrational, when you got outside yourself—if ever you really got outside yourself—to assert that Jay Rountree should stay in Chicago, because he had been born here, and set to selling these things, because his father and grandfather had made them. The Jay Rountree on the



train on the way home from Harvard would have denied it emphatically.

The day was over; it was time to go home—home to his wife in their hotel rooms and tell her how he had started work.

He recollected how at Tryston, she had told him of Anaconda, in which she owned stock, but she hadn't the slightest idea where Anaconda was, she had said; and Jay wondered if she knew for certain *what* it was—a mine or a snake farm. But she knew exactly where to find it on the ticker.

She would sell out, or some one would sell out for her, the instant an attack endangered the stock. She would call any one crazy who held on for sentiment and offered to fight for the company, instead of selling as swiftly as a broker could offer her shares. Then she would buy, with total lack of sentiment, stock in a railroad or a bakery or a cement plant, well located on the ticker.

Lida certainly was not sentimental when money was at stake. That was New York in her.

He found her dressed for dinner, with white shoulders, white arms, white cheeks and red, red lips.

"Dinner is at six-thirty," she informed him, coolly. "We are expected at six."

"Father phoned you?" asked Jay.

"Some one 'speaking for Mr. Rountree,'" quoted Lida, and Jay recognized the mimicry of Ellen's restrained, quiet voice.

"Oh, she talked to you," he said and quickly added, glancing at his wife's décolleté: "It's a family dinner."

"I want to rise," returned Lida, "to my father-in-law's expectations of me."

"Put on a sleeved dress," said Jay. "I'm going as I am."

"To the opera?" inquired Lida.

"Is father taking us to the opera?"

"'Mr. Metten has bought a nice box at the opera; for six people,'" replied Lida and again Jay recognized a quotation, this time in imitation of Mrs. Philip Metten's best diction. "'He got it to-day for to-night. It is a good opera, with four fine singers.' She asked us also to dinner," Lida slipped into her own speech. "I told her dinner was impossible."

"So is the opera," said Jay, a little impatiently.

"Is it?" inquired his wife, innocently. "I didn't know at what time one retired after six-thirty dinner."

Jay took no offense; the jeer was, too clearly, a bit of protective armor for Lida against his father's opinion of her.

"By the way, my pay was fixed to-day," he said and waited for his wife to ask its figure; but Lida confessed not the slightest curiosity. So he told her: "It's fifty a week."

"Cents?" inquired Lida.

Jay looked at her and smiled. "I'm going to take a shot at living on it; but I'm not supposing you will."

"I?" repeated Lida. "I?"

"Your money," said Jay, "of course is yours to spend on yourself; but I can't spend it. We've got to agree on that. We can take diggings somewhere where I can manage the rent; I'll handle my personal expenses and also whatever we do together."

“What a lot you must be planning to do with me!”

“It can’t be much—at first, Lida,” he said.

“You don’t care!”

“I do. D’you suppose I’d not like to bring you money, tell you to do what you please, live where you please?”

“With you, Jay?”

“Of course with me.”

She approached him and seized his hands with her tingling touch on his fingers. “D’you want me with you here? If you loved me, Jay, what’d I care about Chicago? Damn the smoke, damn the dull, slaving people here—if you love me! There’d be a kick in diggings with you on fifty a week! Shall we try it? . . . But you got to love me! You got to love *me!* Grab me! Like you *had* to! . . . God, I knew it. You’re no good in this place. You belong here.” She thrust back from him. “I’ll put on my sleeved dress. You change to a clean collar and we’ll go to dinner.”

She slammed the door of her room, shutting him out, and he stood gazing after her, aware of the collapse of his response to her and his inability to re-arouse it. She assigned it to Chicago, to his submission, upon this return, to the dominion of made and sold things.

Lida’s phone rang and he heard her answer. She was speaking, he suspected, to Mrs. Philip Metten, who would be following up her invitation to the opera, and he realized that consequences to be counted by hundreds of thousands of dollars, in the dominion of made and sold things, might hang upon the nature of Lida’s response; upon whether or not she affronted Mrs. Philip Metten. But he did not interfere. Lida’s voice reached him, not in artic-



ulate words, but in tones of refusal and refusal more positive again. Then it ceased.

When she emerged, in her sleeved dress, she was coolly oblivious to the call, and Jay did not bring himself to question her about it. He took her to a taxi before he recollected that he could not afford it for transportation of a few blocks on a clear, dry evening.

He had looked in at home a couple of days before and he had driven Lida past the house, but she had not cared to enter; accordingly, when Beedy opened the door, she paid her first visit.

Beedy was faultless, bearing himself with more dignity, indeed, than did the man in Lida's home in New York. This and the sombre melancholy of the big hall surprised and slightly constrained Lida. The place felt older, far, than a Park Avenue apartment and over the wide hallway presided two portraits. Jay took Lida's coat and handed it with his own to Beedy while Lida examined the serious countenance of a handsome, black-haired man, portrayed with a lilt of life for all the dogged earnestness of set lips.

"Who hired Sargent?" inquired Lida.

"That's grandfather," said Jay, a bit proudly.

"Heaven, I suppose," observed Lida, "was quite a locality with him." And she turned to the solid likeness of a gray-haired, bearded patriarch. "That's Stanley Alban," explained Jay. "My grandfather's best friend."

Lida dipped into her husband's pocket for a cigarette and, lighting it, she completely cleared away her momentary oppression. "California by covered wagon in '49?" she inquired, peering over the match at the portrait.

"No," said Jay. "Just Illinois."

"Of course," apologized Lida, "Now I have him. He knew Lincoln."

Upon the signal of his father's step, Jay plucked the cigarette from his wife's lips and put it between his own; after his father caught sight of them, he snapped it into the fireplace.

"This is Lida, father," he said; and under the look in his father's eyes, his pulses leaped. Lida spoke quickly, but John Rountree deliberately studied her.

"I have been expecting you," he replied, "you both."

"We'd have been earlier," offered Lida coolly, "but I dressed for the opera; when we gave it up, I changed back."

John turned toward the drawing-room, motioning to them to precede him. Lida went ahead but Jay delayed, watching his father, whose eyes followed her, estimating her. Even in her sleeved dress, she contrasted with any wife or daughter of John Rountree's friends entertained in these rooms. Of course, girls of Jay's acquaintance never frequented the house. John glanced at Jay, who held breath briefly.

"Go in with your wife," John said and Jay drew toward her, with an idea of defending her; but Lida was more than equal to the requirements of the moment.

"How had you planned on the opera for to-night?" John asked her.

"The Mettens invited us; they bought a box for us to-day," explained Lida.

"To-day," repeated John and betrayed to his son the momentary flight of his mind to his day of vain waiting for a hint of the disposition of the half million dollar busi-

ness, at the bestowal of the Mettens and which had become essential to him.

He tried to ignore it but he could not; and his daughter-in-law perfectly appreciated the point of vantage she had asserted.

"Mrs. Metten was just talking with me; I got out of her party to-night. But they have the same box for next week and the rest of the season. She asked us for next week," Lida related coolly, "and every week, for the opera and dinner. Shall I be nice to her?"

John had to hesitate before this girl, married to his son, who had come to him in the very contrary of contrition. He was entirely upset, having expected to dispose an advantage over her; instead, she held it over him and displayed it.

"Do you want to accept her invitation?" he asked.

"It's nothing to me," returned Lida. "But one can't slide out of a blanket invitation like that—and leave much behind to be picked up. What do you want me to do about her?"

"How did you leave the matter with Mrs. Metten?" John asked.

"I left it open," said Lida.

Jay interfered. He wanted her to win but not inflict too much humiliation. "That's your and my affair, Lida," he said, saving his father.

Soon Beedy announced dinner and the second-cousin dependents of the house, the Dills, appeared.

Before the table, set with five places, everyone but John delayed. He went to the head. Ann Dill's customary



seat was opposite, except when guests were at the table, when John always honored the woman with the place. Ann led Lida to it but Jay discerned that his father did not approve of this implication of preference.

“Set that place on the side,” he directed Beedy.

Jay warmed. “It’s Lida’s,” he protested; but she laughed.

“Sit on the side with me, Jay,” she bid him. “You know I’ve just dropped in.”

Beedy was waiting and, not being re-commanded, he left things as they were; so, finally, Ann Dill went to the disputed place and Jay and Lida sat side by side.

John repeated grace, and Beedy, faultlessly, served dinner, without wine and without cigarettes at the table. The talk turned into the question and answer of people bent on avoiding the real matter in their minds, but now and then some one skirted it.

“I haven’t known how to make ready your room,” Ann Dill addressed Lida.

“Mine?” said Lida. “Where?”

Jay explained quickly. “Father asked us both to move in,” he told his wife for the first time and, watching the slow stain of color in her cheek, he knew that more fully she felt the incident of the change of the chair.

Jay found himself with little appetite, and his father had none. Here in this room, as long ago as Jay could remember, he had sat with his father alone often, the two of them, at this big, sober table, morning and evening. Here at breakfast, sometimes with the sun streaming in, his father would admonish him upon the elements of suc-

cess in life; from this table, he would send Jay to school and himself depart to his solemn mystery of money-making called business.

Early hours and long days, hard work and unflagging industry were the very stuff of success, his father had assured him; and certainly his father had practiced through life those virtues; but here he was after all his years of early rising and late laboring, with his business at the mercy of Lew Alban's caprice (when old Stanley died) and of a nineteen year old girl's decision as to whether she should affront or flatter the wife of Phil Metten.

The world was changing too fast for him; but, following his momentary halt before Lida's surprising challenge as to her course with Mrs. Metten, he was gathering himself, Jay knew. After dinner he would tell his daughter-in-law what he thought of her and no count of business consequences would modify his moral duty in dealing with her.

Jay drew his wife aside, when they all rose from the table. "Come see my room," he suggested and he led her upstairs.

Upon the walls of his room, once the nursery, lived always in Jay's memory the bright band of Jack and Jill and the Cow jumping over the Moon. Actually they were there, under the new, adult paper, for they had been painted upon the plaster. He told Lida of them, and, telling, he remembered how his eyes had followed them from his small bed in the last light of dusk and the first of dawn.

Often, when he was awake at daybreak, his door would open. (He was not relating this.) His father would come

in; Jay would call to him and leap up with arms out. When he had had to go to bed, before his father was back from the office, he used to try to keep awake (and often succeeded) so as to have his arms about his father's neck, his kiss on his father's cheek. How had so much dropped away? And who had been to blame? Indeed, when had it happened? Gradually, too gradually for Jay to assign so much as a time to it; too gradually, indeed, for him to have realized, at the time, what was going on.

Never had he felt the force of it so much, when his father had been holding the whip over him; but to-night, he—Lida and he—held a certain power over his father; and he did not want it used.

“Lida,” he said—he had closed the door—“father means to go for us.”

“Have you a drink here, Jay?” she asked.

“Not here,” said Jay. “I made an agreement with him not to bring it into the house—outside me.”

“Then give me a cigarette, Jay, and kiss me.”

He kissed her, quivering under his hands at her shoulder blades; he kissed her again; and he lit her cigarette.

“You can make him, Lida, a lot of trouble.”

“Make it for you, too!”

“Yes,” said Jay, “of course for me.”

“I don't want to. Damn it, Jay, I'd stick it and grin in that opera box every night of the week for you, if I could.”

“Lida!”

She thrust back his arms. “No; listen to me. You love this room, don't you?”

“It's been mine; that's all,” said Jay.



"You love this house; you'd be back here, but for me."

"No," denied Jay, stupid in his excitement, not thinking. "I'd be at Harvard."

She went whiter. "Yes; I've smashed you up! You'd take everything your father said and what he'd think of you, wouldn't you? That's you! You'd take it all with me without a word for yourself! . . . Well, you won't!"

He tried to grasp her but she slipped to the door and was out, running down the stairs. The strong smoke of his father's cigar floated from the drawing-room; and she reached sanctuary there. Jay followed and joined her where his father had waited, prepared to deal with them.

"Sit down," John ordered; and Lida instantly obeyed him.

Jay apprehensively remained standing, near her.

"You have become my daughter," John delivered at her.

"Then Jay's mother's son, too," retorted Lida quickly.

"What?" asked John, halted.

Lida repeated and in the same breath explained it: "If you're entitled to me living by your family ideas, she's entitled to him by ours."

It was solely to discomfort his father, Jay realized. Lida's wits were spinning far faster than his. This had flashed to her and she had flung it out to confuse him; but it was nothing to her.

She was on edge for another opening; of what sort, Jay could not anticipate, for she flashed one irrelevance after another, while his father arraigned him and her.

His father told how, long ago, he had found Jay failing in duty and responsibility; how he had battled with Jay's

idleness, godlessness, extravagance, drinking—and worse.

“Worse, I feared, from the company he kept,” charged his father; “I feared, but did not prove until this . . . episode with you.”

Lida started to speak but at this Jay touched her; and his father silenced her by raising his voice: “I am not charging that chiefly to you. Adam’s excuse to God never made, to a man, Eve the chief sinner. I blame my son far more than you; but I blame you.”

Lida sank back.

“Yet I know you are young to blame; the lack in you rose with your rearing and from your idle, profligate friends, your circle never brought up to revere work or know the meaning of self-respect.”

It was at this, when his father was embarked again on generalities and Jay was off guard, that Lida unexpectedly struck.

“There isn’t much of a code left in my crowd, father Rountree,” she admitted to him and he listened, “but there’s this much; a man doesn’t make the girl run all the risk. If she needs a new name, he comes through for her; he gives her a married name for a year or so, anyway.”

She was on her feet and she thrust herself away from Jay.

“That’s not much of the ten commandments but it’s something; and something else goes with it! Nobody in my crowd puts up a man of a different sort to make money out of him. That’s what I ran across when Jay left me in your daughter’s house. You see, her husband had a house guest. He wasn’t your sort but there was business for them in him. I didn’t allow for that; Jay didn’t either. I sup-

posed they thought something of him and had reason to. I found out when I needed a name for a while . . . and his was no use to me.

“So Jay came through for me, do you see? That’s it; God’s truth. All your son ever did was stand before a minister with me. . . . Now I’ve told you. Take me home, Jay; quick, to the hotel!”

He had his arms about her and she ceased to fight him off. His father played no part in their struggle; his father stood apart from them, silenced.

“Justin,” he objected, “Justin!” when Jay led Lida out; but Jay paid no attention to him.

In the cab, Lida kept to a corner. She held his hand; she clung to it constantly and she asked: “Let’s not talk about it.”

At the hotel, in their suite, she opened the door from his room to hers; there he came to kiss her.

“Don’t kiss me again, Jay,” Lida said. “I’ve kissed you good-by; and I want to keep it.”

“Good-by, Lida?”

“Yes; in your room at home, where you were a little boy. That was good-by; didn’t you feel it?”



## XV

Ellen waited through the morning for Jay. Of course she did her work for Mr. Rountree but, throughout it, she was waiting. Where was Jay? Noon passed; and his father offered no comment upon his absence.

She had determined, during the night, upon the attitude which, henceforth, she must maintain toward Jay in these days when he and she would be cast into more frequent and intimate association than ever before. She must be close to him, and work with him impersonally. She imagined that she could assume an impersonal attitude toward him. She even had practiced it, repeating to herself words she would say to him. She wanted to start with him to-day, when she was thus prepared; and he did not appear.

He entered with his father, upon the next morning, and at sight of them together, she discerned that something unknown to her had happened. Mr. Rountree's manner with Jay was changed; it had been, always, critical or censorious; now it was less so. Jay was quieter and more considering.

He struck a sort of compromise between his father's plan for his employment and his own. He was assigned, definitely, to the sales force and to the direction of Mr. Lowry, but his immediate occupation was with the files in his father's and in Ellen's own little office, where he spent hour after hour, meeting her prepared impersonal-

ness with one of his own not especially planned. Something had happened to him. What?

It was through the business, and the immediate instrumentality of Di, that days later Ellen learned.

Di was become serenely indolent about the room and, apparently, completely independent of outside demands upon her time; but she paid promptly her half of the weekly expenses, together with all arrears; also she had dispatched a hundred dollars in the form of a gift to her mother, as Ellen ascertained when Di flung her, carelessly, the letter of thanks.

Pansy had written a pæan of gratitude and praise to her daughter completely devoid of any anxiety as to the means of the abrupt improvement of Di's fortunes. The letter left Ellen with little to say or do about Di's scheme of life, which promised any real result.

"Well, it didn't last long," Di commented from her bed; and Ellen, with the letter in hand, said:

"The money?"

"Oh, that's gone," replied Di, carelessly, and laughed. "I meant Jay's marriage."

"What?"

"Haven't *you* heard?" asked Di, sitting up. "Don't you see him? His wife's gone home."

"Jay's wife? Where?"

"To mamma in Little Old."

"When?" cried Ellen.

"Gawd," said Di, "I was askin' you. Jello just got it to-day."

"How?"

"From Phil. He got it from Mrs. Metten. By the way,

you're still keepin' your door open down at the office, lookin' for the Metten order boy? Don't do it; shut it."

Ellen ignored this. "What did he get from Mrs. Metten?" she demanded.

"That Jay's wife went to New York."

"I don't believe it," said Ellen.

"Neither does Mrs. Phil. That's why it's no use your catchin' cold sittin' in the draft keepin' your door open for a call from Mettens," Di advised. "They've lost your address."

Thereupon Ellen penetrated to the information that Lida Rountree had phoned Mrs. Philip Metten regretting her inability to make any engagements, now or in the future, because she was returning to New York and that Mrs. Metten, suspicious of a slight, awaited corroborative testimony.

"Phil called up the hotel," added Di. "And they checked out of there. But Jay's here."

"Yes," agreed Ellen, "he's here."

"Well, it wasn't exactly necessary for her to pull out. I didn't need it," asserted Di, comfortably, "but of course it didn't make it any harder for me. We got the Metten order, signed *and* countersigned now. You'll be told of it, to-morrow."

Ellen hardly heard this. His wife had left him! So she came to understand his new impersonalness with herself.

She went to bed, with no idea of sleep but because in bed, and with her light out, Di would not talk to her. She had to think. Think? It was not thought which was athrob in her, which thumped so that it seemed Di must



hear. It was not thought which crumpled the edge of the sheet in her clenched hands; it was not thought which tried to toss her but which she controlled so that it only turned her slowly, as if she moved in her sleep, from side to side.

She deceived Di into thinking that she slept. Di ceased to munch marzipan and to read by her bed light; Di arose and moved to her mirror; she opened a drawer and produced a check book.

She had money, plenty of it, money to give away. Ellen did not doubt that Di and the Slengels had obtained the Metten order.

Di ceased to find satisfaction in scrutiny of her check book; she switched on the mirror light and leaned close to the glass, gazing at herself. She saw no change, none that showed. None that betrayed anything; nothing to alarm her; yet she was not reassured. She stole to her bed and back to the mirror for another look into her own eyes, to see what was behind them, what stirred in her soul.

She switched off the mirror light; beside her bed, she switched off the reading light and stood in the dark, cut by vague glints and patterns of shadows from the street. Di, alone in the dead of night, was become afraid of what she had done.

Suddenly she crumpled; she dropped to the floor, catching at the side of her bed and clinging to it. Di sobbed a bit and, like a little child frightened and sobbing, she prayed.

Ellen shut her eyes to see no more; Ellen's lips moved, but she did not make the mistake of speaking, even in a

whisper, to Di. Ellen whispered to her God who also was Di's God, so far as Di remembered any—the God of the little white clapboard church with the belfry exposed to the four winds, sweeping across the point of the Michigan peninsula. Di and Ellen had knelt, children there.

