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THE GIFT OF

WILLIS ARNOLD BOUGHTON

CLASS OF 1907

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MEANWHILE

By PIERRE COALFLEET

DUFFIELD & COMPANY

New York—1927.

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MEANWHILE

Grover Thanet was cutting an afternoon class in Dryden with scarcely a trace of the uprushing sense of guilt that would have suffused him as a Freshman. He was a little weighed down by all he had apprehended during the last four years at Harvard, and for that reason the new green of the trees on Boston Common, framing the gilt dome of the State House, merely saddened him. His shadow self was mitigating the sadness by reminding him that he wasn't, at any rate, reacting in the obvious fashion, which was a comfort. May stirred in him feelings for which no poet with whom he was familiar had found adequate expression. Poets yearned, as he was doing, but after holding out a promise of Truth, merely offered you a maiden. The eternal feminine, he reflected, is a lightning rod, forever diverting shafts of truth to the earth.

Here was Nature creeping into town over the brick and asphalt, rejuvenating in the langorous sunlight; and here was he, in plain prose a year older than he had been last spring. His fancy turning, not lightly to thoughts of love, but gravely to thoughts of man's mortality and such, a state of mind which, according to poetical convention, should not occur till around

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October. For Grover October was a more stimulating month than May, his nature being one that responded more gladly to the prospect of resurrection than to the process itself. For him, what had already happened was more exciting than what was happening; and most exciting of all were the lovely vague things that *might* happen. Never had he gone to bed without the feeling that perhaps *It*,—the important and determining event, the key experience,—would occur on the morrow. He was twenty-two, and no It worthy the name had yet occurred. Three-score-and-ten minus twenty-two. You couldn't do it in your head.

His companion wasn't saddened by May, not she! in her straight blue suit and trim shoes and jaunty hat. No hypocritical fur neck-piece; no handbag,—good old Rhoda, she used her pockets. "It ought to be warm enough to swim by next week." That expressed the effect upon sensible Miss Marple of the weather's melancholy benevolence.

In Grover's ears sad but sprightly tunes were running: bits for the cello from Debussy's Rondes de Printemps. He kept wishing that Boston were Paris. In two months time, D. V., it would be.

As they crossed Beacon Street he reached back into his mind for the subject they had been discussing. Ah yes, old maids. Rhoda had informed him that her Aunty Pearn was a stuffy one, and as he had rather a penchant for them, even when stuffy, he felt quite kindly disposed towards the present expedition to

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Chestnut Street. Rhoda's visits to Boston were infrequent,—she preferred the dogs and speed-boat at Aldergrove,—and Grover, being a tractable young man, as well as fond of Rhoda, occasionally shared her duty calls, having none of his own. His fondness for Rhoda was like a fondness for cinnamon buns: unconscious, profound, prosaic, and old as memory. Rhoda and his mother: they were lenses through which he had seen a very considerable proportion of the little he had seen of life.

"They're vague and sympathetic, maiden aunts," he defended. "One can tell them the first convenient fib that comes into one's head and they swallow it gratefully. What I draw the line at is your maiden uncles. They pretend to know better. And ask you how old you are and what you're going to do for a living."

"Well, what are you?"

"How should *I* know!"

"For goodness sake don't keep crossing over whenever we change sidewalks, it drives me nutty; nobody is so pedantic any more but you . . . For my part I'd rather be asked all that by a fatherly old bachelor who'll remember my birthday than be asked my mother's middle name by an old maid who *won't*,—or if she does, send you a present of a hunk of moth-eaten lace your great grandmother who's been dead for centuries wore sewed on to her panties. If they're your relation they object to the way you dress; if

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they're mere acquaintances they try to trap you into letting out of the bag that your mother wasn't one of the Scantleberries that produced an ambassador but one of the ones that made condensed milk. . . Which reminds me that Sophie Scantleberry is back from India and you'll have to come and call on her, too. She has a husband that smells of Scotch and has to be gone away from quite often, for months at a time. . . Whenever I cross Sophie's path, once every three years, she puts on a look which says, 'Another New England in-law; God give me strength to be sweet!' They used to live in Paris and entertain all the international riff-raff, but she gave it up suddenly and went to some sort of a Hindu convent where they teach you a fancy kind of Christian Science, only harder to learn and not so common. You see ghosts, if you're good at it, and have to breathe a special way. Then she gave up that, and I imagine she's looking around for something new."

"Truth being so elusive," Grover commented, absent-mindedly. "It's no sooner crushed to earth than—"

"Sophie'd be good for you, my boy, because what you need is to have a woman who owns up to thirty-five put some wind in your sails and take it all out again. 'And I learned about women from 'er!'—that sort of thing. I know if *I* were middle-aged and at a loose end I'd be crazy about the way your cheek goes from the outside corner of your eye to your

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chin, especially when you're looking *away* from a poor wench!"

"Taking it by and large, you're hard on the King's English."