The God of the four winds and the earth and seas, of the stars and the sky, endured with Ellen. When the doubled red flags, with the black square centers, flattened in the gale from the coast guard staffs, when the radio flashed the storm warning and the hurricane signals were set and you knew that your father, with ten thousand tons of iron in his ship, was off the rocky capes of Keweenaw, a girl needed a God to pray to.

A garage mechanic's daughter matured into no such need; God might be only a sudden, flitting panic of midnight memory. Di had recovered herself. She arose and, whistling softly, she went to bed.

The morning completely confirmed Di's claim upon the Metten order. Mr. Lowry himself reported to Mr. Rountree, when Jay and Ellen were present:

"It's signed, sealed and delivered. Slengels start the machines in their addition to-day."

The converse of this was that Rountrees must shut down machines in part of their plant but no one said it. Mr. Rountree listened to Lowry.

"Entertaining beat us and nothing else; the personal angle. Sam Metten appreciates parties; and they certainly gave him plenty—good parties."

"Good?" Mr. Rountree put in.

"Exactly to Sam's taste. Phil had different tastes;

your son held him for a while, then Sam got too strong for us." Lowry knew of Lida's defection but he avoided reference to it. "Slengels figure that this shakes us and they can finish us. They're pointing for Alban now.

"They'll attract some of our little accounts," continued Lowry. "A few little fellows always trail a big one from the house losing him to the house getting him. There's always a bandwagon bunch. Slengels will mop up some of those; but they're after the big one—Alban. They're saying on the street: when they get Alban, they'll put us out."

Mr. Rountree's firmly set lips made no reply or comment but Jay asked: "Is that the way they say it, '*when* they get Alban?' They say 'when'?"

Lowry looked at Jay steadily. "'When,'" he repeated, "was the exact word they used."

Jay followed Ellen into her little room for the ostensible purpose of applying himself to the files; but he did nothing with them. He was feeling fight with an intensity and to a degree strange to him. Previously, when he had thought of "fight," it had meant the sensation aroused in him when he had rowed himself out in a losing boat on the Thames and when, once in a tournament final, he had come to the "turn" four down on a champion and had fought on to win on the last green.

Such sensations suddenly had become childish compared to this. They had supplied him with a simple, almost immediate satisfaction in terms of physical exhaustion or of triumph; this taunted and goaded him, it whipped him up and exasperated him and offered him no ready means of satisfaction at all.



Ellen moved away from him for fear, if she stayed close, she must touch him; or without actual contact, she might show, even without another look at him, the heat of her heart. She slipped into her seat before her typewriter and spread her notebook open, but her fingers were useless at the keys.

"Lew Alban appreciates parties," Jay said.

"Yes; he's been to some of the Slengels'."

"How do you know?"

She jumped, it was so personal to her. She, how did she know?

"Lew told you?" asked Jay, without waiting for her answer.

"Di told me," said Ellen. "Diana Dewitt. I room with her."

"I remember," he said. "She works for Slengels."

"They gave her a party job. I told you. She's the one who beat you. You—you know how you were beaten, I suppose?" asked Ellen with her face burning.

"I know how they got Sam," replied Jay. "We weren't competing on him; we were specializing on Phil."

By we, he might mean the firm but he meant, Ellen knew, his wife and himself.

"Lew will be the only one to compete for on the Alban account, soon," said Ellen.

"I wish to God we could give him the gate!"

"No you don't," denied Ellen and saw the slow, deeper flush of shame underflow the redness of his excitement. "Do you?" she asked him, in her suddenly gentle, sweet way.

"Not if you say I don't," he acknowledged this.

"You'd not dodge him," said Ellen, almost as though speaking to herself, and his shame was gone. He'd not dodge Lew, she meant, because Lew had attained a power over him which Jay Rountree hated to acknowledge. Lew was become necessary to him; he was in no way necessary to Lew; it was humiliating to be in such a situation, but it was business to meet it and deal with it.

Ellen spun about quickly. This was not being impersonal with him—far from it!

"Lew Alban," she said. "will be harder to handle than Jello. . . . Sam Metten," she corrected quickly, "for the Slengels as well as for us."

"How?"

"He's not so simple. I know him, you see. He talks to me."

"Does he?" said Jay.

"I don't like him," continued Ellen, without looking about but, under his eyes, she flushed hot; and she was relieved when he said: "I've moved. Do you know?"

"I didn't," said Ellen. She wanted to look up at him but she bent to her notebook. "Where?" she asked.

"I'm on East Pearson Street; in what, d'you suppose?"

"What?"

"Studio. You can get away with less room, less show and service and less rent, if you call it that."

"Does your wife paint?" asked Ellen. Then he told her:

"She's in the East. She went the other day. No, neither of us paints. The place hasn't a palette, or a smock. It just was a studio and now is diggings at low rent. Roof of my own, that's all."

Why had his wife left? For how long? Or was she to be back? These questions crowded to Ellen's tongue but she bit her lip and smoothed with cold fingers the pages of her notebook.

He went out bearing image of her small, slender figure bent over her book. She had been in blue, as she often was about the office, a plain, pretty dress with piping of white at the throat and cuffs; and he thought of her hair wound round her head.

Ellen, obliged to answer her questions herself, accordingly believed that the roof of his own meant that his wife would return; and she thought of him in his diggings that night, awaiting her.

Jay was under his own roof, but he was not awaiting Lida. He might go to her but she would never return to Chicago. He knew that his own roof was, in fact, little more than a gesture, an offer of a place for her with him. Lida was bent on escape; not from him, for she wanted him with her, but from all that here held him and to-night doubly bound him: for Rountree and Son, having lost Metten, was in danger; Rountree and Son—his father and he—were at the mercy, now, of Lew Alban. And Ellen Powell was right; he couldn't, and he wouldn't, dodge it.



## XVI

Lew Alban arrived in town at precisely the most effective and agreeable moment for himself. He did not make the mistake of hastening upon the heels of disaster; he gave the Rountrees time to feel the full force of it and to appreciate the calamity if they lost, at one stroke, the bulk of their remaining business.

Jay was on the street, selling or trying to sell, but he was gaining, chiefly, experience, and a point of view. He had made up a list of prospects, for his personal attention, compiled from golfers and from Harvard, Yale and Princeton people who had been, or who might by any chance become, customers; and in five weeks, he brought in one new order.

“Look at it,” he bid Ellen, laying it upon her desk. “A wonderful order—two hundred dollars gross. We’ll net maybe ten dollars.”

“But it’s a start with Howarth-Lyman,” said Ellen. “We haven’t sold them anything at all for eight years.”

Jay nodded. “I squeezed that out through Ken Howarth. He was in the Yale boat; was with him in New London, once. You know I’d have starved, or have taken a job as a waiter in a restaurant, before I’d have gone to Ken Howarth to help me out with ten dollars, because I knew him rowing; but I went to him a couple of weeks ago on that introduction and to-night, because he knew me rowing, I have his order. That’s business.”

Ellen's steady eyes studied him. "It doesn't bother you now."

"It bothers me like the devil that it's not bigger," said Jay. "I hear Lew Alban is on his way to us."

"He'll be here Monday," said Ellen. "There's only one train from Stanley in the morning. It's early. Meeting him?"

"At the train?" asked Jay. "Me?"

"Art Slengel will probably be there," said Ellen. "Your father won't; and Mr. Lowry's out of town."

Jay set his alarm clock that night for rising earlier and, as he pointed the signal hand, he thought of that hour as Ellen Powell's for him. Lida's morning hour for him and for herself, he remembered, lay far along the dial; Lida, with all her lilt and liveliness, liked late rising and to loll in the room, bathing and breakfasting in luxurious leisure.

He recollected it, almost with surprise, as he dressed in his room cold from the night. Lida, far away, would not be cold; she had slipped away from New York, indeed, and was on the Wilmerdons' yacht in the Caribbean or perhaps she was ashore now at St. Lucia or Barbados. She had written him her itinerary in the letter which had announced her departure as an accomplished fact; for she had sailed before he received her letter. Two weeks ago that was, so now, unless the whim of the party had changed, they might be at St. Lucia.

It reminded Jay of Levuka. Lida had wanted him to go with her to Levuka; instead she was in the palm groves of St. Lucia—with whom? He ran over her mention of the other guests: four men; two with their wives,

two with none. Jay knew the one named Thurston: lots of money; lots of time; and he liked Lida. Jay had met him at Lida's school.

Jay hurried, without breakfast, to meet Lew Alban's train; for at this hour, Lew would not have breakfasted. Jay meant to take Lew to the Club. It was rotten weather and not even a Chicago slave could deny it; cold, low clouds and a hanging haze of smoke which demanded street lamps and motor headlights and permitted hardly a hint of the dawn. But Ellen Powell, Jay considered, was rising to go out in it.

Art Slengel was at the train-gate. "Hello, Rountree," hailed Slengel and offered a gloved hand and smiled.

He was ten years older than Jay and entirely sure of himself; he was tall and broad, in a new, heavy, tailored overcoat, fur-lined. Sleek hair he had and pink skin, close-shaven. You knew a barber always shaved him and scented him slightly, too; he smoked, rolling between thick lips, a cigar upon which he left the band.

Jay, shaking hands, could not keep from making a Harvard estimate of him. Never would he be elected to the Institute of 1776, not even in the last ten to be taken; never, never to "Dicky" or to the "Hasty Pudding."

Slengel was making a business estimate of Jay; and business was the issue between them. Never would Jay get Lew Alban for breakfast, Slengel thought—and Jay didn't. Lew descended and was glad to see Jay and somewhat surprised. He commented upon it. "Meet all trains now, Jay?" he inquired.



"Not quite," said Jay.

"Message for me?" Lew gibed him. "Or something like that?"

"No."

"What's happened?"

There was nothing, as all three knew, but that Lew Alban had become president of the company whose business was essential to Rountree and that Jay was in business. He made the best of this by saying: "I'm working now, Lew."

"Don't overdo, Jay," advised Lew and, turning to Slengel, went off with him.

It seemed to Jay, as he sat down to a twenty cent cafeteria breakfast, that Ellen Powell and he had made a mistake; he had offered Lew merely amusement at his expense. But that had pleased Lew, he realized; it was what Lew wanted and Lew appreciated it the more because it was before Art Slengel. Jay ceased to feel that he had accomplished nothing by his trip to the station. Certainly he had not dodged Lew; and he reported to Ellen Powell: "He's in town; and Art Slengel was there and got him."

"We'll see him here," prophesied Ellen; and at mid-afternoon, Lew called on Mr. Rountree, respectful enough in externals. He walked in without knocking, but he always had done that, and that was supposed to imply intimate friendship, not disrespect.

He spoke to her, after he had greeted Mr. Rountree, and his eye, unnoticed by Mr. Rountree, roved to her frequently.

"Slengels wanted to show me through their plant

again," he commented. "They've a new unit, you know, just equipped."

Of course Mr. Rountree very well knew; it was the unit manufacturing for Metten.

Mr. Rountree resorted to personal talk about Lew's father, which opened the way for Lew to inquire: "How's the boy getting along? He certainly rises early. . . . His wife rejoined him?"

"She's cruising, with family friends, in the Caribbean," replied Mr. Rountree, and took up details of business between his company and Alban. Lew disposed of these quickly. He liked to be swifter than the man he dealt with. Over the shop-sheets, which Mr. Rountree lengthily studied, Lew looked at Ellen.

He was no man to possess power over others, but how much he held over Mr. Rountree and over Jay—and her! How much more than when, last, he had sat in the office eyeing her over shop-sheets! How much more she felt it.

Ellen did not flatter herself that she was more attractive, femininely, than other girls who were undoubtedly obtainable by Lew, but she knew the type of man that cares nothing for the cheaply obtained. It was the type that liked to destroy, and to destroy no easily bought stranger but one who had long defied and delayed him and upon whom he had often looked. It was this which, vaguely, she had realized and which had underlain her remark to Jay that Lew Alban would not be as simple for the Slengels as Sam Metten. Jello had delighted in Diana and had allowed her to compromise him, but Di would be a trifle to Lew.

Jay entered and, barely noticed by Lew, he sat at one side to await the finish of Lew's business with his father.

"You'll step over to the shop with me?" Mr. Rountree invited Lew.

"I've seen a shop to-day," reminded Lew subtly taunting; and Mr. Rountree left him to Jay and her.

"I'll take you up home," offered Jay, pleasantly, for Lew was to endure a perfunctory dinner with Mr. Rountree.

"What's up at your house now?" inquired Lew and glanced at Ellen. "I've some letters."

"All right," said Jay, and arose. Ellen always did Lew's letters when he was in Chicago; she kept for him sheets of the Alban stationery, which she produced, with hands slightly unsteady.

Jay noticed this and looked up at her. What excited her? he wondered. She possessed a calmness and a quality of poise, ordinarily, beyond any other girl he knew. It was what made her so satisfactory and companionable in a talk over affairs gone wrong; but she was upset, for this moment. He wondered about it and went out.

Ellen took her seat with notebook open and waited. with the disquiet, which Jay had seen, astir within her. Lew kept her waiting. She arose and, to occupy herself, set to straightening Mr. Rountree's desk. Lew Alban's eyes were on her, watching her face and her hands and looking down, as he always did, at her legs. He was blowing smoke rings at her.

"You're a mighty good business girl," he spoke to



her at last, "but you don't look it a bit." He awaited reply from her, but she disappointed him; she thought he had no letters! "You look like a girl laying her lace and linen in her hope chest instead of shop-sheets in a drawer. How is the hope chest?"

"I haven't one," denied Ellen, fluttering.

"How about the hopes?"

"None," said Ellen. Ordinarily she would have ignored him; but she did not, under the sway of the excitement which had seized her and was increasing visibly—for Lew saw it.

"Really?" he asked, hunching his chair closer to her.

At that, she deserted the desk; she would not have him nearer; but, also contrarily, she would! The excitement working in her stimulated him and he enjoyed it; she was stimulated by it. Yes; amazingly, she was; it was a sensation of power—a power over Lew Alban who, in other ways, held Mr. Rountree and Jay and her in his power. She had something Lew liked and wanted.

It was what Di had had which had given Di power. Here had been Di, an office girl, working with her hands and head, accomplishing nothing; but Di had put to use the power of her femininity and by it Di had torn away, or certainly helped to tear away, the half million dollars of Mettens.

Ellen, working here with her hands and head, was helpless, almost, as Di had been; with her hands and head, never could she hold, against his hatred of the Rountrees, Lew Alban; but if she put to use her femininity!

She slipped through the door into her own little room

at the idea of it and escaped him only to recognize, instantly, that she had whetted him by this flight and had drawn him on.

Not at once, for it was his way to tantalize, he followed to the door and looked in at her, whereupon she gasped and dropped into her chair, turned from him and began typing; but she wrote nothing coherent. This he observed, as he stepped to her and, with his hand upon her, read over her shoulder.

“Practicing Russian—or Chinese?” he twitted her, squeezing her.

She slipped from under his grasp, which brought from him, “How long have you been feeling this way about me?”

“How long?”

“Been hiding it, have you? Or did it just break through to you?”

“What break through?”

“Me,” he patted her, “to you.”

“I don’t know,” she said, with scarcely breath for it.

“I don’t care,” he said, and both his hands were on her.

She moved but he held her and she did not struggle. The sensation in her paralyzed her. Let him; let him! Let him a little and see what you can do with him! You’ll not have to do like Di. Allow him this and then think; don’t think or feel now; let him do it.

He stooped to her, slipped his arms down her, held her to him and kissed her; held his lips on hers, pressing hers.

At last he let her go—she had done it. Dazedly, dully, almost without feeling she gazed at him. Aroused, flushed he was; his sallow cheeks were aglow.

"Rough with you, was I?" he whispered, shaking her. "Rough with you? You'll like it."

She arose and retreated from him, staring at him. She had had no idea of what it would be; but it was over; she'd done it. She'd not dodged.

To whom had she said that? Jay; Jay, of course. "You'll not dodge Lew Alban," she'd said and sent him to the train. So he'd not dodged and she hadn't. No, she'd not dodged Lew Alban.

He was talking to her but she did not know what he said. Someone entered Mr. Rountree's room; it was Jay, returning for Lew. She could not meet him. She let Lew go out to him; neither sent for her, so she stayed, shut in, until they were gone; then, snatching her hat and coat, she escaped.

It was clear and cool on the street. The breeze, what there was, blew from the lake so that the haze and smoke of the day was swept westward. The walk was crowded; the boulevard was a four-span stream of cars southward, a reverse stream of four span beyond. The shop windows were alight with a show illumination which dimmed the clusters of street lamps and drew, like moths to a flame, female passersby.

Ellen halted beside a group looking in at dresses; at gowns, indeed, of silk and velvet and handwork, beautiful and extravagant. Ellen stopped and stared, she did not see. With the back of her glove on her little, tight-clenched fist she rubbed and rubbed at her lips which Lew Alban had kissed. Her shoulders quivered as under the grasp of his hands.

She seemed to hear his voice, speaking to her, and



here he was himself, not a memory of him; he had found her on the street and stepped up to her.

“Take your pick,” he was saying easily. “Pick any one anywhere. Look in all the windows!” he bid her and squeezed her arm and was gone. Jay was not with him, for she watched after him, to make sure of it; nor did she see Jay elsewhere on the walk. She went away from the window in the opposite direction from Lew Alban and circled the block before turning home.

Jay had not seen her, which was as well for him as for her, because he had been making of her, without being aware of it, a sort of reliance in his world of ever shifting, shaken values. He knew no other girl quite like her; and only now and then, amid the thousands and thousands of people one looked upon and passed, did he see any one with her quiet quality of—what was it? Poise? More than that but he had no word for it. He remembered, once, meeting her unexpectedly and suddenly. He had been going along and amid the hurrying, hunting, wondering, frightened faces approaching him, he had been caught by eyes which looked at him with none of the common panic. None of it! There she was.

Her father had such a quality, which lived in the eyes, Jay remembered; seamen’s eyes, he had thought them, calm with the consideration of the four horizons, the water and sky and sun and stars. He liked Adrian Powell’s eyes and he liked Ellen’s looking on the world without any fear. So it was well he had not happened upon her to-night, for he would not have seen her without fear.

He had been awaiting Lew at the club and Lew re-

joined him in more jovial mood, wherefore the ponderous function of family dinner, with his father and the Dills and Lew, passed more agreeably than usual. Lew sustained the entertainment, in good enough humor, until nine o'clock, when he departed to a destination not designated. He refused the offer of other social engagements with the Rountrees but would spend some time at the office in the morning.

Ellen, knowing of this, did dodge Lew on the very next day. She awoke with a headache which she never would have offered as an excuse for absence, ordinarily; but she telephoned, saying she was sick. As a result, there arrived for her in the afternoon red roses which Di curiously examined with her, discovering the initials "L.A." upon the card and the inscription: "Take your time. No hurry."

"Who's your L.A.?" demanded Di and, in a moment, "Lew?"

Ellen's scarlet face answered her.

"Lew!" declared Di. "Sure, Lew!"

Ellen thrust the buds back into the box. How had he learned her address? From whom at the office?

Di elucidated this point; she laughed. "He has his nerve. He asked me where I lived after I told him I roomed with you."

"Last night?" inquired Ellen.

"We was at a little supper," informed Di. "Not much doing." Di did not dwell upon the affair. "So he put down my number to say it with flowers to you."

She gazed at Ellen, who closed the box and bore it to the rear porch and left it there. Upon her return,

Di repaid to Ellen a bit of her debt of reticence by refraining from overquestioning; verbally, they dropped it, but it dwelt unmentioned between them, disturbing Di.

For Di, too, had been making of Ellen a reliance; and Di discerned that it was not merely that Lew Alban had sent Ellen flowers but that Ellen had done something to deserve them on the day before this upon which she stayed in her room, Lew being at the office.



## XVII

She went to the office in the morning, ignorant as to Lew's whereabouts, and learned that he had left town. No one regarded her differently; of course, no one knew. Jay was the same to her but every contact with him was charged with the stir within her aroused by Lew.

Working for Jay with her head and hands, she slipped into sudden, pale inattentions which puzzled him and caused him to ask less of her.

"You're doing too much," he said.

She denied it, ineffectively; he took his matters to another girl but with her he still talked over matters at the end of a day.

One bit of luck she had; Lew remained away. Indeed, he went off on a round of his sales offices in California and the northwest coast. When Ellen read this in a letter to Mr. Rountree, she felt lightened and as if given a reprieve. No longer, for a while at least, might he descend upon her with the morning train from Stanley.

However, he proved his persisting thought of her by bestowal of flowers with which Di had filled two vases, when Ellen reached home; as before, she cast them out and made no acknowledgment; but, as before, he had sent a card which discounted immediate expectations of gratitude.

Continually, through the office, he displayed the power of his position. It had been the habit of Stanley Alban,

from the beginning, to pay to John Rountree the invoices of each week; and Lew, taking over from his father, continued the practice. Evidently he had left signed checks to be filled in and countersigned by the treasurer, during his absence; so upon each Monday morning, Ellen took from an Alban envelope Lew's draft for twelve thousand or fifteen thousand dollars.

The amount, whichever it happened to be, now exceeded the total income from all other sources. It met Rountree bills, provided the Rountree payroll and supplied what profit there was. Never, since the very start, had the firm been so completely dependent on the faithfulness and the friendship of the man, old and bedridden now and slowly failing, in his home in the little town of central Illinois.

Mr. Rountree phoned him daily and went down on weekends, at fortnight intervals; whereat Di laughed, after report of these visits reached her through the Slengels.

"Mr. Rountree goes because he cares; I hear him when he phones," Ellen declared. "He's not hypocritical."

"I'll scream to the sunny sky that he's not," granted Di. "I bet not a sincerer prayer for long life ever lifted to the Gates than Mr. Rountree sends up at that bedside."

"Who've you got down there?" demanded Ellen.

"Oh, Art," said Di. "But he's only lookin' through their plant. Lew asked him to make suggestions. Art hasn't been up to the house; he says he's never developed a Baptist bedside manner." Di stretched languorously, but Ellen was trembling.

The prospect of old Stanley's end precipitated her into

that—she could not know what—which she had determined to do to help hold the Alban business and Lew.

“Hot to-day,” Di offered a neutral subject.

“The water’s all blue,” said Ellen, accepting it. “You can’t see ice anywhere now.” The floe in the lake, she meant, viewed from the high vantage of the office windows. “It’s breaking up in the straits, mother says. Father’s in Duluth.” With his ship, she meant, loading with iron ore to be ready for the first break through of the ice in Lake Superior and the opening of Sault Ste. Marie—“The Soo.”

In a week or two, possibly more but maybe less, for it depended on elements far beyond man’s control she might spy from the office window the long, low hull of the laden *Blenmora* with its iron for South Chicago. Slowly, steadily, unswerving, straight to its course the ship would appear from the north, pass far out and slowly, with her eyes lingering upon it, lessen and lessen and vanish; and that night, near the ore slips of the Calumet, Ellen would sup with her father.

“I’ll be glad to see father,” she said to Di, who knew all this.

“Uhuh,” agreed Di, with head down. “You would.”

Di did not want to see her father, nor her mother. Di did not, in these days, discuss her family. Except for mention of the money she sent home, she never brought up the subject of Hoster. She tossed back her auburn curls and, as upon the night when momentarily she had dropped beside her bed, Di arose whistling. From the closet she produced such a gown of the new spring mode



as had confronted Ellen from Michigan Avenue shop windows when Lew had bid her to pick what she pleased.

"Like it?" questioned Di, with a touch of defiance and of wonder as she watched Ellen's face burn with a slow, deepening glow.

The heat, breaking the long winter-look over the lakes, increased also in the Caribbean and Lida became more communicative. Thrice only in more than two months had she written Jay, and each epistle had been no more than a memorandum of a mood.

"Fie we are," she had inscribed from Santa Lucia. "Palms are appallingly overplayed. We switch the setting, but we're the same. There was a tail end of a hurricane yesterday, and we rode it out, where do you suppose? In the harbor."

The three had been like that and now arrived a cable-gram from Caracas informing him that she was returning to New York, leaving him to guess at the time. Perhaps she did not know it, he thought; and the message did not make clear whether she stayed with her party or traveled independently. Then a radio arrived, supplying him with the due date of a mail boat, two days ahead.

It meant, plainly, that she wanted him to meet her, and he prepared to go east, without either opposition or approval from his father, except an offer to supply him with expenses, if he needed money.

"I don't," said Jay; for he had been saving and was not required, therefore, to apply to Ellen as upon the

occasion of his previous departure for New York. When they were alone, at the end of the day, he referred to his trip.

"Mrs. Rountree's returning," he said.

"Here?" asked Ellen, naturally enough.

"I don't think so," replied Jay. "Just to New York, I believe."

"Oh," said Ellen, and looked at him, immediately to resort to arranging papers on his father's desk, which she did with the half-dreaming inattention he had noticed, recently. "When are you to be back?" she asked finally. "Or are you to be?"

"I'll be back," said Jay; and, to save herself, she could not check a start. He'd be back, whether with his wife or without; he'd return to work here with her. "When, I don't know," he said, watching her with appreciation of that difference in her mood which Lew Alban, feeling, had deemed not businesslike at all but domestic. "Did you suppose I was quitting now?" he asked her.

"No," she rejoined, without looking up. She had wanted him to bind himself to return, no matter what his wife did. "What can I 'tend to for you when you're gone?"

"Lew Alban," he replied, and laughed when she jumped. He had no idea of what was within her! "Now if you could only tie him up somehow long enough to give me time to work up my prospects, I'd be much obliged. I've got a lot of stuff started, you know, but there's a good personal reason everywhere, just at present, why I don't get the business.

"Somebody is giving it to somebody else because he's

his brother or his wife's brother or because he likes him or because he is afraid of him or because he has something on him; so you've got to become closer than a brother, or a wife's brother, or you've got to make him more afraid of you or you've got to get more on him than the other fellow has—then you'll get the business. I'm working around to it, but it takes time; and it doesn't look like we had a lot of time, does it?"

"No."

He held out his hand. "Good-by," he said to her. Tomorrow morning, he would see her again here in the office, but to-morrow they would not be together at the end of the day. It was good-by to this intimacy, he meant. She took his hand and looked up at him and slowly a hot flush crept up to the roots of her hair.

He left at noon on the morrow; and on the next day, when he was in New York, the Soo was open! The ice, even in Superior, was conquered. Day before yesterday the ice-breakers, plunging and charging, had cleared a channel through White Fish Bay where, at the outlet of the greatest of lakes, the west winds of April had rallied the last bulwarks of winter. St. Mary's River and the canals of the Soo were clear; the freighters, heavy with iron, were coming through!

There in the north (as Ellen gazed from the office window) hung a spot above the clear, blue horizon. It was sunny and mild on Lake Michigan; spring securely stood. So the spot in the north was smoke. Now appeared a prow with a pilothouse and mast above it; a long, lean hull lay low abaft it, and there was the after mast and funnel!



The *Blenmora!* The *Blenmora!* For her father would be among the first to send his ship through.

She was with him in his cabin. What matter the scream and scrape of the enormous clamshell maws lifting the ore from the holds? What matter the clangor of the red iron bounding in the chutes, the hiss and heat of steam, the spread of the brown hematite dust? Ellen loved it; it brought her father.

She was in his arms, her cheek against his; he lifted her a little and tossed her a bit, laughing aloud in his love and pride in her. They talked and laughed; they went about the ship; they had supper together, through which he studied her, seriously.

"Ye grow little, Ellen," he charged her at last.

"It's the rest at home growing bigger, father," she said.

"They grow," he agreed, "and ye—" suddenly he was out with it—"what have ye taken on, my little girl?"

"Nothing new, father," she denied.

He shook his head. "Do ye work too hard?"

"No."

"It's not work," he agreed, "I know the look of ye. It's loving, is it?"

"No, father!"

"So that's it; loving! Ellen, girl, does he love ye?"

"No."

"I felt it in ye, my arms about you. You'd have them—his own. Ellen, girl, look to what ye do! Loving like ye'd love your man, look to what ye do!"

## XVIII

Jay called from Grand Central and learned that the mail-boat from the Caribbean would dock during the afternoon. Ringing the Park Avenue apartment, he learned that Mr. and Mrs. Lytle were in but, naturally, had not yet arisen, so he merely left word that he was in town and put them from his mind for the morning.

He walked down Fifth Avenue, in the clear spring sunshine, toward his father's New York office, with his mind on the boat, near Sandy Hook, bearing Lida from the languor and overplayed palms of the Caribbean.

At the office door, lettered like the doors in Chicago, he halted momentarily with a sudden pulse surprising him. What was it? Open a door like this, and she looks up at you, his pulse said. But she's not beyond this door; she's not here. Ellen Powell, that was. What had she become to him? He never had felt this in Chicago, where always he had opened the door and found her.

A very different sort of girl, in Ralph's office, informed him that Mr. Armiston was not yet down but might be, shortly. Ralph kept New York office hours, not those of Chicago.

Jay waited by a window which gave a glimpse of the Hudson, a ferry and a long, four-funnelled liner outward bound. How she'd thrill at the sight of it! How she'd thrill to New York, which she had never seen! He imagined, standing here beside him, Ellen Powell gazing

at the great ship with her wide, gray eyes and then looking up at him.

Ralph had come in and hailed him, twice, "Hello!" before Jay spun about suddenly.

"Looking for the wife's ship?" inquired his brother-in-law pleasantly.

"No," said Jay. "Yes, of course," he corrected. "Who told you about her?"

"She'd left the Wilmerdons a couple weeks ago," replied Ralph. "Everybody knows that. Here you are; is she in to-day?"

"This afternoon," answered Jay and shook hands, turning the talk from Lida by inquiring for his sister.

Ralph did not pursue the matter of Lida. He was a tactful, pleasing man, eight years older than Jay. He was from Maryland, originally, and was dark, mustached, slender and handsome. He carried himself in an easy, confident way and spoke with a slight, distinguished southern accent which he maintained purposely; it was part of his air, part of his charm, part of his stock in trade.

He usually seemed a bit sleepy in the morning and did nothing to deny it. He wanted you to feel that he was the sort that was at his best late in the day and that he looked forward to the evening. Jay knew that he was a very good salesman to deal with certain buyers, but was helpless with others.

"I see you're at work," he complimented Jay. "Been wondering about you. I didn't know, really."

"That's not surprising," said Jay, smiling, "if you've been trying to trace me by my results."



“Not such rotten results!” rejoined Ralph with sincere enthusiasm. “I’m very glad to see you. Something to tell you.”

The girl took this as a hint for her departure and left them alone, whereupon Ralph, instead of supplying information, requested: “Tell me the truth, when does Alban drop us?”

“Just as quick,” replied Jay, “as Lew is left an orphan. That’s all there is to it.”

“Just so,” said Ralph feelingly, and asked: “How is father using you? Between the hours of nine and five with an hour off for lunch?”

Jay smiled. “That’s about it.”

“And I bet you call on people at their offices. Now I’ll lay you a little wager. You’ve done one thing that interests me mightily. You cracked Howarth-Lyman Company for a little order. I don’t know anything about it but I’ll lay you any odds you like that you didn’t get it between nine and five, unless it was at the hour off for lunch, and you didn’t hook it in any office.”

“No contest,” said Jay. “I got it from Ken Howarth at a club about one-thirty.”

“A.M.,” finished Ralph positively. “And I bet if you hadn’t rung the clock at nine the next morning, father Rountree would have called you for not keeping office hours. Office hours! That’s Chicago for you. Chicago still thinks business is done in offices. There’s only one good reason for any busy man to have an office; it collects for him, all in one place, everybody he doesn’t want to see. It’s a great help, that way. A man has all his time to give to business, if he just keeps away from his office.

"Jay, I've been trying for two years to get to the real man who does the big buying for Howarth down here. He's your friend Ken's cousin. What d'you do to-day, after you meet the boat?"

"To-day," said Jay, "I'm only meeting the boat."

Ralph delayed, squinting slightly. "Make an engagement for to-morrow?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow."

Ralph refrained from comment and, after a moment, reached for a call button, but waited.

"What d'you think of Miss Powell?" he questioned, astonishingly.

"What?" said Jay, startled.

"For me, down here," explained Ralph. "She's the best business girl I've ever seen, and she's simply wasted with your father. He's always in his office to answer anything about the business, so he doesn't need her. I'm never in my office and I need like the devil a girl who knows the business, the Chicago office, the plant and our people, and who's got a *head*."

"Your father can train another girl out there; I can't here. The proper place for that Powell girl, in our organization, is New York. She'd be a God-send for me. I'm going to take it up with your father, Jay. Help me on it, will you?"

"Of course," said Jay.

He went early to the dock and watched the Caribbean boat approach. Almost as soon as the line of passengers at the promenade rail emerged as separate figures, he located Lida. A silhouette of her head and shoulders was

enough; he could not see that she moved but he knew that she was not still. There she was, tense, eager, impatient to end the stale venture of this voyage, whatever it had been, and launch upon fresh experience. With him? If not, what did her cable and radio mean?

He waved and she lifted a hand. She responded to other greetings and Jay looked along the dock and discovered the slight, smart figure of her mother and the broad form of Mr. Lytle, who made him out and waved a stick at him.

“Heard you gave us a ring,” said Mr. Lytle, proffering a cordial, soft hand. “Wished you’d come up. We’d a room for you.”

Lida’s mother inspected him with bright, black eyes. Under her small, black hat her hair was clipped like a boy’s. She and her husband both were aware of Jay’s situation with her daughter; for Lida, upon her return from Chicago, had disabused their minds of erroneous impressions. So Mrs. Lytle wanted to be cordial to Jay but she found it difficult; she felt a debt to him and she did not like that. She would have felt more at ease with him as a recognized wrongdoer.

“We are expecting both of you to stay with us,” she said stiffly.

Lida disembarked with ideas of her own regarding her residence. She kissed her stepfather on the lips, her mother on the cheek, and she did not kiss Jay at all, but of him she inquired:

“Where are you taking me?”

“Plaza,” he said; and while she talked with her mother,



he phoned for a suite. The four left the dock in the Lytle car but the two elders stopped on Park Avenue. Lida and Jay were driven on together.

“Same straight street,” murmured Lida. “Same tearing town.”

She shut her eyes in distaste and leaned into her corner, swaying slightly with the swing of the car. Her return had disappointed her, Jay knew; he had been below expectations.

The white little ovals of her eyelids accentuated the clear brown of her skin. She had tanned in the Caribbean sun of the yacht deck or the sandy beaches. Lida was not physically tired; she looked very well indeed, but she sought a stimulus which neither New York, as yet, nor he had supplied her.

He had rather supposed that, when he saw her and was close to her, she might stir him again; but, somewhat surprisingly to himself, she had not. He sat beside her with her hand in his, holding her with a quiet and tenderness new to him. He wanted to please her and protect her but she did not excite him.

“Same silly old city,” said Lida, with eyes shut, and he thought, with Lida’s hand in his, of Ellen Powell arriving here in New York and for the first time seeing the city. Unconsciously, he pressed Lida’s hand. She withdrew her fingers, as though she had felt something vicarious in his clasp, and she sat up and stared at him.

In her room at the hotel, she had her talk with him. She was seated upon his knees, his arms holding her, her arms now and then about his neck, her hands more often at his face.

"There's nothing at Santa Lucia, Jay," she told him. "Nothing for me. I guess there's nothing in Levuka. Santa Lucia must be enough like Levuka to let you know. The Fiji couldn't be lazier than the niggers or the sand hotter. There're palms in the sand and the sun, and you see the Southern Cross. . . . It's frightfully over-rated, dim and not even straight. Seen it?"

"Never," said Jay, gently patting her.

"It's crooked, like that!" She stabbed with a finger to mark the position of the four disappointing stars. "Nothing to cheer for. There's nothing at Levuka, I guess. Where is it, Jay; where is it for me?"

He held her gently, with the new tenderness which had come to him with her and which she would not have from him. She stirred in protest to it.

"I thought for a while down there, if you'd been there, Jay, we might have found . . . it; but we wouldn't."

Still he made no reply and she turned, confronting him, holding his face between her hands.

"What you been finding, Jay?" she asked.

"I?" he said. "I've just been at work. Not much done," he confessed, "but I've been at it." And his mind was with her who had been at it with him.

Lida's fingers drew, familiarly, upon his cheeks, too tensely, too troubledly, too demandingly. He thought of Ellen's touch in the brief contact of their hands and he thought how would be her touch upon his face, how different from Lida's. He withdrew, slightly, from Lida's.

"Who is she, Jay?"

"Who?"

"There was no one when I went away, Jay," she said.

"That wasn't up at all. But you've—" her finger-tips quivered on his cheek—"you've found somebody."

"Nobody," he denied.

She cast off his arms and arose. "I didn't think you'd stay in this suite, Jay," she said. "I only wanted you to take it for me. I'll keep it on, you see. I'm not going home. I'll have my own place; nobody'll be over me. I'm married, you see—Mrs. Jay Rountree."

She walked to the window which overlooked the park, patterned with shadows from the sun lying far and low in the west. She spun about, head up, fired with a flash of jealousy.

"What sort is she, Jay? Not mine, I know; but what—what gets you?"

She made him see, so clearly, Ellen: Ellen beside him, Ellen speaking to him, her eyes in his. She made him see Ellen, suddenly, as at that first time she cried because of him, in his father's big chair with her toes not quite touching the floor; and, amazingly, this memory affected him beyond any measure with the moment itself. But it was nothing he could relate to Lida.

He remained in New York until the end of the week, putting in appearances with Lida wherever she wished, and he looked up Ken Howarth's cousin, not by making a call at the Howarth office, but under midnight circumstances which permitted the casual introduction of Ralph, with no need to mention even that Ralph was in business.

"Precisely perfect!" Ralph exulted with Jay on the next day. "Now we have a chance to get them, if we simply don't rush them! If we try to hurry this, no chance; but if we play it properly and patiently, the sweetest business



in Manhattan may fall into our laps—if we don't fall first," recollected Ralph, grimly. "This drink, Jay, had better be to the health—or at least to the longer life, however he survives—of good old, staunch old Stanley Alban!"

## XIX

Ellen changed, during the week, so noticeably that Di commented: "Your father certainly is good for you." Partly it was an effect of his presence and the prospect of his return, with his ship, every fortnight throughout the summer, but chiefly it was a consequence of her admission that she loved. She had cleared away conflicts in herself by declaring it; but she had made her dependence on Jay only more complete.

She dwelt on his promise to her: "I'll be back," after he had told her that he expected his wife would not return here. Then Ellen came upon an account of his social doings in New York; for that was news.

Lida Haige and Jay Rountree had run away and married and, after a few weeks, had separated, the New York correspondent recalled, but now they were reunited. He had "rushed" to the seaboard to meet her and she had abandoned her friends at Caracas "to hurry home to him." So now they were reunited; they were appearing everywhere together. What did it mean?

Ellen at night sat on the low seat before her dresser, brushing her hair; she kept at it, not looking in her mirror, feeling the draw of the brush. Di stepped behind her, gathered up her hair, suddenly slipped the kimono from Ellen's shoulder and bared the white, smooth skin over which Di let drop in a shower the lovely, chestnut hair.

“You’d stand one type of man on his head,” announced Di, glancing into the glass, “if you did your work this way.”

Di retreated and raised her hands, satisfiedly, to her shorn, auburn locks. “I stand the other types on their thinning topknots,” she observed, complacently.