"Taking it by and large, as you really don't, mine's better than yours. I never pretended it was the King's anyhow; didn't we revolt for the privilege of talking as we damn pleased! Besides, I *am* the canned milk Scantleberries, not to mention the rubber roofing Marples, and it's an age of commerce which the poor old aesthetic Thanets couldn't buck the tide of, and all died out bar you, and sometimes I think you're dying out, and I'll use any grammar I like, even in Back Bay,—in fact, especially in Back Bay. If Dad leaves me his rubber when he dies I'm going to buy up the whole Subjunctive Mood and put it in the British Museum where you can't do a thing but *look* at it. . . That's what's the matter with you: instead of saying frankly, 'I'll take beer,' you say, 'Oh, to be a lily-pad!' You're a prisstail."

"A what!"

"Prisstail. It's a word I'm making up to describe you, since no word that exists, will."

"You've wandered from the point, which was old maids."

"Prisstail's not so far! . . . If old maids are vague and sweet to boys whose cheek goes from their eye to their chin as nicely as yours does, it's for reasons that would shock the daylights out of them if they

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but knew their Freud. . . For that matter male old maids are quite as sympathetic—"

"How about *their* Freud?"

"They should worry! Though I'm sure Uncle Mortimer would come out of a psycho-analysis test quite intacto. He's three times as old as us, and all he has to show for it is a lot of holes he dug in Babylonia. With his income he could have kept a yacht and a prima donna and sowed bushels of oats. . . Can't you *see* poor Morty sowing!"

If one of Grover's classmates had conjured up the picture it would have led to enjoyable ribaldries; Rhoda conjuring it up horrified him a little.

"Don't be coarse," he said.

She turned a tender smile on him, which for worlds he wouldn't have acknowledged.

"I don't see why you can't stay home this summer," she protested, after a moment's silence. "Nobody nice goes abroad any more. It's only one of your romantic notions."

Romantic notions, he was superiorishly thinking, make the world go round. And it was beside the point to class him with the people who went abroad, for what had their expensive jaunts in common with his exotic thirst? "Before I'm too old to appreciate the flavor," he said, "I want to go to places like Cracow and Belgrade."

"They have narrow little streets that smell to heaven."

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"Can't you understand that that's exactly why I want to go there!"

Rhoda could understand it quite well, and relented. "But why *this* summer?"

"What summer, then?"

She was chastened. "Of course, it's pure selfishness, old top. I'm scared stiff at the thought of losing you forever, that's all."

"Who's romantic now!"

"Not I," she exclaimed with precocious bitterness. "I'm facing a fact which is so plain you can't even see it. You never do see them when they're plain,—only," she smiled indulgently, "when they're pretty. Mere man!"

"You envy me."

"You needn't rub it in."

They had arrived at the door of an ineffably decent little brick house with white pillars and clean, clean windows which gave a shine to the dark interior. "Tell my aunt it's me and Mr. Thanet," said Rhoda to the discreetly cheerful person who let them in.

"I," corrected Grover under his breath.

"You say me—often."

"Not to maids, in the Brothers Adam houses."

Miss Pearn was sitting up as precisely as a folding pocket-rule, regulating the flame under a silver kettle. She rustled when she moved, and peered above two pair of pince-nez, for she had been reading from a book called The Threefold Discipline,—as if *she*

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would ever get out of bounds! A mere half sister of Rhoda's mother, thereby a descendant of Colonial Governors and unscathed by roofing, she was, as one could see at a glance, all for the Pluperfect Subjunctive. The very chairs in her front parlor were placed where they ought to be, not at all where one would by nature have sat, unless one were really a prisstail. The only solecism was a half consumed loaf of sugar on the floor, let fall by Judy, an obese spaniel.

Rhoda returned her aunt's kiss deferentially and sat down by the fire which even on this May afternoon was not ungrammatical. Grover was reflecting that the landscape on the wall, full of waterfalls, would be a Thomas Moran if he, Grover Thanet, were only a little surer of art, which, again God Willing, he soon would be. He also reflected that the gift volume of Goldoni had never been perused, and that the little Diana with a hare-lip and a suggestion of corsets might have been done by Queen Victoria herself, had that lady gone in for sculpture.

"How is your dear mother, Mr. Thanet?" asked Miss Pearn. Grover hadn't even known that his mother was acquainted with Miss Pearn, much less dear to her. He was sorry to say she had been ill. For that matter had he ever been able to say that his mother was well, in the sense that other people's mothers were?

"And what are you planning to make of yourself?"

He supposed Miss Pearn's warm little smile, thor-

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oughly Indicative and not half as Subjunctive as her talk, was a reflex from the way his cheek went. If only the mirror were further to the right, so he could see how it really did go—

Rhoda had all but dropped an irreplaceable cup at the question, and here was Miss Pearn waiting for an answer: almost any would satisfy her. Oh, to be able to reply, Plumber!

He gave her the self-deprecatory smile that was his chief social accomplishment, though he was not yet aware of it. The smile redeemed a certain sententiousness that had formed this year as a crust over his style. "One of the more futile vocations, no doubt," he said. "For instance, teaching."

It was an admission he was always a little ashamed of, even though people quite often replied, "Oh to be sure, you're the son of *the* Professor Thanet." Yet not even to Rhoda, and not even to his mother, just barely to himself had he affirmed that indeed he was not going to sink into an academic bog, of all possible bogs! Furtively, on odd bits of paper, and on the margins of notebooks that ought to have been devoted to learned jottings, he had been drawing pictures that had given him a little thrill up his spine. He couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been drawing pictures. What did that mean? And what did it mean that he had never read the biography of a genius without recognizing moods of his own upon every page? Benvenuto Cellini, Rousseau, even, God

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help him, Marie Bashkirtseff,—he knew just what they had been through. He often wished to ask other young men if they had similar sensations on reading similar books, but he refrained, for they might say Yes, which would make him feel silly and spoil it all; or they might say No, which would make him *look* silly and lay him open to the suspicion of harboring a superiority complex. As to that, he knew the perils of reasoning from false analogy, for he had read, not entirely in vain, *the* Professor Thanet's classic work on Logic. And yet—

He saw the last patch of golden light vanish from the clean street outside Miss Pearn's windows; the Debussy tune, sad but sprightly, came scampering back into his brain. If Boston were only Paris! And if there had never been a Dryden or a Shakespeare or a Holy Roman Empire to cumber the ages and bring examinations down upon the heads of an educable posterity! He recklessly decided to spend the evening with Rhoda. They would have dinner at the Tuscany and order a bottle of chianti. Quite as if there were no new suits to pay for.

Mortimer Pearn didn't drink tea, but his sister's guests were allowed to look in on him before departing. He spent most of his life upstairs in the library, a room that fitted him like an old garment with generous pockets for prehistoric statuettes and heavy-looking volumes on what Rhoda called "nothing at all." Rhoda wasn't sure which of the ologies her uncle

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went in for, but she suspected him of affairs with ge-, arche-, and the-, and mild flirtations with flighty young modern ones, such as paleont- and anthrop-. His windows overlooked a rock garden as lacking in flora as, according to his candid niece, his life was lacking in the flowers and fruits of sin.

Rhoda introduced her companion, whom Mr. Pearn seemed to remember from a visit to Aldergrove fifteen years previously. "During the Christmas holidays it was," he reminisced. "Just after my return from Babylon. You were coasting down a hill."

The return from Babylon, Grover reflected, sounded like a title, and his incorrigibly irrelevant mind sketched in a picture of Mortimer's flaccid form encased in breastplate and shin guards, Mortimer poring over Persian hieroglyphics while Alexander the Great sowed oats for him and all the Pearns to come.

"Half the hill belongs to the Thanets," Rhoda threw in, "and the other half to us."

"Mother and I own the half you have to walk up," mused Grover aloud, then was afraid Mr. Pearn might not see any sense in the remark. Almost none of the things I say, he was thinking, make sense per se—only per me.

"And what are you studying for?" inquired Mr. Pearn a little later, as though he felt it incumbent upon him to show an interest, and as though he had hit on an original topic of conversation. It means

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nothing to them, Grover was savagely reflecting, nothing at all, so why the hell do they keep asking?

Rhoda came to his rescue. "He's going to Paris and see Life for a living," she said, then turned the tables. "I'll bet you didn't know what you were going to make of yourself when you were a Harvard Senior. At any rate you didn't make it, whatever it was. You did hot and dusty excavations instead, and got elected a member of societies where they meet in cutaways and listen to papers written by old men with beards about languages nobody can translate, and a fat lot of good it would do them if they could, didn't you!"

"Ah well," Mr. Pearn apologized, "the world wouldn't be so much fun for the rest, without a few old fogeys for contrast. Though don't you ever go and be one, my dear. . . You're not still determined to remain single, I trust?"

"Why should I change my mind?" Rhoda challenged.

Her uncle smiled with the archness that Grover begrudged to fatherly old bachelors. "For the very best of reasons." He turned to Grover. "You agree with me, I'm sure, Thanet."

"Oh," said Grover, "I've always thought Rhoda would make somebody a perfect husband! . . . She proposes to *me* now and then, but I'd rather keep her for a brother."

"What relation does that make *us*, I wonder," said

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a clear little voice that startled Grover and Mr. Pearn into a standing posture. The voice, thought Grover, was almost too consciously pitched; the intonation rather deliberately non-American. The intruder had held out a hand to Mr. Pearn, who was kissing it; it was as though one saw Anatole France paying homage to one of his own heroines,—say Mme. Nanteuil. A small white face delicately freckled was puckered into a smile of mild amusement, the kind of amusement, thought Grover, that worldly women are forever deriving from situations that to everyone else are a little embarrassing. This particular example was petite and ultra-smart, and she seemed as odd in Miss Pearn's house as a yellow and brown orchid would seem in a bed of mignonette. She looked, too, as though she might once have been through something: an illness or a calamity. By some strange logic uncatalogued, God knew, by *the* Professor Thanet, she produced the effect a beautiful woman might have produced. On trying to account for it later, Grover decided that the effect was due to a co-ordination of manner and garb achieved by a perfect understanding of her limits: she was so odd in dimensions, yet so utterly in scale! The dead white skin, the amber eyes, tired eyes, the artificially scarlet lips, the little hat and a glimpse of dry, snuff-colored hair, the narrow brown cape and bizarre chain,—each contributed an exact quota to an entity that no other person could, with the same simple ingredients, have

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achieved. Rhoda, coming up to stand beside her, Rhoda who was always neat, compact, fresh, and pretty, by contrast seemed gauche and raw.