In her usual plain blue dress, with her hair wound round her head, Ellen was in her usual place beside Mr. Rountree when the door opened with the impulsive push which had heralded Jay. She started, looked up and there he was, alone!

Of course he’d come alone to the office; his wife never had visited the building, yet Ellen was sure, at sight of him and before his father obtained statement of the fact, that he had returned alone.

His hand, withdrawn from his father’s, was grasping hers.

“Lakes are wide open,” he was saying. “Saw the ore-boats from the train.”

“Yes; father’s come and gone.” Was she clinging to his hand? She pulled away suddenly but he looked at her a moment longer before he answered his father’s inquiries of his sister and Ralph.

When he stepped out, Ellen improvised an errand to her own little room for refuge to compose herself before she resumed with pad and pencil at his father’s side. “Not reunited,” drummed in her head and she all but wrote it down. “Not reunited here.”

Jay, seeking the sales department, did not immediately



intrude upon Lowry; he wanted a few minutes to settle down after this return to Ellen Powell. But his excitement stayed. It was not that excitement which he had lost with Lida; scarcely that sort at all. That had overswept him shortly, violently, with a sudden onset which aroused within him resistance, very differently from this.

He avoided Ellen during the day until their old, usual time together, when he looked into the office and, finding her alone, entered as casually as he could and dropped upon a chair.

"Anything new from Lew?" he inquired.

"He's in Stanley," said Ellen, arising, "but he hasn't been here."

"Isn't he due?"

"Oh, yes; he's due," replied Ellen, with cheek and forehead deeply stained.

Why was that? thought Jay and proposed to her abruptly, "Would you care to go to New York?"

"New York?" said Ellen. "I?"

"To run our office. Mr. Armiston has asked for you. He needs you like the devil," explained Jay, overruling the matter as he felt how little he wanted this girl away. "You're exactly the person for the place; the only right person," he said. "Mr. Armiston thinks you've the best head of any girl he's seen. Of course you have."

Ellen ignored this praise of her competence. Appreciation of the skill of her hands, the clearness of her head! She wanted value as girl; as woman.

"Father'd send you on, if you asked it," said Jay.

That was true, she knew. Beneath Mr. Rountree's mask of impersonality was a sensitive pride which never would

permit him to detain her if she, who worked at his side, wished to leave him. And Jay, she thought, was indifferent whether she was here or there.

“We started something in New York,” he told her. “It broke so that I was able to put my brother-in-law in with the Howarth people so that something big may develop. In New York, Howarth is a sizable account, you know.”

Ellen nodded, aglow with the idea that Jay, so far from being indifferent, perhaps urged her to go east because he would be at work in New York.

“Is Mr. Armiston . . . adding to his office?” she inquired.

“He wants to add you; that’s all,” said Jay.

“Oh,” said Ellen and looked away, aflame; so he had not thought at all of *her*.

“That account is not only sizable,” continued Jay, “but it’s the only one in sight which can make up to us for Alban, when Lew leaves us; but we’ve got to get it before we lose Alban.”

Ellen, saying nothing, gazed at Jay with impulses in possession of her of the very nature against which her father had warned her. Because Jay disregarded her (she thought), because she was (she thought) to him no more than a competent and useful business girl with a good head, she would . . . she would . . . what had Di said? She’d stand a man on his head!

Not Jay—for he would send her off; but she’d stand on his head, *for* Jay, Lew Alban!

She had not known how she was to proceed with Lew, for she had thought of having to “hold” him indefinitely;

but this chance at the Howarth business laid, perhaps, a limit for her. It required her only to hold Lew for a time, and that she might do. But her face burned furiously and she bent her head from Jay and turned away.

So she said nothing to Mr. Rountree in regard to New York; so she received in the office, at the first of the week, Lew. He had chosen not to herald his arrival. He walked in and greeted Mr. Rountree, with not a glance immediately for her, and except that he kept her aware as never before of her body, he did nothing which she had anticipated.

He did not even wait for an interlude alone with her, but was satisfied with a moment when Mr. Rountree stepped into the general office.

"I'm sending for you at eight," Lew then informed her.

"To-night?" said Ellen, her eyes on his.

"Eight," repeated Lew, returning her gaze, and after a few minutes more with Mr. Rountree, he departed without another word for her and did not reappear during the day.

Di was not about when Ellen dressed. Flowers had come, flowers which she could not this time cast upon the rear porch, for they were violets in corsage bouquet sent to her to wear, and the accompanying card, initialed, read: "I like to dance."

Ellen had a black, chiffon dress; she had gunmetal stockings and black satin slippers; and she laid them all out upon her bed, she banished them and laid them out again before at last she put them on.



Di always dressed with deliberation and before a glass; Ellen, having finally decided, dressed quickly and did not delay at the mirror. How white seemed her arms and shoulders beside the black of her dress!

Lew sent for her, as he had said he would do; a cowardly, unoccupied cab called for her, such as had often sought Di at this door; and Ellen, after answering the driver's summons, drew on a coat and ran out. In another cab, a couple of blocks away, Lew was waiting. He changed to hers, and there she sat bareheaded beside Lew Alban.

Of course she never had worn a hat in the office, but it was different, bareheaded in a cab with a man looking at you; and, under her cloak, her shoulders were bare.

"You're pretty," Lew praised her. "By God, you're pretty."

He wanted to see her shoulders; he wanted to see her white skin. He pulled at her cloak. "Let's see your dress," he said. "Black," he approved. "I like black on you. By God, you're beautiful." And he looked down at her feet. "You've little feet," he said with satisfaction, "pretty little feet."

Her cheeks and shoulders and her toes in her slippers prickled, but not with fear; it was the excitement of power prickling her like pin points.

The car was on a boulevard caught in a current of cabs and chauffeur-driven limousines hired or bought and maintained by men for women. Within them were girls, and women, sought by men, courted and indulged by men. Ellen had glimpses of faces. She saw not a competent feminine face; with head and hands, these girls did and

could do nothing. They neither needed nor cared to do anything with head (the inside of it) or with hands (the skill of them), but for them spun this stream of cars; for them had been built this city!

"You dance," said Lew. "Of course you dance with your lovely little feet."

"I dance," Ellen replied.

Seated beside him at a little table, near the edge of a dance floor, Ellen quivered in her black chiffon and looked about uneasily at the other couples. It was a dine-and-dance club, so called, but only an admission and cover charge regulated the membership.

"You've never been in a place like this before," observed Lew, with satisfaction.

"Never," admitted Ellen; and he ordered dinner, extravagantly.

"Chicago has a few early evening clubs," said Lew, patronizingly, "New York has the night clubs. New York is the place. I'm moving there, you know."

"I didn't," said Ellen, turning her cocktail glass.

"Yes. No reason in God's world I should stay at Stanley because my father stuck to the prairie and we manufacture there. Manufacturing is nothing any more; a foreman can see to that. My office must be in the city."

"Why not Chicago?" asked Ellen.

"Why play a second?" replied Lew. "New York is the first city in the world. My office will be on Fifth Avenue. I'll run everything from there." He touched his glass to

hers: "To New York!" he suggested and she sipped the cocktail: "To New York!" she said.

"Ever seen the first city?" he asked her.

"Never."

"You will," he promised her.

"You dance," pronounced Lew, his arm about her, "like a dream. Who have you been practicing with?"

"Paul Denny, mostly," Ellen told him. "A few other friends."

"What sort of a friend of yours is Denny?"

"He used to be on the boat with my father. He was here for a year and a winter, but he's gone back to the boat. He didn't like the city."

"Some don't," said Lew, satisfied with the tone of her explanation. He grasped more closely her soft, flexible body. She made persistent resistance. He danced not at all like Paul, who had held her with a bit of awe and always with respect. Lew Alban knew, in his grasp of a girl, neither awe nor respect; to dance with him required Ellen to duel, subtly, against him.

He liked, for a while, to make attempt, to feel her repulse; truce for a moment, then attempt; repulse; attempt. Then he tired of it. "Let's go somewhere else," he proposed.

"I must go home," said Ellen, positively.

He laughed and bid her: "Get your coat."

In the dressing-room, her sensation of power which had sustained her early in the evening, utterly forsook Ellen.



She wanted nothing so much as escape and to work hereafter, never upon her womanliness, but with her hands and head. She wanted nothing, nothing in common with these girls about her, re-rouging and re-arraying themselves to proceed "somewhere else" to-night with their men. But she had to go out to Lew Alban.

He was awaiting her by the entrance, where he eyed the girls bound elsewhere, eagerly and gigglingly, with their escorts. Lew had obtained much from Ellen Powell. Her dread of him, her resistance to him, her excitement with him had supplied him with a pleasurable stimulus which he never could have received from these eager girls. The look of her gray eyes questioning him, the feel of her slight, supple body and her little, persistent repulses of him kept him stirred, but he had proceeded with her as far as he could to-night.

"No hurry," he had written her, after he had made his definite start with her. It would not be short and sudden, the obtaining of this girl. Indeed, he did not want her easily obtained. At any time he could pick up a girl to accompany him, eagerly and gigglingly, elsewhere. Accordingly, when Ellen rejoined him with a steadfast request to him to take her home, he surprised her by soon complying. On the way, he kissed her; but he took her home.

When she was applied again to the office tasks of her head and hands, Lew sauntered in with no apparent memory of the previous evening; and she tried to betray none. To Mr. Rountree and Jay, he volunteered his intention

in regard to New York, much as he had imparted it to her last night.

“So I’ll be located East,” he concluded, coolly, shaking hands.

He left no doubt, as he parted from Mr. Rountree and Jay, that he felt no regrets over the distance he was to put between them. He shook hands also with Ellen, but his fingers admonished hers very differently.

“Have you ever seen New York?” he asked her, ignoring last night.

“Never,” she repeated her reply.

“That’s an answer you can change.”

Jay said to Ellen, when they were left alone: “I wish I could see my brother-in-law liking Lew; or Lew, him. But I’ve had them together; they look upon each other like a pot of poison.”

Ellen remained silent, though inwardly she seethed with her secret.

“Speaking of Mr. Armiston,” she said, as though he had reminded her of the matter, “I might like it with him in New York. A little later,” she qualified hastily.

## XX

Jay, in white shirt and duck, was up the mast of a forty-foot sloop, rigging the halyards. It was a Sunday morning, warm and sunny and sleepy upon that little inlet of sheltered water which sparkles beside the green parkway and boulevard shore of the Chicago "gold coast."

It lies well north of the great, geometrical jetties and moles making the bulwarks of the harbor at the mouth of the river whereon ply the ships of commerce: the long, laden coal carriers, the white and scrubbed passenger liners and the package freighters from Buffalo, Erie, Port Arthur. It is far, far north of the Calumet and the slips at Gary for the ore-boats from Duluth. These pass so far out that often they are hull-down on the horizon; for Belmont harbor is no haven for any craft frankly launched for gain; it is anchorage for privately owned yachts only.

Jay ran the ropes carefully, leisurely; enjoying the sun was not an hour above the water; a steady, pleasant landward breeze was blowing; he liked the feel of it, he liked the swing and sway of the mast, the wash of the water on the hull. When he slid down and hauled, with his mates, on the hoists he had just rigged and the sail billowed out and the jib ballooned before it, the world was very good to Jay Rountree and his five mates of the *Arletta's* crew.

They had cast off from the buoy and singing, because



they were young and it was Sunday sunrise and there was a sailing wind, they pointed into the lake, sending a rail under as they met the waves, whereat they laughed and dipped it deeper.

Off watch, at the start of this cruise, Jay lay on the deck in the sun and wind, daydreaming. The wind and the wash of the water, the furrow following free, were like Lida's image of the south sea venture for him and her—the venture which Lida herself had come to doubt. He did not dream of Lida here in place of his shipmates of the sloop's crew; his daydream turned him upon his side and he searched along the shore for the stretch of the city in which Ellen Powell lived. Asleep she was, he thought; but he liked to locate her.

He glanced astern and at the skipper at the helm and he thought of relating the doings of this day to Ellen; for the skipper was Ken Howarth, the *Arletta* was Ken's and so there was entwined with the sport of this day's cruise, an element of business. Jay smiled at comments which came into his head upon this element and his own he thought of repeating them to the only person who could appreciate them. She was asleep ashore, he thought.

Ellen was not asleep; for he had mentioned to her, yesterday, his invitation to sail on the *Arletta* and he had said they would be off early. So, without having set an alarm, Ellen had awakened at sunrise and from her window she had been watching the lake, not for the smoke and the long, gray hull of the *Blenmora* far out, but for

a little white sail which, seeing, she could **not** **be** to identify.

He appeared at the office promptly on Monday morning, sunburned and relaxed from his long loaf in **the** wind. His father did not like his lassitude, but Ellen loved him, heavy-eyed and contented. She longed to lead him away under the shade of trees where he could stretch on the ground and sleep, if he would, while she sat by him.

But he went out to his round of calls and she took letters and answered phone through hours which dragged interminably. It was no day to work; it was a dogday, close and sultry; yesterday's sailing wind had died; and the hot afternoon sun hung in a halo of haze. Ellen went often to the water cooler; often she bathed her face and forehead; but Mr. Rountree, in black alpaca, shortened his stint not at all, nor did he excuse himself from a visit to the shop.

He departed; and at last the day was transformed. Jay returned. He flung his cards on the desk and himself upon a chair, stretching his legs before him.

"You're the coolest soul I've seen to-day," said Jay; and she exulted that she'd kept herself freshened. His eyes traveled from her face to her throat and to her arms bare from above the elbow.

Jay liked her rounded slenderness and the pretty tapering of her forearm to her wrist and her slim, strong little hand. She had been through the winter, or at least since he had been noticing her, white; but she had become brown with a clear, smooth tan lovely upon her.

"You've been in the sun, too," he said.

"Yes; on the beach."

"D'you ever burn?"

"No."

"I thought you didn't; you just take to the sun. I finally do, after two days beet-red."

She gazed at him, with his warm beet-redness, and longed doubly for her dream of him under shade trees.

"What luck?" she asked him.

"Blob to-day; but yesterday! D'you hear, I've signed before the mast? I'm regularly on the *Arletta's* starboard watch. And what d'you suppose lies before me? We're entered in the big race from Chicago to Mackinac, and Lyman Howarth comes on from the East for that. He always does; says it's the sportiest sailing race on water, fresh or salt. Place him?"

"Mr. Lyman Howarth?" said Ellen. "Isn't he——?"

"The same," assured Jay. "He's the one I met at midnight in New York and introduced to my brother-in-law after he'd been trying to reach him, for two years. Lyman Howarth is young but he has a lot of say in New York; and he comes out to stand starboard watch in the race with me. A couple of days and nights steady going, with good weather; in bad—the Lord knows."

Ellen watched him. "Sometimes I've seen them start from here," she said at last. "When I'm home, I see them finish."

"Do you?" said Jay, not thinking of her now, but sticking to business. "How would you make out a report on the prospect card for Howarth? 'Yesterday, sailed with Ken Howarth; joined his crew; will be in the same watch



in race with Lyman Howarth.' How would that look?"

Ellen smiled at him for his little struggle with himself.

"You know I'm not with Ken Howarth just for business. You know I enjoyed that sail," he said seriously to her. "Lord, I love it! I'd rather sail than do anything of the sort—especially sail a race—but I'm certainly there for business, too.

"I was thinking, lying on my back and absorbing some of this burn, whether any of the cargo boats cleaned up as much in a month as I hope to make, for the firm, out of the *Arletta*? They certainly should have dropped me at some strictly commercial pier in the river; they ought never to have brought me back to Belmont Harbor.

"I made my calls to-day; but honestly I couldn't work up much interest in them. What's my record? On office calls, a washout. Fact is, I've done just one important thing—I played golf with Phil Metten at Tryston; and I've got just one good prospect—from the fact that I'm sailing, on Sundays, with Ken Howarth and his cousin comes on for the race. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," said Ellen, but she was thinking of the race.

"You know," he stirred toward her, "you know I really believe something considerable will come from Howarth; something big enough, maybe, to save us. It can't come quick or if we ask for it—nothing could kill our chance deader—but if we take time and let it come, we'll get it, I believe.

"But, by heavens, we have to have time and hold on to Lew Alban. The Howarths, however they like us, never will throw their business to a firm losing Alban after Metten and headed for the rocks. Will they?"

"No," said Ellen, suddenly flushed. "Never."

Her coolness, which he had liked and praised, was gone; but he liked her none the less, looking at her and wondering about her. What so suddenly had excited her?

Ellen was awakened from her fancy of the shade and rest with Jay. Lew Alban loomed before her; and, what of Jay's wife?

Of her, he said nothing at all; and Mr. Rountree refrained from all reference to Lida. No one mentioned her; she had vanished from the news.

Occasionally Ellen bought New York papers and searched the accounts of society for some hint of Mrs. Jay Rountree's whereabouts, but in vain; for Lida had dropped from notice in New York, quietly slipping off at a season when so many people of importance disappeared for all sorts of reasons and to all sorts of destinations. Indeed, it was a season when to remain in sight would stir comment. It was summer.

Jay knew that she had gone with her mother to Maine and he supposed that she stayed there until, wiring that he was coming on, he received a telegram from Mrs. Lytle telling him to await letters. One from Lida and one from her mother arrived together. Lida had departed, alone with a maid; she would communicate with her mother; she asked Jay not to seek her or make inquiry for her, promising him in return that she would send for him when she wanted him.

Mrs. Lytle emphasized that Lida required of him only no interference for the present and that nothing could be more tragic than an act of his which directed attention to Lida's hiding.

## XXI

The great regatta made ready under a fair wind; a west wind it was, mostly, a sort of sirocco from the sun-parched prairie, dry and hot. On the harbor jetties and piers, on the docks and breakwaters where the crowds collected, there was stark, staring sun heat; on the verandas of the Chicago Yacht Club, looking out over the big harbor and beyond it to the stake boat, was shade—ninety-two in the shade.

Three hundred and thirty miles away, at the tip of Lake Huron where the tiny isle of Mackinac lay like an emerald goal, it was ten degrees cooler only. Heat lay over all the lakes—violent, fiery July heat; but the wind was steady and almost abeam, wherefore the crew of the *Arletta* smiled and sang, and hung a cap over the barometer. For the *Arletta* was a fair-weather boat, light and fast. Seldom could a sloop stay in sight with her, when all canvas was spread; she liked to lean before the wind and skurry and skim.

If she had to reef and trim, that was another matter; but her crew, with a cap hiding the barometer, did not consider it. They were committed to moderate weather; so, moderate weather must there be, whatever the mercury in the hidden barometer tried to tell them and whatever the forecaster cried.

A cannon fired—the warning gun! And the score of sail—schooners, yawls and sloops—luffed, jibed and jock-



eyed for the start. Outside the harbor, now, all of them; outside but short of the line between the jetty and the stake boat.

A gun again! The schooners were off—the big ships of the racing fleet, two masts, mainsail, foresail, topsail and jibs. Heavy weather boats, they; wind and wave, they hoped for, particularly the *Vega*, first across the line.

Jay, at the *Arletta's* helm, put about and waited. Hot! He was brown, browner than his hair which, as he tanned, seemed bleached by the sun. Brown were his hands on the wheel, deeper brown than Ellen Powell's but lacking the clear smoothness of her color.

She was not here, of course. She was not even in Chicago, either upon the shore or in any of the big buildings under the sun there in the west; but, recently, he had been watching her hands become brown like a Brahmin's—her smooth, slim hands which he liked. She was north; she'd gone home. Her father, on his last voyage down, had taken her to the Soo because his father was away. Hot!

It was very hot, close to a hundred, in southern Illinois where old Stanley Alban lay and might not be moved. The heat did not help him; he endured it and prayed; and his friend, his best and closest friend since old John Rountree passed away, John Rountree's son, sat at his bedside, reading the Bible and praying with him. Lew also was there. It was no time for Lew to be neglectful.