Thinking back to the remark which had prompted the stranger's question, Grover was rather pleased with it,—pleased, that is, to have said something sufficiently clever, or for that matter inane, to cause this being to look at him in such an odd quizzical manner. He felt subtly flattered, and that rendered him nimble and bold, with the surprising boldness of a shy man. He also thought of the contour; on the way upstairs he had caught a glimpse of it in a mirror. Poor Rhoda!

"Intimate, I hope," he replied.

"This rude young man," Rhoda explained, "goes by the name of Grover Thanet. I don't have to tell him who you are, for I've already done so. I said you'd be good for him."

"For goodness sake don't explain what you meant by the remark," said Mrs. Scantleberry. "It sounds fraught with implications."

"It was!" Rhoda retorted. "As fraught as it could be."

"Never mind," Grover counselled. "Be it anyway."

"Be what, rude young man whose name sounds like a rather pleasant island or estate?"

"Why *good* for me, of course," said Grover.

Mrs. Scantleberry appealed to her cousin Mortimer,

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as Nanteuil might have appealed to her creator. "This strange talk, I suppose, is just Younger Generation."

"I rather fancy so," said Mr. Pearn.

"What does one do with it?"

"One humors it. At least I do—if I do anything. But when it comes to that, Sophie dear, you yourself look almost Younger Generation!"

Sophie smiled wanly. "Oh those little *almosts* that life is so desperately full of! . . . Can anybody tell me the time? I stopped in a moment to see Cousin Betty and, so to speak, Cousin Judy, but I suspect I've been due home for at least half an hour."

Grover glanced at his watch. Sophie, he was thinking, could appreciate the fat, somnolent Judy. Rhoda's dogs were the kind that went bounding over landscapes and upset lamps when they came in for tea. "It's *almost,*" he said with reluctant honesty, "a quite unkind little almost, half-past six. But not quite—really."

For the first time Sophie's lips parted in a smile that transfigured her peaked and puckered face into something beautiful,—not almost, but really quite. And a few moments later she was gone.

. . . .

Grover had chambers on the first floor of a dormitory well outside the gates and well beyond his means. For the red walls and the scratched furniture he was indebted to a former occupant; his own con-

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tributions were an aspect of tidy chaos, an odor of cigarette smoke, a rented piano, a host of books that were overdue at the library, a bunch of pink daisies, and a terra cotta head of Voltaire who was mistaken for Mozart and Wagner. On the work table reposed a typewriter whose carriage moved neither to the right nor to the left, also a bag of apples and two photographs: one of the Professor Thanet, in a gentle bowler and fierce mustachios, and one of his widow, in bangs and leg of mutton sleeves, looking sad, Grover had reflected, even twenty-odd years ago. He would confront her with the photograph the next time she said, "Darling, do you want to break your mother's heart?" She had been born with such a breakable one.

The work table bore that title only as a matter of courtesy: Grover preferred his knees. With slippered feet braced against the windowsill and a textbook balanced on his thighs, he spent hours in sharpening pencils, peeling apples, and drawing pictures of knights-at-arms and highborn ladies leaning out of bowers. A somewhat higher degree of concentration produced long letters to Geoffrey Saint, former tutor and perennial mentor. Occasionally he read a prescribed chapter in history or wrote a prescribed theme, and quite often he had spent a whole night absorbed in irrelevant mental exploration in smuggled volumes of Casanova or Krafft-Ebbing.

Today his heart was heavy and his conscience importunate. He had let more than a month go by with-

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out a visit home, having alleged the claims of study; and this morning a characteristically trustful letter from his mother had shadowed forth Omens. She had spoken again of "getting on;" and as fifty-four wasn't so very on, he couldn't shake off the thought that something more serious than she had ever admitted must be—pushing it. Furthermore there was the phrase "what little we have left." Which seemed to imply that one day there mightn't be any.

He knew that if he threw down his books and took the next train out from the North Station to Aldergrove his mother would meet him with the same old flush of pleasure on her faded cheeks, the same girlish smile, the spontaneous, whimsical baby-talk phrases that she kept inventing with incredible resourcefulness. They would play the Egmont and Coriolanus overtures, four-hand; the chords in the base would tire her at the same old spots, and she would have to stop and make a cup of tea which would turn into at least four, very weak. Her quiet gaieties would reassure him as ever, but beneath them, as ever, he would catch glimpses of the tragic figure she essentially was: a little New England Duse. That divine credulity, that eternal defencelessness, that deep pathetic faith in—God save the mark—him!

For the time being whatever signals his ears were attuned to catch were muffled by the louder protests of his own endangered plans. He was in the grip of a sense of frustration which he had been unable to for-

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mulate even in the garrulous letter to Geoffrey which lay unfinished on his knees. "I wouldn't put it past Fate," he scribbled, "to do me out of my year in Europe, just when the prospect of it is beginning to appeal to me as my one hope of salvation—"

Salvation? Of what?

Postponing the Insoluble, he took refuge at the piano. A certain dozen of Scriabin preludes were still new enough to serve both as a stimulant and an anaesthetic.

As he played his lips went into an affectionate smile at the postscript of his mother's letter: a warning not to overtire his poor dear eyes but to go to see Dr. Tinley at once. "Emma Sipe went to him when she was studying at Radcliffe," his mother added, "and they (presumably the good doctor's reading glasses) did her so much good." Grover questioned whether society was much the gainer for the fact that that fright, meaning Emma, could read fifty more pages of John Stuart Mill at a stretch than formerly; but in any case one thing was certain, and that was that his poor dear eyes would never be ruined by the Holy Roman Empire, *nor* Dryden, *nor* The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

What countless bundles of assorted information had arrived at his mind's door these last four years! What capricious showers of ideas had drenched him—only to evaporate and leave him with a mental cold. Today it seemed that all the mental energyzing of recent

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months had been as pointless as the capering of the wind across the surface of a deep lake. He had been ready to learn that intellect fed the lake; now he suspected that intellect merely rippled it. He was beginning to guess,—and it was discomfiting, for he had heatedly argued to the contrary,—that life was fed by little streams of feeling, and, perhaps, by a good broad river whose existence had been quite unknown to him. This afternoon he was aware of a trickle, a definite current; he could almost hear the murmur of cascades which must be pouring their contents into him! The murmur of cascades, the sound of a small white hand punching a velvet cushion. It was not only a beneficent sensation, it was a little vertiginous. It quickened his instinct and dyed his fancy; by the same token it tripled his contempt for mere wind, of the sort that blew gustily around the ears of student groups and stirred up silly clouds of dust. It was shocking to think that so far he had contributed nothing to life but a capacity to absorb written ideas and give them back in impassioned arguments that weren't even right! It was time to do something.

Scriabin was becoming easier, and making more sense.

But do what—*what!* Why didn't people's bachelor uncles *tell* you what you were going to make of yourself, instead of asking you!

June, and the much-touted young man's fancy,—where, if any, was his? Or in the heart or in the

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head? Here he was twenty-two, and intacto, and it wasn't as though he wouldn't enjoy sowing wild oats, for he most certainly would. It was discouraging to be so chaste; artistically speaking, it was immoral.

From Scriabin he drifted backward to Debussy, which was like sailing into a calm cove after making headway against choppy seas. The Debussy prelude, an old favorite, had long since ceased to be exciting: it was pleasantly narcotic, and his mind was drowsing off when a faint warm whiff of an unknown flower came in through the open window.

In his eagerness to capture it he found himself involuntarily subduing the volume of tone, pressing down the soft pedal, and this struck him as being such a strange thing, psychologically, to be doing that he was oblivious for the moment to the fact that there wasn't a flower within a stone's throw of his windows —except for pink daisies, which were odorless. . . .

The music had restored his spirits and co-ordinated his nerves. He felt even equal to an attack upon Chopin etudes which had always been his despair, and launched into a sea of mutinous chords.

"Don't you *ever* play anything a fellow can whistle?"

He looked up to see Eric Peperell, smooth, pink, tan, and gold, provokingly healthy, dressed with careful carelessness. With a self-conscious lurch Eric straddled a chair, his arms resting on the back, a newly bound golf club dangling to the floor. When you shoot up to six foot two without warning, Grover

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was thinking, it makes your ideas look short in the sleeves and tight across the chest. Nevertheless he envied Eric for having shot, knowing by now that he himself would stick at a mere five foot eight. In the days when they were at St. Basil's together, and approximately the same height, in body if not in mind, Eric's influence over him, the feeling of worship he had inspired, had been all the more potent for being inexplicable. This afternoon, his intuition freshened by a musical bath, Grover felt he could localize Eric's might in the elusive curves at the corners of his mouth. Eric's curly lips, Samson's locks,—*c'était quasiment*, as Claudine would say. Smiling curves indicative of emotional possibilities which would, no doubt, remain forever undeveloped, so strong were the agencies directing and repressing Eric's actions: the well-bred young American, magnificently equipped for adventures that would never occur to him!

Poor foolish mortals, he was thinking, how pathetic that we must be forever attributing magic prestige to the things we are fond of. Realizing for the first time that Eric was, like himself, merely a combination of slugs and snails and puppy-dog tails, Grover was abruptly released from a thrall that had held him six or seven years, and though it was disheartening to be thus bereft of a good illusion, he smiled with a secret sense of advantage. For his own ideas weren't short in the sleeve and tight across the chest: if anything they were a size too big for him, a better fault.

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Having awakened to Eric's limitations, knowing intuitively more about Eric than Eric would ever know about anybody, his own peculiar superiority disentangled itself and floated up serene. Forevermore he would be proof against the kind of prestige enjoyed by solid people like Eric, for now he knew that their solidity was part and parcel of their immovability, and in the long run immovability was damn stupid. It wasn't out of principle that the Peperells of the world were orthodox and decorous; it was because they hadn't sufficient imagination to gamble with their funds; they stuck to hopelessly safe bonds.

This triumphant conclusion had got into the bass of the Chopin etude, and, for all his carefully cultivated low-brow taste, Eric was paying attention. There was a deferential look in his clear eyes, and from it Grover made two pleasant deductions: one, Eric, today more than ever, leaned upon him for some intangible support, an idea, a clever tag, a flavor that no other personality could supply, though Eric had all Harvard to choose from; two, Eric's particular kind of superiority, so dependent on the accidental glory of youth, was at its zenith and must henceforth wane, whereas his own kind, less accidental than painfully evolved, had barely commenced to manifest itself and would augment from year to year. Never before had he negotiated that cascade of chromatic thirds so neatly!