The gun! The yawls were off—two masts, a jib and a big mainsail and a jigger. The next would be for sloops, and Jay luffed and put about quickly. He had a knack of timing, a feel for speed and for seconds which put in

his hands the helm at the start. Ken Howarth, owner and skipper, stood smiling beside him; and Lyman, who was on from Newport, watched Jay's hands and the pilot of the sloop *Saracen*, bearing away a hundred yards ahead.

She spread identical canvas with the *Arletta*, from jib-point to topsail. She matched the *Arletta* in length and beam. Among the sloops, it was, likely, the *Arletta* to beat the *Saracen* or the other way about.

Jay glanced at the *Saracen* and beyond to the stake boat and with his eyes he traced the starting-line to the shore.

"They have it," said Ken Howarth, suddenly nervous. They had the start, he meant; they were timed to the third gun and would cross with its echo, leading the *Arletta* by a hundred yards, Ken thought.

Jay did not think so; but he did not even shake his head; he stared at the shore; and, for those seconds, he was not even thinking of the race. He'd be cut off from shore, suddenly he realized, for two days and nights and the Lord of the Four Winds only knew how much longer. Cut off, that meant, from the waiting in these last days for word of Stanley Alban, and of Lida.

Not such word as was expected from Stanley, did he fear from Lida; a very opposite word, indeed—news of birth, the exact contrary of death, but with a possibility of death, too, of course. But he could do nothing about it, afloat or ashore. He did not know so much as where Lida was; she had not told him and her mother refused all information.

Ken Howarth clapped him on the back. Lyman called to him: "We got it!" The start, they meant, for the *Saracen* was ahead of the gun; she was at the line and, not to cross, had to come into the wind, sails flapping.

A puff of smoke! The sound! The gun! And the bowsprit of the *Arletta* was at the line, with jibs, mainsail, topsail, every inch of canvas drawing. They were across and away with the *Saracen* astern and to leeward.

It was only the start, and what were yards' advantage and a few seconds in three hundred and thirty miles of crow-flight course—five hundred or six, perhaps, sailing? But it was the start, and they had it.

"Steamboat track!" called Ken. "Straight to Point Betsie!"

Two hundred and three miles away, as a steamboat never swerving from its compass course would log it, north by east and across the lake, beckoned Point Betsie. Clear water all the way, ninety fathoms below them.

Jay gave over the helm to Ken and stretched out on the deck, forward. Lyman lounged comfortably beside him, talking.

They liked each other and the same sort of things: effort of nerve and muscle, a bit of bucking the elements, a bit of depending upon yourself, a bit of risk. Jay, from his schooling, knew the East; Lyman, from visits to his cousins, knew the West, as he called Chicago.

They leaned on their elbows, watching the sails racing them, and talked rig and jib patterns. Now and then Jay remembered that Lyman was a buyer and he was a seller; indeed, that Lyman held, perhaps, the fate of the future



of Rountree. But Lyman did not know this. Jay wondered if Lyman remembered even that he was a buyer and Jay a seller. Lyman gave no sign of it, whatever.

Nobody needed the cap hung over the barometer, so nobody picked it up; but the radio set in the little cabin brought in, at six, the weather warning. No harm in hearing it and now you might as well see what the glass said. It agreed with the forecaster completely.

Lyman lit the kerosene stove and Jay beat up batter for flapjacks.

“Mix a lot, Jay,” urged Lyman. “This is probably the last time anything will stick to the top of the stove. We’ll feed both watches while our appetites are with us. I’ll be bus boy.” And while Jay cooked, Lyman served the watch on deck.

There was a midnight moon, and land was lost. Under the moon, the fleet—schooners, yawls and sloops—was spread over the lake ahead, astern and on both beams. Tiny jewels of light, emerald and ruby, marked the hulls. The moon showed the sails, and a sloop—the *Saracen*, probably, she was too far off for a hail—lay even with the *Arletta* but far to the lee. A disadvantage, perhaps; but also perhaps not, for if the wind swung around with a change in the weather, the positions with respect to the wind would be reversed and they would have the windward position.

Calm had come with the moon—a too sudden, ominous

calm; the steady, hot sirocco from the prairies had blown itself out, and now there were dead doldrums in which the water seemed to drag like weeds in the Sargasso sea. But the water was clear like black glass. All through the fleet, balloon jibs, fisherman sails and spinnakers were spread to catch every capful of wind. To the west, down by the watery horizon, lightning flashed and forked.

“Heat lightning,” Jay said; for the stillness was very hot. Rolling over the stars came a curtain—clouds, black clouds—and squalls struck the sails. Some took it behind, some took it abeam, some headed into it. Spinnakers came down; balloon jibs and topsails. The fleet was scattering.

The masthead lantern and the red and green lights of a steamer approached. It hailed the *Arletta*.

“There’s a big blow on the way.”

“We know it,” the skurrying *Arletta* acknowledged. “You better get in to Gary.”

The lightning, leaping from cloud to cloud, became attracted to the lake. Down forked the flashes; down, down and spreading. Distant, at first; four flashes came before the thunder. Then the thunder caught up and was continuous. The squalls stopped. Here was the blow! The lightning showed it coming out of the north. There it struck a schooner’s sails; there it carried a yawl’s topmast away.

Under jib and reefed mainsail, the *Arletta* leaned on the starboard tack and skimmed a sloop on the port tack. Lyman shouted to Jay: “This is what they don’t believe, when I tell ’em east. The sea can show nothing as sporty. You got to have your water in the center of a continent to work up wind like this.”

Then the wind really came, and the *Arletta* tried to take it. The mast stood; the stays strained but did not snap. Below, not above, was the damage; for the foot of the mast, though it stood, opened seams and water rushed in.

Jay and Lyman bent to the pumps. Pump, pump, pump it went, by hand and arm, with back bent. Pump, pump, to stay afloat at all. Pump; an hour on, an hour off while the port watch pumped, pumped, pumped. Your turn again, yours and Lyman's to pump and pump.

A good thing, training; a good thing, to be used to pull, pull, pull at your oar in a race for four miles. But that, after twenty minutes, was over. No end to this; none in sight; but Lyman and Jay, pumping, made it a sort of Harvard-Yale event against the crew of the *Saracen*, who were Cornell and Princeton. Jay called like a coxswain to Lyman: "Come up, Yale; come up! Princeton's rowing thirty-six." And, like a Harvard coxswain, Lyman yelled back at Jay.

Rain followed the big blow, blinding, squall-swept rain through which, toward dawn, beat the sound of a steamer's whistle.

Ken replied with the foghorn. Ken had been below, taking his turn at the pumps, but he happened to be on deck for this. It was still so dark that he held flashlights and played them on the sail to increase the chance of being seen; and the steamer came so close that it hailed:

"Want help? Want help?"

Ken called to his crew and replied: "We're racing, thanks; thank you, but we're racing!"

They never had another hail; they never saw another



sail that day, through which the wind blew rain and rain and they pumped to keep afloat, navigating by guess largely and seasick, some of them.

Jay wasn't; nor Lyman. Off watch, they consumed crackers and cheese and sardines and, paired at the pumps, they did double time twice.

Shore stood to starboard; they sighted Point Betsie with Frankfort Harbour below but never thought of putting in. They pumped and passed the Sleeping Bear; now the Manitous in a mist of rain. They pumped on.

Ile Aux Galets shoals—"Skilagalee" (the graveyard of the Lakes)—took its turn at them. The steering gear smashed, the wheel-box split, the rudder was useless. So they stripped to a storm jib (pumping meanwhile) and made repairs which let them hoist sail and which held through the Straits and into Huron!

They finished! Seventy-two hours out, indeed—three days and three nights from the start—but they finished. Nine sail ahead of them. The *Vega* of course and other schooners; yawls, too; and sloops, which had been built for heavy weather; but not the *Saracen*, light like the *Arletta*.

"*Saracen?*" Lyman Howarth hailed. "Where is she?"

"In Charlevoix! They were taken in, sinking."

At this, Lyman hugged his partner of the pumps and did a dance. "Outpumped 'em, b'God; we pumped out Cornell and Princeton!"

The sun was smiling on the little strait between Mackinac and Round Island. The wind had died; only a breeze was blowing, and the *Arletta*, having finished, lazily was seeking the shelter of the shore. Jay sat at the stem, very

tired; sleep, he wanted, nothing but sleep. Scarcely could he keep his eyes open to the motor-craft and sails which witnessed and cheered the finish.

Suddenly he started up, eyes wide and staring at a little white catboat which had come up under the *Arletta's* lee. A bareheaded girl was standing at the stern, steering with a bare, brown little forearm thrusting at the tiller. Skillfully she brought her boat in close without any interference, while she gazed at the *Arletta's* crew gathered astern. Jay she did not at first see, for he was forward and she had to look under the sail, but he recognized her.

He leaped up and ran aft and she saw him. "Oh!" she cried out; just that, "Oh!" for all of them to hear, and she put over her helm, steering away again. They all watched her, little and brown and hiding her face with confusion after her cry.

"Friend of yours, Jay?" Ken asked him.

"Catch her," said Jay, reckless in his arousal from his exhaustion. "Catch her!" he begged and Ken obliged him. Jay ran forward again but this time to lee and, as the boats came close, he called to Ellen Powell: "I'm coming aboard!"

She replied not a word but looked him over from head to foot and her little brown arm pulled at her tiller, bringing the catboat almost against the big sloop so that Jay leaped and was aboard with her. Instantly, she let the sheet run; the boats separated. They were off by themselves, he and Ellen and a boy who was her brother.

Jay shook hands with the boy: "Hello," Jay said to him. "Hello; you're Ted." For Ted had come, last summer, with his father to Chicago and had visited the office.

To Ellen, Jay said nothing at all but sat on the side opposite the sail and looked at her. Amazingly, his exhaustion was fled; he might never have seen a pump; he might have slept for eight hours, instead of snatches of minutes through the last three nights; he felt wonderfully excited.

“You had a time,” said Ellen to him. “You surely had a time.”

Still he said nothing to her and he never turned his head to the *Arletta*. She and he, and Ted, were sailing away from Mackinac and the fleet. “Where should I take you?” asked Ellen, as though he had come aboard for his convenience. “You want to go in?”

Jay shook his head. “Where would you go by yourselves?”

“We’d be going home now,” she said.

“Mind taking me along?”

“Mind?” she repeated. “Mind?” Her gray eyes looked away from him to the water and returned to him to glance from his bare head to his canvas-shod feet. “You’ve been soaked through,” she said.

Jay laughed. “Not through much.” He was in shirt and canvas trousers. “We got dried this noon.”

His sudden excitement was subsiding to a satisfaction made for him by the nearness of this girl in a white linen dress and with bare, smooth brown arms, with a slim, brown hand on the tiller and whose canvas-tipped toes did not quite touch the bottom of the boat, as she sat at the stern—as her leather-tipped toes always had failed, when she sat in his father’s big chair, quite to touch the floor.



How utterly unlike that office girl was this Ellen Powell of the sail and tiller, with little strands of her hair blown before her face! But how, then, was he so completely comfortable at having come aboard, as he had, and at having remained with her?

Far, far away from Mackinac, he glanced back and, recollecting his leap, he cared not at all what his mates might be saying of him. Without that sudden, reckless impulse to board this boat, and without having yielded to it, he would not be here; and here he was completely content to be.

She brought the catboat to a wide, sandy beach below a green hillside whereon was a white house which they had seen from across the strait. They climbed up to it together; and not yet did Jay's exhaustion return. But at the odors of dinner—he thought it was dinner but it was meat and vegetable soup for supper—he was ravenous.

Ellen's mother would not have him wait; she brought him a pitcher of milk and he drank and drank.

"I ought to ask for wires," he said to Ellen. "They would be forwarded to Mackinac."

"I'll phone over for you," Ellen said, watching his eyelids droop.

"I'll take a short nap before dinner," said Jay, "if I may."

Ellen led him to the "best" room where he flung himself face downward on the bed and was asleep almost before she left the door. She lingered, listening, near his door. Toward bedtime for the household (nine o'clock) her mother suggested waking him, for the supper which she

had kept ready. "He'll sleep better," her mother said. "I fear he'll wake in the night, hungry."

But Ellen wanted him left to sleep, so her mother stole in, while Ellen held a lamp outside the door, and her mother was satisfied to draw over him a blanket, for the cool of the northern night had come. Ellen had a glimpse of him in a shaft of light from the lamp she held—a glimpse of his brown head and his arms flung beside his head, like a child sleeping, face to the bed. He never stirred.

She retreated, at last, to her room where she lay listening and dreaming, with sleepless suspense, in the dark. It was almost like her dream of him with her under shade trees; better than her dream, in some ways, to have him here. But what did it mean that, seeing her, he had leaped to her boat? What did it mean that he was here? In the dark she listened for sound of stir from him, happy and fluttering with fright. Happy? Never, never in all her life had she suspected happiness like this; and never, this fright.

Cockcrow awakened Jay; cockcrow and the clear, slanting shafts of the northern sunrise. It was later than dawn, for the house was on the west slope and the sun had to surmount the hilltop before sending its yellow beams through the windows. Jay stretched and he studied the white ceiling. He looked through one window and saw the strait; through another and he gazed upon a garden sparkling with dew: blue larkspur and Canterbury bells and, beside the window, purple and white and pink morning-glory. Cockcrow and the cluck of hens.

He fingered the blanket, drawn over him by someone during the night. He recollected how he had seen Ellen under the *Arletta's* sail and he had called to Ken to catch her and, without regard for anyone else, he had leaped aboard her little boat. He recollected, and for the moment relived, his complete content as he had sat watching her, sailing with her to this place, her home.

He realized that, in his exhaustion, he had done exactly what he had wanted to do. If he had not been spent, he must have forbidden himself and controlled himself. Perhaps, if he had not been so wholly spent, he might not himself have known what he had wanted to do, but his exhaustion had stripped him of pretense and inhibition; it had made him, for that hour, utterly free; and so, seeing her, he had leaped to join her; and here he was, in her home.

He sat up; he arose and straightened his clothes and brushed his hair. Through the wide open windows, the morning breeze blew cool and the sunlight lay clear and clean; a waft of wood smoke reached him and he heard the pleasant crackling of a wood fire. He stepped from his room and soon came upon her.

Ellen was laying the breakfast table. She had a great blue bowl of strawberries in her hands—gray eyes lifted to his, smooth brown cheeks and her brown hands on a blue bowl of red berries. She was in a blue and white gingham dress.

She put down the bowl, slowly, not looking at it for looking at him. "Good morning," she said; and he damned within him the loss of his exhaustion; for, having destroyed his denials and pretenses, it had fled and left him



with self-control clamped upon him again so that he could not do what he wanted to.

He longed to seize, in each of his own, her little brown hands releasing the bowl; he longed to draw her, by her hands, to him and then suddenly grasp her in his arms, crushing not her—oh, he would not hurt her at all—but he would crush the ironed, provoking smoothness of her fresh gingham dress.

Instead of all this (and this would not have been all!) he had to say, because he had slept, "I was awfully informal with you, yesterday." (But nothing to what he would do to-day!)

"I'm glad you were," she said; and asked: "You slept?"

"The clock around," he admitted. Where was his office Ellen in this blue and white cotton dress? Here, or he could not long for this girl so; impossible, simply from having sailed with her and seen her again this morning, to long so for a stranger; but he felt and, in spite of his having slept, he said:

"You're a sort of a sister of Ellen Powell, aren't you?"

"If you want me to be," she said; and crimson confusion overcame her.

"I don't," he denied swiftly and walked out, by himself.

What message might be for him this morning? What from Lida or of Stanley Alban? Might Lida, in these three days, have sent for him; or Stanley Alban died?

"I phoned to Mackinac," Ellen told him, when he returned. "There were no messages." It was like the office only for a moment; at the next, her mother and sisters

and the two boys were about him and he sat down with the family to such a breakfast as never had been spread before him. Sometimes Ellen waited upon him; sometimes her mother; sometimes the smallest of the three girls passed him a dish with her tiny brown hands, very competent (like Ellen's) and with big gray eyes (very like Ellen's) seriously lifted to his.

By all canons of conduct, this self-invited guest should have departed after breakfast, but it was the last thing he desired to do; so he compromised by taking a walk with Ted along old Indian trails which led, here and there, to sudden, silent clearings planted to squash and beans and corn and to weathered cabins from which the black, beady eyes of Chippewa squaws and children observed them. Jay wanted to return to the house, the home where Ellen was.

Noon came on, still, sunny and cloudless but not hot. There was no wind to stir the leaves of beech and maple; the silver poplar scarcely flicked in the sun; yet the strait was not quite calm. You could see from the hillside the sparkle of ripples and you felt cooled by a current of air which failed to disturb the trees. Wood insects droned and hummed, and bees were at the pink clover blossoms.

It was the hour for a swim and Ted had borrowed a suit for Jay. Ellen in bathing suit went with her sisters down to the beach, where Jay and the boys ran foot-races.

Strange to approach him, with her arms bare, her shoulders almost bare, her legs bare and with her blue bathing suit clinging close to her body; strange but not at all unpleasant. He glanced at her as he glanced at her sisters, and he gave one hand to Ann (who was the littlest one)

while Ellen held to Ann's other hand and together the three of them splashed into the water.

His body was like her picture of him at his oar, only now he showed no strain at all; he was laughing and he swung Ann high. He liked Ann; he liked the other two girls and the boys; he liked—oh, yes, Ellen knew that he liked her.

They left Ann in the shallow water and swam out, he and she, side by side to the catboat, upon which he clambered ahead of her and gave her a hand, pulling her up. Side by side she sat with him, barelegged and wet.

She had had an idea, when undressing, of keeping Ann with her, but her shyness was gone. It was only pleasant to be with him; pleasant and very exciting. He waited for her to dive and she poised, for a half second, in a bit of a panic. How she wanted to dive well!

She did it; she took the water perfectly, her little brown hands first and her little brown feet last disappearing, so that he praised her when she came up. And he dived in after her.

Dinner at late noonday.

How long could he let himself stay? He phoned to Mackinac and was told, "A telegram."

After it was read to him, he talked with Lyman Howarth. "Our crew is motoring back," he said to Ellen, when he went on a walk with her. "They're leaving the boat for repairs. Couple of men drive down this way to-night. I'll go to the main road at ten to meet them. Can I stay here till then?"



Ellen was slow to speak, for her disappointment; she had dreamed of perhaps another day. "I wish you could stay"—she wanted to say "forever" but she could only say, "much longer."

"I've got to go," he said. "Stanley Alban's dead."

"Oh!" She started up, as though at an alarm.

Suddenly, like the end of a spell, she was swept from the enchantment of her day. He and she were alone on a hill-top under pines between which the sun streamed with afternoon radiance. They had dropped to a soft, brown carpet of pine needles and, from the shade of the jackpine, they looked over the strait, over islets and to the opposite shore and over sail and ships between, but they were returned, in sight of it all, to the office and to another relation.

"Father wired me," Jay said; and he added, unthinkingly, "There was no other message." None from Lida, he meant, but he had not told Ellen he had wanted word of her. However, Ellen had known it. "Messages," he had said last night, when she spoke of phoning over; now he had one but, Ellen guessed, not the other expected message.

"I've got to go," Jay repeated. "I must go to Stanley as quickly as I can." And he sat silent, thinking of the old man who had died and who had maintained, to his last breath, the epoch of his own youth and loyalty to his friend's son. Jay thought of his father in the old man's silent home and the gathering, in the front room, of the elders of the church which Jay's grandfather and old Stanley together had established; he thought of them on

their knees at prayer and his father with them. Then he thought of Lew, but he spoke to Ellen of Stanley.