"It's a pity you don't like these, Pep," he said, turn-

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ing to an even less tuney etude, "for they happen to be good; in fact the very best there is."

Eric came lounging over and sat beside him. The bench creaked, and Grover recalled the days when Eric, like a tawny lion cub, would sidle up to him in study periods to copy sentences in a Latin exercise, instinctively knowing that his mere proximity was enough to wheedle anything out of anybody. Dutifully Eric looked at a page of the music as if willing to verify its goodness, though he didn't know bass from treble. Then he rested a warm heavy arm on Grover's shoulder and got up.

"You'll always be the same funny kid," he remarked. "Won't you."

"Not exactly," Grover replied, "for I'm getting samer and samer."

"I don't follow you."

Grover smiled with a trace of malice. "You're not even headed the same way!"

"Where the heck you headed?"

"I don't know—possibly toward Parnassus."

"If you mean I'm dumb," Eric cheerfully acknowledged, "that's nothing to write home about." He had gone to swing his club over an imaginary tee, as if proving to himself that he had not remained at a standstill; hadn't he added golf to his accomplishments?

"Speaking of home, what are you doing this week-end?"

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"If I'm in my right mind I'll be swatting."

"Like to have you come home with me; I'm driving up Friday night."

After all these years! How often Grover had dreamt of coming down broad slippery stairs to breakfast at Eric's; of riding Eric's horse; of borrowing his blue sweater after a game of tennis! He had even imagined the haunting smell of the soap in Eric's bathroom. Scales fell from his eyes and he saw why invitations had been rare in his life; he saw why he had never been "popular,"—it was because he didn't do things you could whistle, because he couldn't take casually what to others was casual, nor seriously what to them was serious. To him friendship was precious and exclusive; to them it was cheap and gregarious. They, feeling themselves drawn, went forward; he drew back, or ran a mile, awed by the depth and intimacy of his feelings. And it dawned on him that many people, even Pep, might have been glad of a sign now and then, from him! It would never have occurred to him to invite Eric home with him, yet how often had he not imagined Eric in the little house in Aldergrove, driving from the station in the old-fashioned car that had to be cranked, waiting his turn at the one and only bath!

"Thanks awfully," he said. "I'd like to, but I have to work. And even if I didn't, I'm due home myself." And even if he didn't have to go home, he was think-

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ing, to accept now would be an anticlimax; he had far too thoroughly imagined it.

He saw how simple it would have been to fit Eric into the modest Thanet scheme. Any nice person would see the humor of his cat-boat bobbing beneath the Aldergrove Yacht Club; any nice person would appreciate the black Artelia's muffins and loquacity, and the lame collie and his mother's old-fashioned notions; any nice person would sense in the Thanet menage something whimsical, something touching, something fragile, something which, though forlorn and rococo, was yet profoundly real. And Eric was, for all the tightness of his mental garb, a nice person.

"Has Rhoda Marple told you," said Eric, "she's coming to the Commencement dance with my mother and sister?"

Grover had a moment of jealousy,—but only a moment, for there was no mistaking the good faith of the hand that was now shaking his shoulder. Moreover he was reminded of a telephone call he had neglected to make this afternoon. Having flatly refused to take part in the Commencement rites and festivities himself, he could not blame Rhoda for accepting another man's invitation, especially a man whom he had made a point of introducing to her. In an unanalyzable sense he was pleased, yet he also felt, however irrationally, that he had been badly used.

As Eric went on talking, Grover pictured the garden parties and the dances, the Chinese lanterns, the straw-

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berries and ices, Eric and Rhoda threading their way through it all, handsome, besieged, their laughter blending with the music and the chatter, conforming uncritically to the endless formalities. Often while ridiculing the conventions he had caught himself envying youths who ran arm-in-arm up the steps of exclusive club houses,—men like Dick Briarcliffe, the crack oarsman, and Garfield Pearn, who knew a lot about Confucius and Lao-Tse and certainly couldn't be charged with lack of brains. The envy was never of long duration, for he could reassure himself with the thought that within his breast burned something that all the Peperells and Briarcliffes and Pearns were devoid of, something too nearly divine in quality to be compatible with Conformity, something—well, what? There was the rub.

He would try to analyze and formulate the something in his letter to Geoffrey,—it was all bound up with salvation, and Europe. Meanwhile there was Pep leaning out the window and gurgling at the refrain of a ditty that came floating up:

> Why did 'e that was so wealthy
> Go with 'er that was so poo-er,
> Tykin' 'er from hhonest parents,
> Turnin' 'er into an 'oo-er.

"It's that wild ass Bruff," said Eric, making a thumbs-down sign to the serenader.

"Is young Thanet up there?" came the voice.

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"Who wants to know?" growled Eric, protectively belligerent.

> Ho hit's the rich wot 'as the pleasures,
> Hit's the poo-er wot 'as the shyme—

The voice trailed off and a moment later there was a thunderous noise on the stairway. Max Bruff flung himself into the room, tripping over Eric's golf club. As the owner plunged to its rescue there was a heroic clash, and Grover saw his tranquil premises transformed into an arena for the rough and tumble of two titans. One chair had already toppled over, and a table was threatened.

"De grâce, messieurs, respectez mes fleurs!" he cried, leaping up in time to save the daisies.