"He was a fine old man, narrow and self-righteous as the dickens," said Jay, "but he stood for something; and he certainly stood by us. I liked him; in small separated doses," he qualified honestly. "I'm going down there out of respect to him. Lew will be sneering in his sleeve at me, I know. He'll say I came even to a funeral for business."

Ellen offered no comment; she was sifting through her brown fingers the dried pine needles and her heart was thumping and thumping. Every mention of Lew was like a tocsin, arousing her.

"I'll go down no matter what Lew thinks," Jay continued, "though I'll be only adding to his pleasure at spilling us as soon as he gets around to it, now. He'll not cut us off next week; it'd hardly be decent. Besides, he's the sort that likes to kill slowly; but b'God," said Jay, under his breath, "I've a chance to beat him; to live without him, I mean." He looked out over the lake. "We had rather a rotten time racing up here, you know," Jay added suddenly, making his first voluntary reference to it.

"I knew," said Ellen, keeping her eyes on the pine needles. "That's why I went to meet you. I wasn't sure all the sloops would finish—with everybody aboard." And she had not admitted that before.

"We were all right," said Jay, "but it was no loaf. Lyman Howarth and I spent a fair amount of time at the pumps; and there was a while when we had an exaggerated idea of . . . whether we'd be all right, really. Well, Lyman and I were rather thrown together, anyone'd say. He

never dished me and he feels I didn't dish him. We never talked business; we never thought business, either, but . . . well, Lyman and I . . .” Jay groped vainly for a word.

“You built your Baptist church together,” Ellen offered, surprisingly.

“What?”

Ellen looked up at him, flushing. “Your grandfather and old Mr. Alban built a Baptist church together fifty years ago, and so he's stuck with you ever since,” she quietly said. “Lyman Howarth and you started something of the same sort inside you. I thought so, when I heard you talking to him on the phone.”

“We started something,” Jay said, “and nothing could turn it sourer than for me to ask him for business.” He winced at the idea. “Can you imagine it? Even on the business side, it would be the one worst move; but wait and say nothing, and Lyman will work the account around to me.”

He struck his fist in the palm of his hand. “But we have to have time—time—and hold Alban, somehow. Lyman can't go to his father and say ‘give our business to a failing concern.’ We have to be going, and going strong to get Howarth; and never let them guess how we need them.”

He flung himself back and lay looking up at the trees; and Ellen longed to move nearer him.

“It's come up to me, hasn't it?” he asked; and she knew exactly what he meant, as she followed his thought to his father in the home of his father's dead friend.

She thought, as Jay was thinking, of his father having



dealt through all his business life chiefly—and indeed as far as was possible to him—with things in preference to dealing with people, because he had no knack of dealing with people. John Rountree, in fact, distrusted people; he did not really like them; he trusted, instead, things and liked to deal in things; he understood things; he did not understand personal relations.

Once, he had done well because his father had dealt in personal relations sufficiently to make a lifelong friend of Stanley Alban, and the son had inherited this friend who had stood by him until this day. Moreover, at the start, there had been no competitors; so people had to come to John Rountree and he could succeed, dealing only in things. But conditions changed and required personal relations with many sorts of people; and John Rountree, having no knack for them, forbade them and called them outrageous and wrong.

Suddenly Ellen's breast was aflutter as she gazed at Jay, in the sunlight and spotted shade of the trees, and there was made clear to her the roots of the hostility between his father and him which had enlisted her with him before ever she had seen him.

Jay had been born with the knack to prosper through his liking for people and theirs for him; it endowed him with ability to succeed by merely forming personal relations which set at nothing and ignored the father's training to things; and this, to his father, was what was wrong in the world. His father wouldn't have it, in the world; but his father could not alter it, so he took out his grudge against it in the world by bitter determination to break it and deny it in his son.

Lucky for him he couldn't, Ellen thought. Where would Mr. Rountree be, after burying Stanley Alban, if Jay had gone his father's way and not taken to people and rowed and played around New London with the Howarths and sailed this race with them?

"Yes; it's up to you," Ellen said, whispering.

"What, d'you figure, can I do about Lew?"

She leaped up and he put up a hand and caught one of hers in surprise at her excitement. "It's late," she cried, explaining. "We must be going back."

Against the evening coolness, and for the night drive to the main road, she gave him a coat of her father's. Ted accompanied them but he stayed with the little car at the crossroad, while Ellen and Jay walked away.

Stars gleamed, the Dipper and Cassiopeia and Andromeda. Were they stale as ever to Lida to-night? Jay wondered. Where was she? And might she send for him tomorrow?

Light spread before the northern stars, a dim, greenish glow creeping up and up; it brightened and became serrated and flowed in folds like a curtain of shining cloth, and one great beam reached and reached toward the zenith. Now the whole curtain moved and shifted its folds; it seemed to crackle. You seemed to see it crackling, not hear it. Light, light glowed and crackled in the sky, and the curtain was shattered; shafts of lights swayed and danced, separated, approached, parted and joined again!

"The dead dance," whispered Ellen. "This is what the Indians say. You can believe it a night like this."

"Suppose Stanley Alban's there?" asked Jay—or Lida's restless soul? This he did not say, nor did he think of

Lida lost. Not Lida, but the lights kept her in his mind. Suddenly, while Ellen and he watched, the dead tired of their dance; the Aurora dimmed away.

In the dark he grasped Ellen's slim little hand; motor lights, from the north, gleamed far up the road.

"I don't like to leave this place," said Jay. "I don't like to leave you. I'd like to stretch out this day and keep you."

"I'd like to keep you," said Ellen. Her hand drew in his as though she would take it away but suddenly seized his again, and he grasped hers, clinging to her. He would have grasped and enfolded her and held to him the little brown body he had seen this day. He wanted her lips; he wanted her lips as never he had Lida's lips; he wanted to slip an arm down and lift her and in his arms hold her against his breast and kiss her and whisper to her, lips on hers; he wanted her hands upon his face, where so often had been Lida's; he wanted her.

He began to be able to see her, eyes lifted to his; brighter, he wanted it. But this was not the Aurora; it was motor headlights. He had to step from her; he had to let her go.

"Good-by," she whispered. "Good-by, Jay."

"Ellen," he said; but he had lost his chance for more. He could keep only her hand a few seconds longer. "Ellen, good-by," he said and stepped out on to the road.



## XXII

When she had done her work in the morning, Ellen slipped into the room which had been Jay's. No one noticed, she thought; but her mother had and, when Ellen remained, her mother entered and found her seated by a window (which had become "his window").

Ellen looked about. "I've made his bed, mother," she said.

"You wanted to, yourself."

"Yes. . . . Since, I've stayed to think about him."

Her mother approached her. "What about yourself, Ellen," she inquired gently, "yourself and him? He's the one you told your father of."

"He is."

"He's married, Ellen; you'd not told your father that of him."

"No. I didn't think it made any difference."

"That he's married, Ellen?"

"I didn't know he'd . . . come anywhere for me. But he came here," she whispered, so troubled within herself that her mother made no reproach of her.

"The night he came, Ellen, he was just a tired boy. And I'd have liked everything about him yesterday, weren't he married."

Married! thought Ellen; How much was he married, and why? Why was his wife away from him? She could not mention to her mother these things. Her mother was not "misdoubting" anything done; but "you love him,

Ellen; you told your father so; you've told me he's the one, and I've seen you."

"I'm going to New York," Ellen suddenly said, startling her mother.

"To New York, Ellen? Why's that?"

"I've an offer. I had it weeks ago. He'll not be in New York, mother; so I'll go there!"

She stood, in her excitement, quivering. She would go to New York away from him but in his service, for Lew Alban would be there. Ellen avoided her mother, for what she seemed to say was, "I'll leave even the city Jay Rountree's in, so as to be away from him," whereas what she meant was that, for him, she'd follow, to New York, Lew Alban.

None of this could she tell her mother, but it was then and there that Ellen made her decision.

She owned the rest of the week and, during it, she heard nothing from Jay nor of him. He was at Stanley, undoubtedly, with his father and Lew Alban. By Monday, they would return to Chicago, and on Monday morning, Ellen was in her place at the office, awaiting Mr. Rountree.

He came in, garbed in black. Jay accompanied him, so she kept her eyes, at first, upon Mr. Rountree, who scarcely spoke to her. Did he remember that she had been at home? she wondered. He was completely preoccupied with his own affairs and he sat down, solemnly, to deal with them.

Jay shook hands. In his fingers was there remembrance

of their handclasp beside the northern road? Did he recollect his leap from the sloop to her little boat, when he had seen her? He inquired about her mother and about the rest, by name—of Ted and Ann, especially—and she replied to him steadily enough, almost as usual. He went out, leaving her to her work with his father.

Jay had heard from Lida. It was a note in pencil and so brief that he had memorized it.

“I’m all right. It’s all right. The stars are not so stale, Jay. Do you ever look at them? Later, I’ll send for you.”

So Lida had not been among the dead who had danced in the sky of that northern night. Instead, the stars had become, for her, not stale! How and why? He thought of her often as he went about; and he returned to Ellen at the end of the day, as he used to do.

“Ken Howarth and I had lunch together,” he related. “Lyman Howarth’s gone back east. We talked race.”

“What’s Lew Alban doing?” Ellen asked.

“Staying in Stanley for a while. There’s probate proceedings, of course, and a lot of legal stuff. Then he returns to New York. He’s offered for sale everything he has in Stanley, except the factory; even the old house.”

“His home,” repeated Ellen, offended at the idea; and she asked: “Did you see Mr. Slengel there?”

“He was not at the funeral. That was rather a Rountree affair,” said Jay wryly. “But he came down before we left; in fact, we left him with Lew.”

He glanced at her smooth, brown throat and her brown little hands and her bare forearm; he dwelt, for the instant, in the delight of his day with her; he dwelt with the longing for her which had seized him under the stars—



Lida's stars, not stale. Later, she'd send for him. He shook hands with Ellen, unnecessarily but briefly and with no such grasp from her as on the night in the north.

Ellen knew nothing of Lida, but Ellen felt him withdrawn again. She went home—home now being a room with Diana.

Di was very glad to see her. Di questioned her a little, not much, of Hoster. She wanted Ellen to confine herself to answers to questions and not volunteer more. Abruptly Di abandoned the subject of home.

"Send your sympathy down to Lew?" she inquired.

"No," said Ellen.

"He ain't the one that can use it," admitted Di. "He'll be free as air, now."

Did Di mean, in the disposition of his business favors? Ellen wondered. Di explained.

"He's known for months the old man couldn't move from his bed, still he's been crampin' Lew's style. Now Lew'll let out."

Ellen had opportunity, soon, to see this for herself. Lew appeared, wearing a new, light suit with a broad, black mourning band on the sleeve. He called ostensibly to pay personal respects to Mr. Rountree and to deliver a seal ring, a Bible and other effects found to have been bequeathed to John Rountree by his father. Ominously, Lew did not discuss business at all but was prodigal, beyond the provisions of the will, in bestowal of his father's keepsakes, especially those of small intrinsic value, ecclesiastical in character.

Ellen felt he was playing upon Mr. Rountree with a more pompous and more cruel deference than ever before; and he plied Jay, overpolitely, with small, worthless presents, impossible to refuse.

Yes; Lew was letting out. At the office, he was punctilious with her; no curve of her body escaped his scrutiny but he did not delay to be alone with her. He wanted to be off; off to New York, "free as air" (as Di had said), with no parent alive to learn, by any chance, reports of him.

Again and again his eyes came to Ellen, but each time her sensation was the same. He was postponing her; he had put off his patience and willingness to wait; he was off to New York free as air. Art Slengel accompanied him.

From New York, Ralph Armiston recorded Lew's arrival.

"I am not personally popular with him, as you know," Ellen read Ralph's frank admission, in a letter to Mr. Rountree. (She remembered Jay's statement that Ralph was to Lew, as was Lew to Ralph, a pot of poison.) "I have no negotiations with him at his office. We are supposed to assume that his business stays with us. He refuses my social invitations; he goes around with Slengel."

Di, a few evenings later, confirmed this. "Art's sticking in New York," she informed Ellen. "He's certainly on the job with Lew," and she vouchsafed details, which had reached her, that demonstrated that Mr. Slengel spent little of his time, on the job, in Lew's office. The method of procedure, which had proved itself by most practical

and profitable results in the Metten case, was being extended and adapted to suit the pleasure of Lew.

It did not, to Di's disappointment, draw her to New York. "Art'd be a fool to pay cash fares from Chicago for girls for a party down there," Di admitted. "Broadway's lit for them that bought their own tickets, one way. Besides," considered Di, "I never went big with Lew. Art's had just one criticism of me; I ain't reluctant enough for some. The kick in a kiss to some is the girl's reluctance. Now if you worked for Art and he knew the flowers Lew sent you . . ."

Ellen prepared herself, on several successive days, to speak to Mr. Rountree, yet finally, when she did, she was almost incoherent and he misunderstood her.

"You want to leave my employ?" he asked, regarding her as though she were deserting a sinking ship.

"I just want to go to your New York office, please," Ellen explained and spoke of never having seen New York and of wishing to work there.

Mr. Rountree never had a thought of relating it with Lew; he merely satisfied himself that she had come to a decision and, after questioning her, he made no objections. "I will transfer you immediately," he agreed.

Di was more inquisitive. "Whose idea?" she catechized. Ellen said it was her own.

"Lew in it?"

"I'm to be in charge, in New York, under Mr. Armiston," Ellen replied; and to this Di countered, "In charge of what?"



"The office," said Ellen.

"There won't be no office in New York nor anywhere else, when you lose Lew. You know that," returned Di, narrowing her eyes. "You know Lew liked you. What you doin', Ellen?"

"I'm going to take over the New York office, under Mr. Armiston," Ellen re-declared, too emphatically.

Jay heard of it, not from his father, but through Lowry, and interpreted it without reference to Lew. He remembered how he had, himself, delivered Ralph's original request for her and that he had urged her to accept the place, never wanting her to go. Since then, how affairs had flown for her and for him!

Within the Ellen of the office, who awaited him calmly (outwardly) at the end of the day, was the bare-armed, brown little girl who had bent, looking for him under the *Arletta's* sail, and had cried out in her relief at sight of him. Within, was she who had brought her boat close to let him leap aboard and had freed the sheet when he was beside her; she of the blue gingham and the big strawberry bowl, of the brown, smooth shoulders and brown, smooth legs and brown little feet, who had swum with him and climbed up on the little boat and dived; she of the afternoon talk under the trees and of the dance of the dead in the sky and of the dark by the road before the motor-car came.

To her, he could not cease to be the very tired boy who had jumped at sight of her and forgotten everything and everyone else but her; never, never could he cease

to be (though this he could not suspect) the boy flung face down across the bed with his arms, like a child's, beside his head while she watched over him and dreamed.

Now, she was going away; and after he heard it, Jay avoided his father's office until the hour when he was sure to find her alone.

"You're going to New York," he said. "Did I have anything to do with it?"

She looked at him, thinking what to say. "It's better for me to be there," she told him, at last.

"Do you want to go to New York?"

"I want to go."

He seized both her hands, one hand to each of his, thrusting his fingers between hers, pressing his palms to hers. He drew her toward him, so. Then his hands would release her; his hands would slip over her shoulders and about her little body. He started to draw his hands away but hers clung to his; she fought more than his handclasp but she clung to his clasp; she clung to it, so!

"I don't want you to go!" he told her.

"I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

"To go?"

"This!" she cried, and tore her hands from him. So he stood back from her, as he had by the northern road under the stars where the dead danced; under the stars not so stale now to Lida, who would soon send for him. There was Lida. He remembered Lida and turned away.

To leave the city, where she had dwelt for nearly three years, was less, far less to Ellen than to forsake the lake

beside which she had been born and had lived all her life. She looked for the water and watched it at every eastward open space, as the train rushed into Indiana.

Now the lake lay to the north. Ellen gazed up the length of the great fresh sea toward her home, nearly four hundred miles away, where were her mother and sisters and brothers—and the room which, shared with her sister, was hers and the room with the bed upon which Jay had slept.

The lake, all the length of it, represented home and home people; for they sailed upon it, her father's ship traversed it all. The lake had brought her father to her and away from her and back to her again.

The porter, with Ethiopian sensitiveness to feelings, stepped to Ellen: "You'll be havin' your last look at the lake."

Ellen arose and gazed back, long after the water had vanished.

Mr. Armiston was very glad to have her, and he turned over the office to her with results which he signaled by reducing to nearly nothing his hours of attendance at his desk. In contrast to Mr. Rountree, he celebrated with compliments. "Satisfactory" was a weak and wobbling word to describe her, he declared. "Never saw a girl with as good a head."

But Ellen did not expect to accomplish, with her hands and head, her errand in New York.

When first she phoned Lew's office, on a matter of routine business, she imagined the possibility of reaching Lew and being recognized; but upon that occasion and subsequently, another answered and dealt with her. When



she inscribed, at the bottom of Mr. Armiston's letters to Lew, the symbol RA/EP, she imagined Lew noticing it and recognizing her initials; but he gave no sign of knowledge of her presence.

Ellen had taken a room near Washington Square and she spent a glorious September Sunday about the docks of the Hudson, watching the ferries, the tugs and the great liners in the slips on both sides of the river. Ships! Deep, rumbling blasts of steam whistles, the swish of cutwaters, the beat of the engines, the tap of bells—one two, one two, one two.

It made her weak with homesickness, but it was at the waterfront that she planned her Monday call upon Lew.

Instead of sending, by messenger, a pattern which required his approval, she carried it to his office. "May I see Mr. Alban, please?" And she sent in her name.

He received her, seated and tilted back, slightly, in his dark-grained chair at his big, dark-grained table. The girl who had ushered her slipped out and Ellen stood alone with him, his eyes roving over her.

"So it's you," he greeted her. "You decided to follow me."

"I'm in Mr. Armiston's office," Ellen said.

Lew nodded, with his eyes still roving, his lips slightly smiling. "When did you come down?"

"A couple of weeks ago."

"You're just letting me know," remarked Lew, watching her face and the increase of her discomfiture, as he put out his hand for the paper she held and, taking it from her, tossed it aside. "Is there any real hurry about that?"

"No," admitted Ellen.

"Sit down," bid Lew. "I'm not busy." He indicated a chair near him and she obeyed.

She had had time, now, to appreciate the change in him. His father, as long as he lived, must have been a check upon Lew and a check, certainly, for his own good. Lew was sallow, more nerveless, thinner and at the same time more coarsened than ever she had seen him. The deceptive, slightly ascetic look natural to him, and which might have been accentuated by his thinness, was instead sharpened away.

"Glad to see you," said Lew, his eyes lingering upon her. Of girls of the readily supplied sort, he had seen too much; of this sort, nothing; and she always attracted him. She had appeared, indeed, on a day when he would have said that no girl would have stirred him; but she did; and he liked it. Moreover, it flattered him that she had followed him of herself. He knew the Rountrees never had sent her after him.

"Like New York?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"Where you living?"

Ellen hesitated, and then told him.

He laughed at her but he liked her for her fear of him. The others had no fear!

"Know where I live?" he teased her.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

She told him; and his street number, on her lips, was pleasantly titillating to him.

"How did you find out?"

"It's on file in the office."

He nodded, a trifle disappointed, but asked her: "Been by it, by any chance?"

"I've been by," admitted Ellen and more than repaid his momentary disappointment.

"Know the phone number, do you?"

"Yes."

Lew looked over her with half-shut, heavy-lidded eyes. "If you use it this week, you'll find me. Then I'm taking a little rest—France; Monte Carlo, maybe." He reached for the pattern she had brought and pulled it from the envelope. "That's all right," he said after a glance. "You knew it was, didn't you?"

"Yes. Do you mind telling me is it really any use our making up that pattern?"

"Our?" repeated Lew, mocking the tone of her word.

"Rountree, I mean."

"Oh, you can count on your job," assured Lew. "Rountree will keep open a while. I'm letting everybody ride till I get back; six weeks, I'd say."

Each evening of the week, Ellen struggled miserably with herself. She ought to phone him; she ought not; she ought; ought not. She never used the number or again saw him before he sailed.

She accused herself, as soon as he was safely away: she had dodged him; she had dodged Lew Alban. She had learned that she still possessed the power to attract him, only to sacrifice it, she thought, by having affronted him. Ellen did not know that, until he obtained her,



she would always have that which a woman, ungained, maintains over a man who has long looked upon her with desire.

Ralph Armiston saluted Lew's departure with heartfelt Thank Gods, for it gave Ralph what he most required—time. "Howarths are warming to us, but we can't force the fire," he said to Ellen. "Mr. Lew Alban hasn't the least idea we've a chance to cook a cake with Howarths or he'd have cut our throats before sailing, weary as he was of welldoings. Now unless he's a thoroughly gratuitous liar, we have six weeks."

It was at the end of the fifth that he returned to the office, late in the day, and instructed Ellen:

"Wire, please, my brother-in-law to come on, and not to wire his partner at the pumps that he's coming. I want him to drop in on Lyman Howarth. Something is nearly ripe to pick."

Ellen wired and received the response: to-morrow he was coming. Lew Alban was on the sea, four days away, aboard a great French liner.

Ellen made no alteration of her dress for the meeting with Jay. In the morning, she arose earlier—she had awakened at dawn—and she had taken more time to her hair; more time to her hands, which were losing their summer brown in this New York November; time, also, to tiny, freshening trifles; but she slipped into the blue dress which she had bought, a month ago, for the office.

He might come to the office direct from the train; he might, she realized, go to Mrs. Lytle's. She had no idea

what was his present relation with the Lytles and with his wife. She had no information, indeed, of himself except what crept into letters of his or his father's to Mr. Armistead, which it was her business to read. Ellen had not imagined how completely she was to be banished from him.

He came from the train, and, it being midmorning and New York, not Chicago, she was alone when the door opened and he was before her. He closed the door, quickly, and after they had spoken, he stood away from her. This was not, and could not be, resumption at the point of their parting; they had dropped from that, both of them, in externals; but what was within him? Anything of that which beat in her?

He asked her about her family and of Ann and Ted by name; she answered, noticing that his hair had become, again, darker than his skin. He was a bit older, a bit more than two months explained. Perhaps it was his new suit, cut differently. No; it was in his eyes and the slight set of his lips, after he smiled. He was taking more responsibility; he was less a boy. But if he flung himself, exhausted, across a best-room bed, he would sleep like a boy again! Looking at him, in this New York office, she saw him suddenly as he had slept in the shaft of light from the lamp in her hand.

"How has it been in Chicago?" she asked him.

"Rotten," he told her honestly.

"How is your father?"

Jay winced. "Spending his soul on economy. I'm glad you don't see him. He's—" Jay hesitated and made a clean breast of it—"he's lost his confidence, you see. He

knows we're losing Alban so tries to scheme how we can run without it. No chance; we can't; we've got to have more business; Howarth, of course you know," and sat down beside her and talked with her about Howarth until Ralph arrived and took him away.

She had him for a few minutes at the end of the day, almost as in Chicago. "I dropped in on Lyman Howarth," he told her, "and couldn't pretend I just happened to be in town and didn't care about his business. I didn't tell him we had to have it, either; I stayed somewhere between. There's a chance for us to take that business away from Slengels but never if Lew leaves us to go to Slengels first."

Ellen walked to her room in a clear, November coolness, with gusts of breeze at her cheek, the harbinger stirrings of a storm.

By morning, a storm—that completely capricious and relentless dealer in destinies—was spread over land and sea. It howled out to the ocean to strike the greatest ships and to make seasick, in his *de luxe* stateroom, Lew Alban. This was one of its countless consequences. Upon the western plains and especially upon the roaring reaches of the Great Lakes—that region where the wind had the water at its mercy in the middle of a continent—it struck with a suddenness and fury not known to the seas and dashed, like the hand of God, at its victims.

Against the package freighter *Gideon Gant*, out of Duluth with a crew of twenty-two officers and men, the gale beat; and the *Gant* flashed over the raging waves of



Lake Superior the alarm that she was sinking. Signals from her then ceased but watchers on the cliffs near the little Keweenaw settlement of Brebeuf saw a steamer, struggling with the storm, come within a mile of the cliffs before she foundered. They saw a lifeboat upturned and specks, which were men, tossed in the waves and disappear.

They saw a mast above the waves: a mast, from the sunken hull, stood; and on the mast clustered five specks. A good glass showed them plainly; they were men. They could not save themselves and no one could save them.

No boat could live in the gale-driven surf over the rocky reef between the mast and the shore; no coast-guard cannon could carry a line that distance. The sole chance of success was from the lake and the freighter *Gilbert Ramsay* tried to approach the mast—and turned back. The *Albert Loring* got closer, before giving up; and the master of the coal-carrier *Donagon* put his ship nearly beside the wreck only to find, and to report, that the situation was hopeless because the *Gant* lay slightly on her side, tilting the mast toward the shore so that it was impossible to reach the men from another vessel.

So the ships could do nothing but stand by, a mile or so away in deep water, stand by and watch, helpless as the watchers on the shore.

On the first day, the newspapers printed only brief reports of the fact. Night passed, and in the morning the five specks were upon the mast; the glass showed that they moved their arms. The five men lived and looked at the ships and at the shore. And there they clung, in their lashings, and looked all day.

That night, in thousands and tens of thousands of

homes, men, women and children on their knees prayed for the five men on the mast of the *Gideon Gant*, while the watchers on the shore stared out into the dark and the *Albert Loring*, standing in deep water, played its searchlight on the mast. It was all any one could do.

Ellen Powell, in her room near Washington Square, New York, was one of the many who prayed; for New York had heard of the men; all the continent heard of them. Their situation, continuing, caught at the minds and hearts of the millions, as nothing else that day; it became the poignant, frightful plight of human beings, doomed slowly and painfully to die in sight of their fellows, helpless to relieve or reach them, and upon their plight, the sensation and sympathy of the millions were spent.

From all the neighborhood of Brebeuf, thousands flocked to the shore to stand and look out. In every city and town with a newspaper, people telephoned, between editions, for news of the men on the mast of the ship sunken in Lake Superior. No tragedy, in months, had so stirred the public. They felt not only the plight of the five men; they felt the challenge to civilization in the helplessness of mankind to save or even to aid, in the slightest, the five men slowly dying in sight of all.

The prayers, which composed the sole possibly effective effort of man, pleaded for the gale to diminish, but the storm, instead, strengthened and worked around out of the north. Freezing weather was on the way. At dawn, again the glasses showed that the five men survived.

## XXIII

The French liner, bearing Lew Alban, docked in New York at noon of this day. Lew, having been exceedingly seasick, greeted Art Slengel rather listlessly and received, with no enthusiasm whatever, invitation to a party that night. He went to his apartment and did not encourage Art to linger, after having paid for the cab.

Lew slept for a couple of hours, and as the recuperation from seasickness is remarkable for its rapidity and completeness, he awoke greatly refreshed. He felt hollow, and, not having enterprised with food recently, he experimented with coffee and grapefruit with such reassuring results that he decided to dine, satisfyingly, a little later—and he did not want to dine alone.

His fancy flitted from girl to girl of those whom he might summon or Art send to him. None of them met his mood of the day; they seemed coarse, too bold and eager. His memory of them displeased him; he had come from Paris.

A face and a figure, never coarse, never bold or eager and very, very pleasing to him lay in Lew's reverie; moreover, there was a matter of doubt whether, if summoned, she would come to him. No harm trying.

Lew phoned Ralph Armiston's office and her voice replied, pleasantly exciting him. "This is Miss Powell?" he formally inquired, to make sure of her, and she recognized him.



"I'm back," he said. "Is there anything particularly for my attention to-day?"

Ellen was alone, except for the girl who assisted her. Mr. Armiston and Jay both were out and either might, or might not, return to the office. They were working on Howarth.

They had endeavored, earlier, to get in touch with Lew but had been put off, she knew; and she knew very well that neither expected anything of him. Moreover, it was plain, at Lew's immediate, careful inquiry for herself, that this was a personal call with personal implications.

"We've several things that have been waiting for you," Ellen replied, not consciously preparing what she said.

"Do you want to bring them over to me to-day?"

"Yes," said Ellen.

"I am not at my office. I didn't go to the office. You remember my home address?"

"Yes."

"Will you bring those matters to me here?"

Ellen could not quickly reply; she had to gather herself. "At once," she said; then she did not permit herself to delay to think. She bundled into an envelope several papers for him, scarcely selecting them. He was in no hurry for these, she knew. She put on her hat and coat and went down to the street.

There was wind and it was colder; in the west, and especially in the northwest, it was much colder. "Men on the Mast Freezing!" proclaimed the black newsheads of the papers. Ellen bought one and, forgetting Lew, she stepped into a vestibule to spread and read it. Cold had

come over Lake Superior; Ellen knew what that meant!

The men on the mast could not be seen to move, except one who kept his arms free and seemed to be beating at his comrades, in their lashings, to arouse them. It was clear weather—clear except for the spray flying before the gale. The wind, for all the prayers—and in the little church at Brebeuf, there was constant praying—did not diminish.

The *Gilbert Ramsay*, convinced of the utter hopelessness of giving aid, had gone on, but the *Donagon* and *Loring* and two other steamers, tossing far out in deep water, did not desert the dying men on the mast. The ships could do nothing but at least they could stand by. The crowd on the shore could do nothing but light fires for the freezing men, on the mast, to see.

Ellen read and, reading, she saw it as none of the others, stopping to spread and read, could see. Tightness drew in her throat so that it hurt her. She bundled the newspaper under her arm. What was this big envelope? Oh, yes; for Mr. Alban—Lew Alban who had sent for her.

She stepped to the curb and entered a cab, for she was shaking so; she gave Lew's address, after a moment's thought, for she had forgotten it.

Lew saw her pay off the cab. He lived on the third floor and he had been watching from the window, and the sight of her, even on the walk, pleased him. She hadn't the clothes and furs of other girls but she had a trimness, a slenderness and delicacy unmistakable and appreciated by Lew three floors up. He was very glad that just now he had put off Slengel again.

He opened his door for her, and when he had closed

it behind her, she dropped the envelope and the newspaper from under her arm.

"You were very quick," he complimented her.

"I came as soon as I could," said Ellen, and her fright, before facing him, was fled. He looked sick and slack. He was recently shaved, recently dressed, but the trimness of his toilet only accentuated his debility.

"Glad to hear from me?" he asked her.

"Yes," said Ellen.

"You were, eh?" He put his hands on her shoulders, pulling off her coat; he put his hands on her arms and slipped up to her shoulders, grasping her and swaying her slightly. "Did you ever call me before I went away?"

"No."

"Why didn't you?"

Ellen wanted to thrust off his hands but she was not afraid of him. "I didn't," she replied.

"Why?" he persisted, holding her, tightening and relaxing the pressure of his fingers. "You knew I wanted you to."

Ellen permitted his grasp and gazed at him. "You're the only one I called; you're the only one I gave a damn to see, when I landed," he admitted to her, his eyes roving up and down her body.

By her body, she knew, she attracted him, but if it were only that, he would never have sought her so. It was what inhabited her body—it was herself, her soul and spirit which had been keeping him off and defying him, which allured him and which to-day especially tempted him. He had set himself to break the inhabitant of her



body and bend her to him; and Ellen was not afraid of him, trying that.

"Are you clear for me to-night?" he demanded of her. Clear? How much did he mean?

She nodded. "I've no engagement."

"I kept clear for you. Slengel is slinging a party but I'll pass him up."

"Will you?" asked Ellen.

Lew kissed her, hugging her to him. "You beat anybody in Paris! . . . What'll we do first?"

Ellen freed herself from him and stepped back over the envelope she had dropped. She stooped quickly and picked it up. "Here's what I brought you."

He took it from her and tossed it away and laughed. She picked up the newspaper. "Seen this?" she spread it before him and he caught her, with an arm about her, and glanced at the type.

"I thought of you right away when I saw it," he said. "I looked for the name of the ship; it wasn't your father's."

"No," said Ellen. "I don't know where father is, since I've been in New York. In Chicago, I always knew."

"You know it's not his ship," repeated Lew; he wanted her to stop thinking about it. "It's not even an ore-vessel." He tried to take the paper away but she clung to it. "You don't think you know any of those men, do you?"

"Not those men," said Ellen. "I don't know the *Gant*; but I know the place where they are; I can see them."

"So can I," retorted Lew, "but that doesn't do them any good." He possessed himself of the paper, but it

had given her a chance to turn their talk. Though he had his arm again about her, she tantalized him with questions—personal questions, indeed, about himself, but about himself far away. She asked him about Paris, about his passage and about the ocean steamer.

He could not return her satisfactorily to her feeling for him—or what he had imagined to be her feeling for him—of their first minutes.

“What’s on your mind?” he complained, finally. “Think somebody’ll come in?”

“No; but I’m expected at the office.”

“Get it off your mind. Kiss me.”

“I’ve got to close it.”

“You’ve got to get into less clothes, too,” said Lew, objecting with his hands to her office dress. “We’re going to dinner; then I’ll dance with you! Dance with you!” he emphasized, kissing her.

She had lied about the office; she did not have to close it; no one had waited for her; no one had known where she had gone. Her little lie, however, helped her to regain the street where she bought another paper and read of the men on the mast. Their situation had not changed; slowly and in the order of their strength, the men must die this night while the world watched them.

Ellen longed to be in the throng on the shore; it would be terrible to stand there, actually seeing and able to do nothing; but the throng about the bonfires, and those going in and out of the little church, were her own people. She longed to stand with her own; she longed for escape from New York this night.

She longed, that meant, to dodge again Lew Alban; but

for her, to-night, Lew would "pass up" Slengel; it pleased him to pass up Slengel for her. To-morrow and later—for how much longer, she could not hazard—Lew might prefer her. Ellen reckoned on no impending danger. Even Di, she remembered, for a long time had looked out for herself at parties.

Ellen, in her own room in Washington Square, was returned to the room in her home where she had made the bed upon which Jay had slept, and where she had determined to come to New York to help "hold," as long as she could, Lew Alban.

"This's a slow shop," complained Lew.

"It's early yet," said Ellen.

"Sure," agreed Lew, "but this'll never wake up. We'll move along."

Ellen studied him across the little table at which he had dined and filled himself full. Marvelously, the meal, with its attendant drink, had restored him; his cheeks no longer were slack, his body listless. Banished was the debilitated Lew of a few hours ago. He had slept during the day; now he had eaten and drunk; also he had danced—danced with Ellen, pressing her close to him, danced cheek close to hers, with her little, lithe body under his hand. But the "shop," though of his own choosing, was slow; he arose from the table.

"I like it here," said Ellen.

"I don't." Lew had lost, with his sudden restoration, something of his suavity. He put a hand under her arm and helped her up.



They sampled another dance shop but with only deeper dissatisfaction for Lew. It was early—too early, because Lew had not been willing to wait dinner too long. Besides, no public dance shop suited Lew's mood after his meal. He preferred a place to-night where he would be more in control of conditions, as at a party—Slengel's party, for choice, where at his appearance everything would be speeded to his mood, whatever the hour. Art had not called it off; Art had insisted on expecting him.

Lew did not name or describe to Ellen their destination. "There's a private party in here," he said, escorting her.

Mr. Slengel had obtained, for his temporary uses, a large, luxuriously furnished apartment. A single, great room was its distinguishing feature. This was high in the ceiling, as tall as two floors; doors opened from the big room at the lower level, communicating to a small den, a dressing-room, a bedroom and a kitchen. A stairway was an architectural feature, leading up one side of the room to a broad balcony running the entire width of the big room and from this opened other doors to chambers on the second floor level.

Ellen, entering with Lew, saw only the big room and its company. The orchestra was not playing so the center of the room was clear, its ordinary furniture—chairs, couches, tables and piano—pushed to the edges. The piano was under the balcony and about it clustered the band—saxophone, trombone, violin and drum. The company clustered about a tray of bottles and glasses and ice on a big table; others, by couples, sat on the stairs. Some leaped up, as the drum beat and

the brasses brayed; others pressed to the balustrade and let them pass, holding their own places close together.

Ellen recognized no one. She knew Art Slengel by sight but he was not visible, at the moment; she did not yet know it was his party, but she recognized at once that this must be "a party." The men proclaimed it, too familiar or too frightened (one or two of them) in the clasp of their partners; the girls banished any lingering doubt.

They were very young, every one younger than Ellen. They ogled the men, clung to the men, pouted provokingly. One appeal they made to the men and that they were paid for, as Di had been paid.

Ellen went into the dressing-room and, emerging, she saw Mr. Slengel; he was with Lew, having welcomed him. Slengel looked at her but did not recognize her; she was to him the girl whom Lew had brought. Nobody else had brought a girl, Ellen guessed; and she guessed that, though Slengel did not identify her, he would have liked it better if Lew had come alone.

His particular point was to please Lew to-night and with entertainment of his own providing. This party would have proceeded without Lew, but it had been prepared in hope of him, as another party in Chicago, prepared for Sam Metten, had capped the campaign which had taken the Metten account away from Rountree.

So Art Slengel preferred to supply Lew with partners; but Lew offered his arms to Ellen and she accepted them and danced. She felt, dancing, a change in his way with her; she felt, dancing, that she classed herself to him with

these girls who sought him; she felt them regarding her as a rival; she felt upon her the eyes of other men.

Lew held her by the hands, after the music stopped, and rushed her beside him up the stairs, pressing past couples seated on the steps; he plumped her down upon a couch on the balcony and himself close beside her.

A big radio adorned one of the corners below and, in the interval, some one turned it on to raucous jazz; but jazz, with a band in the room, was ordinary and a twist of the dial caught and intensified a speaking voice. The news crier, it was, with night announcements: In Europe, a prince was born. Somebody cheered; nearly everybody else laughed. The girl at the radio let it shout the news as long as it was amusing, but it turned to an earthquake in Japan; the men on the wreck in Lake Superior still in the same situation. The radio dial twisted to a sentimental song which a girl on the stairs caught and parodied to yells of applause. She had to sing it again. At the tom-tom beat of the drum, everybody scrambled up and piled to the dance-floor.

The girl who had sung the parody had cast off her partner and she tried to entrap Lew. She pushed Ellen aside and Ellen, flushing, resisted. At that, Lew clutched her and tremendously elated, he bore her to the dance. "That's the spunk; stick with me! . . . I'll stick with you!"

Spunk. For the moment, pushed aside, she had felt it; she had resisted; for the moment, she had won; but she danced in his arms, sick with her triumph. He backed her close to the radio horn which had shouted the song in



its great, magnified voice, and, the minute before, had told of the men in Lake Superior.

Lew ignored other girls as he pulled Ellen up the stairs, again, after the dance. The radio was roaring, tuned to a jig being broadcast somewhere. A couple of girls were swung to a table-top to clog and jig and kick.

From Lew's arms, in the next dance, Ellen watched the other men; business, some of them represented, undoubtedly; and others, probably not. Di had divulged to her some of the habits of these affairs. The host invited a few men important to him, and filled in with pleasing acquaintances of no business significance but who could be counted upon, with the help of the paid girls, to keep the party going.

There was a very good-looking, quiet, dark-haired young man who had dropped in, evidently, later than Lew and Ellen. He danced but he seemed to be looking on, mostly. He represented business; for Art Slengel was giving him a lot of attention. Slengel also closely followed Lew; indeed, between this quiet young man and Lew, the host oscillated.