Bruff, seeing the piano bench free, disengaged himself and sat down, puffing,—not, however, deigning to reinstate his necktie, which he was now wearing hind-side-to.

"I needed a bit of hexercise," he said in an accent which he had recently appropriated, as he appropriated anything that appealed to him.

"Lose your next pound at the gym," suggested Grover. "I'll have enough junk to pack up next week without your excess weight!"

Bruff was turning the pages before him. "Fancy a mild young daisy-collector with the nerve to play Revolutionary etudes!" He attacked the study Grover had abandoned, and was playing it in a manner that

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made Grover suddenly feel, in relation to Bruff, as hopelessly Philistine as he had regarded Eric, in relation to himself. "Mild" had hurt. Of course Max was an exception to all rules; a genius to everybody but the uncle who, instead of sending him to Leipzic to study composition, was keeping him at a university greatly embarrassed by his presence. From time to time Max dropped in to play upon a piano worthy of his mettle. As he explained it, "Me hown is bysey at the bottom and trebley at the top, and has between a hay sharp and a hay flat there's little to choose; in fact the flats is sharp and the sharps is flat; ours is a nice 'ouse ours is."

"Do your worst," Eric advised somewhat savagely, preparing to leave. "You'd better get as much as you can out of life before they hang you."

"When they hang me it will be for slaying thee, oh thou superfluous pursuer of balls,—golf, tennis, foot, medicine, basket, and for all one knows, moth!"

Max's advent had brought Grover sharply to a sense of the immediate. He was debating a number of alternatives. Study was out of the question; so was the unfinished letter to Geoffrey; likewise tea with Rhoda's smart friends. He was merely temporizing in stopping to weigh them, for he knew quite well what he would end by doing. With a thrill he came at last face to face with one particular cascade that had been flowing more rapidly than he knew; his lake was getting full. Again he heard the delicious

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thud of a small white hand punching a velvet cushion.

He caught Eric's coat at the door. "Will you save my life, Pep? Call up Rhoda at Alcie Pender's and tell her I can't possibly get away this afternoon." He had an impulse partly jealous, partly sporting, partly malicious, partly self-castigatory. "Substitute for me, if you like. It's a tea dance."

"Who's Alcie Pender?"

"A tall thin blonde, looks like macaroni—with hair au gratin. She's in the telephone book—I mean her mother is—"

"*And* the social register," sang out Max, "and the book of etiquette—ho hit's the rich wot 'as the pleasures—"

Grover went into the bedroom and took down his new gray flannel suit, then rummaged for a cravat and handkerchief of the right shades of blue, his private code being quite as inexorable as any devised by society at large. Eric was whistling his way downstairs to the telephone, and Max broke into outlandish harmonies of his own. Grover felt a new prestige taking form within him,—for he had quite casually given Eric a command which Eric had quite submissively gone off to obey; moreover he was breaking an appointment with Rhoda in favor of something actually, thank heaven, dangerous.

He emerged with one arm in his coat, and left Bruff in charge. He was in nervous haste, as if rapidity would enable him to escape a host of dim troubles

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that were gaining on him. Running down the steps into the golden green light of the street, stumbling over the humpy brick pavement on which a net of shadows was cast by the elms, he had a longing to hold tight to the present, and to include in it some nice bits of the past. For whatever the future might have to commend it, it would be at the expense of so much that he knew to be good,—it would be like selling keepsakes for mere money. What a pity, for instance, to exchange the Eric who had copied his Latin exercises for an Eric who was taking up golf and, apparently, Rhoda.

As he turned into Massachusetts Avenue Max's strange music clanged in his ears. For all his madness Max could wring more anguish out of ten bars of a hackneyed etude than he, Grover Thanet, could ever hope to wring out of ten whole opuses; and that was a source of refined misery to him. Art made way for the Bruffs; society made way for the Peperells; what under the sun ever made way for the Thanets? Rhoda had brutally put her finger on it when she said the Thanets weren't able to buck the tide. He smiled suddenly at the thought that if Rhoda had said opuses for opera he would have rebuked her, hypocrite and tyrant that he was, too, like everybody else!

A taxicab strayed his way and without giving his conscience time to protest he got in. For the moment his conscience was twitting him about the cavalier

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treatment accorded to Rhoda's party. Why must he be the victim of such qualms when people like Max could be as rude as they chose and not even be aware of it, much less remorseful! In the end, however, his conscience took up the matter of the taxicab. Pep, it told him, would have ridden in the subway on principle. Max would have walked, and sung hearty ribaldries en route, and flung stones into the Charles. Even Max flinging stones was a picture of well-directed energy. While mild young Thanets stood on the river bank sedately meditating the futility of shying pebbles at bottles, men of genius busily and thoughtlessly shied, and, glorying in the final lusty crash, cried out, "Hit it, be God!" And that was, somehow, constructive.

The cab joggled through narrow streets and emerged upon the expanse of Commonwealth Avenue, passing a line of pompous cocoa-colored houses with which Grover was by now so familiar that he could direct the driver, "The fourth from the corner."

As he was paying the fare a startlingly familiar shout smote his ears. Looking quickly up he was horrified to see Rhoda, Alcie, Dick Briarcliffe, and Eric Peperell darting by. They waved to him gayly, mockingly, as though they read Meanings into his errand. Eric doffed his hat with a courtly sweep.