Lew lost interest in dancing. He did not want another partner; he dragged Ellen back to the balcony during a dance. They were out of sight of the floor, on the couch in the corner; they were in sight of another couple on the balcony, arms about each other, kissing. The other couple did not care; Lew did not care.

Ellen cared scarcely whether she was seen. She preferred, indeed, to be kept in sight of other people. Lew would like to take her out of sight of everyone. She

opposed him, fending off his hands stubbornly and silently. She would cry out, but what a maudlin stampede she would start up the stairs! And it would be the end of her with Lew; but if not, what for her?

The music stopped. It was something of a relief. More couples stumbled up. There was the roar of the radio again and the magnified voice shouted above static: . . . "clear with a few storm clouds blowing in the gale with the moon breaking through. There is moonlight some of the time to help the searchlights in this attempt."

The shout suddenly was cut off; the dial had been turned.

Ellen ceased her struggle with Lew; she was tense and stiff in his arms. What was that about? What storm and searchlights were sent on the radio to-night? What attempt did it mean?

A song started but someone turned it off. She heard a man's voice requesting in the room below: "Can we get that voice back?"

"Certainly," called Art Slengel quickly, "certainly." The quiet, dark-haired young man had asked it, whom Slengel particularly wished to please. "Turn it back," ordered Slengel; and the shout above static filled the room:

". . . the vessel coming up is an ore-vessel of the large, modern type; but she is light, being in ballast, for she comes from the east and south. She has come from the Soo . . ."

Ellen was on her feet, having shaken off Lew, how she did not know. She was at the rail of the balcony and she saw at the radio the quiet young man whom she'd

liked. He bent, turning not the tuner but the intensifier so that the same voice spoke but ceased to roar.

For a few seconds, Ellen lost it in the chatter below; then the young man looked at Slengel, who called out, "Be quiet, please, everybody; something's coming in!"

And for a moment, everybody obliged; those who weren't obedient were curious, sober or drunk. They could see the intentness of the dark-haired young man at the radio and wanted to know what it was all about.

"This is from the shore near the village of Brebeuf opposite the sunken wreck," spoke the radio; and the young man straightened and his quiet voice thrilled:

"It's the relay!" he said. "The relay the radio people had arranged all day, if they saw a ship making a try to get those men from the wreck. They've been watching with the relay ready to hook in, if something started. We're hearing from the shore!"

Ellen clung to the rail and Lew grabbed at her arm. "Come back here," he demanded. "Come here."

She looked at him. "It's an ore-vessel, they said; an ore-vessel that's come up," she whispered to him.

"What?" mouthed Lew. "What d'you say?"

"Father'd never pass them, never, never," she cried. "The radio is speaking from the shore of Superior, Lew—Lew Alban," she said to him. "They had a relay arranged, waiting for a ship to make a try for the men; and they see a ship doing it. She's an ore-carrier that's come up, in ballast, from the Soo!"

Lew kept his hands from her; he appreciated that much. "What you say about father?" he asked her, thickly. "You want t' listen to that?" said Lew. "All right; listen



to 't." He bent at the railing beside her and called down to Slengel. "We want t'hear that, too."

Slengel was busy before the dials, and the voice vanished.

"Trying to tune out static," he explained to the dark-haired young man.

"Turn it back," came the quiet, thrilling reply. "That's not static; he's speaking from the water edge; that's the roar of Lake Superior in his microphone."

The voice, above the roar, spoke again. "—You are on the southern shore of Lake Superior on a cliff looking north over the lake," spoke the strange, invisible voice in a tone, independent of its transmission and intensification, which carried the leap of the speaker's heart with it and bore his excitement. "A gale has been blowing for three days, one of the most violent storms known to this section. There has been no let up in the weather; the wind is from the northwest so this is a lee shore. The water for a mile is greenish-white under the moon. You look over white, wild water to the mast of the *Gideon Gant*, which sank off this point on the first day of the storm.

"Further out you see the lights of three steamers—the *Loring*, which tried a rescue, and the *Donagon*, which later tried and has been standing by, with the *Loring*, ever since. The third steamer standing by is the *Sarrant* which came up to-day. The ship that is making the try is east of these and standing much farther in. The *Donagon* plays its searchlights on her and on the water before her to aid her; the *Loring* tries to keep its searchlight on the mast. The ships are tossing so that the searchlight beams

skip across and across, but you see the mast for a few seconds; and you see five specks on it—the men!

“It is plain from the height out of the water that the ore-carrier is empty and probably has been pumping out her ballast, as she came up, to be ready for this. She is long and big but very light. She has been recognized. The ships are exchanging wireless signals which are read here. The ship standing in is the ore-carrier *Blenmora* of Duluth, which passed the Soo northward bound this morning.”

The voice rested and there roared in the loud speaker the surf of Lake Superior.

Ellen was below, before the diaphragm resounding with the thunder of waters a thousand miles away whereon, light and high with its ballast pumped out, rode her father's ship, standing in, far in, toward the mast.

Lew had followed her; Lew was near her but she did not know exactly where. He was not touching her. “We're going to hear this,” announced Lew, with thick authority, “we're going to hear this all.”

His command was not necessary; the room was listening. Not everyone yet understood what the voice in the radio told but its tone could not be mistaken.

“The *Blenmora* is coming in slowly. The moon is clear again and the *Donagon* keeps its searchlight on the *Blenmora* and the waters directly ahead. She is in very heavy seas and, being light, she rolls; water is flying over her. . . . On the mast, as some of you know, there is a man who had been seen all day beating at his comrades to keep them active and alive. As you look at him in the glass, he seems to move; but you can't be sure; it may be

shadows from the swinging searchlight of the *Loring!*”

The awe of the voice filled the room; the speaker was standing in the presence of a tremendous and sublime attempt of man to aid man and no one, drunk or sober, could confuse it. It struck the room silent as the wives of Belshazzar at the apparition of the hand which wrote upon the wall.

“The *Blenmora* seems to be swinging off a little. No! no! It was only the waves for a minute. She is standing in again and coming on slowly. She is very well handled. She rolls but advances steadily. The wind and the water, both bear her toward the shore.

“She has to stand out! She is carried in too far! She will have to stand out and circle and try again, for the waves have driven her too far in. But she’s not doing it. . . . She’s not standing out! She is coming on steadily.

“Powell—I hear he’s her master—Powell is keeping on. It was his intention to be borne in; he steered in. He is making his try not on the outside, where the others found it useless; he is bringing his ship on the inside between the wreck and the shoals!”

Ellen clung to the cabinet, straining. She saw not the room at all; she saw her father and his ship; she could feel the sway and swing of the ship. Forward, far forward on the narrow bridge, her father stood in the open with the water flying over him. The window to the wheelhouse was up; he stood in front of the wheel. His best wheelman—Denny, beyond doubt—had his hands on the big wheel; his strong, steady, obedient hands. Denny looked out to her father.

“Right a little . . . Left a little! Steady!” her father



said. "Meet her now! Meet her, Paul! Steady! Ease her—ease her! A little more!"

She could hear the bells; the clear, clanging bells beating in the engine-room calling attention to the dial directions: "Ahead! Full! Slow! Stop! . . . Astern! Half! Full! Stop!"

She could see the engine-room crew in their hot, closed room below, staring at each other, sweating and swearing with the strain or, wordless, springing to the levers to make each change, at each beat of the gong, which determined the difference between life and death for all. She could see them standing, strained and blind in their room, listening as the steel at their feet rose and feeling it drop to strike at any second and tear out the bottom—and the seas rush in over them.

"The *Blenmora* is beside the wreck! There is no doubt that the men are alive! They are dropping to the *Blenmora*! Powell has brought his bow beside the mast and under it so that the men on the mast who had the most strength have hacked the others free and dropped them to the ship. Two have dropped—three. They all seem to be gone! Now can Powell get out?"

"He's moving ahead . . . moving . . . he's not aground. He's fouled the mast. His mast has fouled it and broken it off but he moves ahead! . . . He swings out! He's clear and free! . . . He has deep water!"

The voice ceased and Ellen sat on the floor, with eyes shut. She put her hands to the floor beside her to steady her. Clear . . . and deep water! He was safe; they all were safe. It was over.

"I will give you in a minute the report of the men res-

cued," resumed the voice. "The *Blenmora* is wirelessly and we are reading it ashore. The *Blenmora* is calling Ashland, which is nearer than Duluth. Evidently, for the sake of the men, she will put in there. The *Blenmora* is saying:

"'Ashland. Have surgeons and hospital for five men. Have taken from wreck of *Gant*, Henry Clapaugh, seaman, home Manistique; Frank Kerry, assistant engineer, Escanaba; Jim Pakker, oiler, Fort William; Otto Lore, oiler, and Lars Anderson, mate, both of Duluth.

"'Powell'"

"Powell," Ellen heard repeated beside her. "Powell," announced Lew's voice. "That's her name. This is the daughter of that man who did that. She comes from there. That Powell's her father!"

Many hands were helping Ellen; sobered, gentle hands. Girls' lips kissed her; girls brought her cloak to her.

Lew helped her into it. Lew was outdoing in solicitude all the others. Lew had become her cavalier.

"I take her home now," Lew announced. "I take you home," he told her.

Slengel and the quiet young man, who had been beside her throughout at the radio, went down with Lew and her to the door. In the cab, Lew remained her cavalier; and he left her at her room.

## XXIV

In the cold recounting of a great attempt made and won, the news from Lake Superior reached Jay in the morning. He was in Westchester at his sister's and was at breakfast with Ralph, who first had the newspaper.

"They got 'em!" exclaimed Ralph, in a tone of personal pleasure. "They got those men off the mast last night."

Jay went over beside him and started at sight of "*Blenmora*." He did not, for a minute, speak. Ralph kept talking.

"Powell," he said. "The captain of the ore-ship is Powell. Isn't——"

"He's her father," said Jay. "Ellen Powell's father."

Ralph looked up at Jay suddenly and stared; he looked away and up at Jay again. Then he handed Jay the paper and Jay carried it into the drawing-room.

He imagined Ellen receiving it as he had but on a street corner, likely, when she went out to breakfast. Jay wanted no breakfast. By hurrying, he could catch an earlier train to the city.

He found Ellen at work, but white and very subdued, and she was so silent, when he spoke to her of her father, that he asked: "Nothing happened to the *Blenmora* later, did there? You've not had any personal news?"

"No," said Ellen. "I've not heard at all from home. I don't fear there's anything wrong."



"How did you hear it?" asked Jay.

"On the radio last night," said Ellen, looking at him steadily. Would he ask where and with whom?

He didn't. "I saw it was relayed," he replied. "It happened about eleven o'clock out there. People all over the country heard it—and you did."

"It was like being there—without any body yourself," said Ellen.

"No wonder you're done up. You ought to rest to-day. You ought to go home. I mean to Michigan."

"Why? Father won't be home. He'll have left the men at Ashland and be loading ore in Duluth to-day. They'll be eastbound to-morrow. He'll pass home, south, and just see it. They'll just see the ship. The straits won't close for a month yet."

Jay's business, that day, was with Lyman Howarth and it had progressed to a point of meetings with the seniors in the president's offices; but Lyman did not take Jay at once into the meeting.

"I was in on something last night," Lyman told him. "Slengel was giving a party. I ran around and ran into it. We had a radio, Jay, which we were using between dances and we got that rescue on it. God, how we got it, Jay! And do you know what? The daughter of the master of the *Blenmora* was there. We saw her get it at the party."

"What?" demanded Jay. "What did you say?"

"I said at the party which Slengel gave, a fellow brought in the daughter of Powell, who took off those men; and she was there and got it! I'd been noticing the

girl; she was a nice-looking girl. I'd been wondering about her and . . ." he told Jay all about it.

After he had heard it, Jay was obliged to go into the conference, but Ralph arrived to bear the burden of negotiation.

Ralph was elated when Jay and he left. He clapped Jay on the back: "Got 'em. We got 'em! Got 'em from Slengel, b'God. I'd as soon have L. K. Howarth Sr., look at me and say, 'I'm satisfied. We will arrange it' as see his name on a signed order. It's done, with him. He's sold."

Jay did not jubilate. He did not doubt that Ralph and he had Howarth; he knew it. Lyman, privately, had just told him so. Knowing it, he did not know what to do with the knowledge.

He could not yet telegraph it to his father. When the order was signed, he would; that would be some satisfaction; some . . . but the rest was run from him. He could not take his trophy to Ellen Powell. He could not return to her at all. Gone again, and this time forever, his end of day with her. Gone—gone, end of day with her in Chicago; gone his incomparable day—that day begun with cock-crow and wood smoke, gray eyes and brown hands on a blue bowl of berries; brown arms and legs in the sun of the lake and the swim to the little boat; gone the delight of talk together on the hill; gone the joy and reluctance of parting at the roadside under the dance of the dead. She had accompanied Lew Alban to the party last night. Upon the evening of Lew's return, she had gone out with him. She must—miserably, Jay thought—have resumed a friendship with Lew developed before.

So Jay could not return to the office; but he could find

no satisfaction anywhere else. He wanted to go nowhere else.

He went to the office.

Ellen knew, at sight of him, that he had been told. She knew he had been with the Howarths and she realized that the quiet young man, whom she'd liked and who was so important to Art Slengel, must have been Lyman; and she was certain that Lyman would have related to Jay the event which had surprised the party last night.

She did not speak to Jay and he sat down in Ralph's chair. He put up no pretense of having anything to do; and she sat with her hands before her, looking at him.

Finally Jay said: "I came from Howarths'."

"I saw one of the Mr. Howarths last night," replied Ellen.

"Lyman."

"Yes. . . . I was with Lew Alban."

Jay pushed himself upon his feet. "Lyman didn't know who you were—that you were anybody to me. I mean that you and I . . ." Jay began again. "He told me there was a girl at the party named Powell; she was the daughter of the Powell on the ship and that he saw you . . . he saw her hear it. He'd no idea it meant anything to me."

Jay had not meant to repeat that. He controlled himself and said, coldly: "We got Howarth to-day."

"What?"

"We got Howarth—the business of the Howarth-Lyman company," he explained, politely. "We'd been rather needing it, you know. Your friend has been so likely to leave us. He can leave us now whenever he



wants; the sooner, the better. We have Howarth and they're the sort to stay."

"You *have* them?"

"Yes. What does it mean to you?"

Ellen's head inclined slowly; she seemed unable to keep it up. Her shoulders wilted; suddenly all her strength was gone and she collapsed over her desk and cried and cried.

Jay stood over her; he put a hand upon her and at touch of her, his anger broke. "Ellen?" he whispered to her. "Ellen?"

"I was at that party with Lew, Lew Alban." Now it all came from her. "I swore to myself I'd hold him till you got Howarth. That day—our day under the trees—I swore to hold him for you. He liked me, you see—Lew Alban. So I came here. He called me last night . . . yesterday . . . I went to him to hold him . . . to Art Slengel's party. . . ."

Jay caught her and bundled her in his arms. How little and light, she was. Dizzy; dizzy, he was, for a second, his heart racing. The door! He carried her to it and, with one of his hands he turned the bolt. But no one was about. It was end of day—their end of day again together.

He looked into her eyes. "Here we are," he whispered, "here we are, you and I."

She lay in his arms, not moving; not clinging to him and not resisting. Not inert! Her heart was throbbing; throbbing. His fingers under her arm felt it—and her breathing. But she touched him not at all with her hands; she had them clasped before her breast; and she said nothing—but looked at him.

"Here we are," he told her again, more loudly, as if to rouse her. "Here we are . . . you know I love you."

That stirred her a little. It stopped for a second that racing throb under his fingers; it stopped her breathing; it unclasped her hands so that, for a second, she clung to him. Then she lay back but said nothing. Nothing?

Lida, her eyes said, looking into him. Lida; Lida. What of her? Where was she?

"Lida," said Jay aloud. "Lida's not in this. She's—out. She wants to be out. She's—divorcing me."

The throb, throb which had been hurrying under his fingers, hurried now against his heart; his lips were on hers, burning on hers; her hands, the gentle, holding, pressing hands of love clasped him and drew him again to her lips. "Love . . . love . . . my love . . . love," Ellen whispered.

The world learned, in the next days, that Lida was divorcing him. Lida had reappeared to her circle of society, in Paris, where Mrs. Jay Rountree had taken up a residence, most properly, with an infant daughter, baptized Amelia for Mrs. Lytle. The papers, which printed this news, added the announcement that Mrs. Rountree was proceeding for a divorce; Jay and she had proven incompatible.

Mrs. Lytle, now a grandmother, was with Lida to aid her daughter in the negotiations with the French courts. Later, Jay Rountree would go to Paris; the case required his perfunctory appearance but the legal separation was assured.

Jay sailed for France at the end of the week.

Sun and snow and the sharp, conical shadows of cedar. Green, deep green the pines; blue the sky; white the land and the lake—white, all white. The lake lay level under its snow. Crack, crack resounded the ice in the strait. Wood-smoke above the chimneys; rabbit tracks beyond the ghosts of the garden.

Ellen was at home and her father was with her. They had not much to say, these two, but they liked to be together, especially to-day before Jay should come—Jay—Jay Rountree who to arrive in another hour, and tomorrow, marry her.

Marry? He had never been, in fact, the husband of Lida; Ellen knew that now. Mr. Rountree had told her that Lida had been but “nominally” Jay’s wife.

Marry; Jay and she were to marry. The family was all in a flurry—except her father. He sat beside the fire with his pipe and gazed into the flames and packed his pipe and sometimes patted Ellen’s hand and sometimes said a word to her.

“It’s to be a different life for ye, Ellen. Strange for ye.”

“Yes,” said Ellen. Strange for her but not so strange for her as strange to her father.

She looked at him and remembered how, throughout the half hour, when he was bringing his ship beside the *Gant*, the world had waited and watched him; and here he sat beside her, the same as she had known him always. Never, likely, would Jay, whom she would marry tomorrow, do a thing to equal her father. His was to be a different life, strange to her father’s. Why, so easily and without a doubt of herself, was she to leave the life of



her own people and take up his? Because she loved him?

Oh, that she did; yet before ever she had loved Jay Rountree, before ever she had heard of him, she had left her father's life for that lived by the Rountrees. If she were not now to marry Jay, still she would return to the city and to business. No doubt of that. Why, if what her father did was so much the better?

"Time," said her father. "Time, Ellen, to be away."

To the station, he meant; the little, snowy station in Hoster where Jay's train soon would be whistling. Oh, she had it in mind! Her father and she were to drive down alone.

At the door, Ellen reached up and kissed her father. They went out to the sleigh and jingled toward the town. Ahead to the left, under a charitable mantle of snow, stood the Dewitt's dilapidated cottage—the home which Di had left and to which she would never return, after having proved of service to Slengels in winning Metten. Di, too, had abandoned the life of her people for the city of business.

Queer that, at this recollection, Ellen felt again the draw of the city—and business. Though it had "destroyed" Di, ten times more powerfully Ellen felt it.

It was the draw of adventure, enterprise, danger! Danger, to be sure, her father well knew and endured; but his danger was of an old, patterned sort. His manner of meeting it was set out for him; he held within him patterns of courage and skill as old as shipping; as old, indeed, as physical peril and man's first impulse to save his fellow from storm and sea.

The danger from business was different—strange. No

old patterns there, no cut channels of courage to guide one. You had to find your own way and make it; you had to try, enterprise, experiment and explore, balance risks and rights. That was the draw of business, to-day, which filled the cities. It demanded a different quality in a man from any that her father possessed; though once, for half an hour, all the world had waited upon him. This was what she had felt and once even had tried to say to Jay and had not been able then to explain it.

She reached for her father's hand. The finest man in the world. Oh, she loved him! But here, a train was whistling. Jay was upon it—Jay who would take her away, his wife!

She stood up and leaped down. There was the train; it was stopping, and upon the first step, stood Jay.

THE END

















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