Grover swung about and walked up the steps with as nonchalant an air as he could command.

The cool shiny hall that lay beyond the grille had never seemed such a welcome haven from all that

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made life trying. A moment's wait and he was shown into an even safer haven, dangerously safe,—a library of mulberry and silver, brightened by flowers and hushed by silky rugs. Sophie Scantleberry held out a white arm to him and cleared a place at her side on a big sofa in which she was buried to the eyes, her high-arched slippers tucked under her.

"How nice of you to drop in! I passed your Hall this morning—light me one too—and almost sent a note in, asking you to come to lunch with me, but I was afraid of interrupting your solemn labors and knew you would be far too polite to send back word that I was to go to the devil, as you should have done if I had—do have some tea. See where I burned myself on that wretched spirit lamp because nobody was here to squunch it for me—"

Grover was tongue-tied, for as he leaned timidly forward to examine the pink mark on Sophie's finger, his nostrils were filled with the faint perfume he had smelt earlier in the afternoon,—the fragrance of an unknown flower which had had no locus, except, apparently, in memory!

. . . .

A velvety breeze seemed to blow the sunlight into the classroom where sixty or eighty young men in shirt-sleeves bent damp and anxious brows over an examination on Shakespeare's plays: sixty or eighty potential voters and patres familiarum, thought Grover,

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being schoolboys for the last day in their lives. And answering such silly questions, scratch, scratch, scratch,—inky fingers, leaking brains. Above the scratching he heard summer playing with the shiny Japanese ivy at the windows: summer came right in and molested the printed paper before him; wraith-like melodies echoed in his ears—the Rondes de Printemps —Paris!

"Explain the use of the phrase, 'Saint Nicholas be thy speed!'"

The others were explaining it for all they were worth; Grover never would. The English Department, he was thinking, is far more interested in the bard's obsolete suits and trappings than in the part of him that was alleged to be for all time. Why compel the Two Gentlemen of Verona to be for all time? Shakespeare would have been the last to expect it,—with the possible exception of the ditty about Sylvia, which Schubert had rescued. The heavens such grace did le-hend her. Sylvia—Sophie.

All this was even more dismal than the seventeenth century essayists which he had also left to an eleventh hour, and, he felt reasonably sure, flunked. In former years he had been able to drift idyllically within a few days of examinations, then by dint of prodigious cramming, come through creditably, sometimes brilliantly —depending on the professor. He had counted upon being able to get under the skin of the Two Gentlemen and King Lear during the four-day interval between

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the Holy Roman Empire and today, but the time had glided away while he drank tea with Sophie, or sat in his rooms thinking about past teas with Sophie and teas to come. It had been like bailing out a boat that leaked faster than one could empty, so why bail? And he was drowning academically,—a novel sensation, lugubriously pleasant. Some drowning people were able to see their whole past in vivid detail. Not he; he saw his future, and as he saw it he did a problem in subtraction on the back of his examination paper: three score and ten minus twenty-two,—forty-eight whole years in which to look backward at the days when he was too young to be a failure.

The breeze rustled the paper mockingly: he wished it would blow it on the floor. The sun gilded the down on his arm: such a harmless arm compared with the hirsute limb across the aisle driving answers into its notebook before they could escape. 'Armless harm, Max would have said. What good was it going to do them all, knowing what Shakespeare had meant by "Saint Nicholas be thy speed." Or were they merely guessing? Might it not be wise to guess too, and say something about Santa Claus and his reindeer? On the whole no, for if it were wrong, it would be such palpable fraud, and it wasn't, after all, an examination in Ingenuity,—if it only were! That was what was wrong with education. Would that be a Mantegna print on the wall, if one were a little surer about art?

If one were going to fail, wasn't it more sublime to

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fail utterly than by a niggardly margin! All things considered, one's chances of becoming a Bachelor of Arts were, not to put too fine a point on it, bloody,— and he leaned back and surveyed the toiling shoulders of sixty or eighty scholars in the throes of mnemonic travail. His gaze strayed beyond them to the window which framed an ancient building, scene of a thousand futile recitations. The hard brick outlines were tenderly blurred by the ivy, just as the institution itself, for all its impersonality, was mitigated by the tendrilly sentiments of three thousand youths who, clinging to it of necessity, were bound to love it. The institution had tortured him, but in its clumsy way it had revealed his individuality to him. *It* knew nothing about him, but it had been the fortuitous means of his finding out something about himself; of his finding out, chiefly, that he had nothing to do with it, any more than ivy had to do with brick. In what way he was unlike its other products, Harvard couldn't reveal to him: life alone would be able to do that. Or would it? It must.

In a few minutes he would walk out the door, never to come back. By ten o'clock—strange thought!—he would have *been* a student—*of* been, as Rhoda still wrote it. And not one human being here, not even the two or three monitors whose disillusioned eyes from time to time had wandered his way, lit by a faint spark of friendliness, really knew or cared what he was, or what was going to happen to him.

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When he arose and handed in his empty book there was a stir of surprise in the room. A few serious pairs of eyes turned on him in awed surmise followed by faint contempt at the swift surrender and by impatience at the interruption,—mere schoolboys still, he was thinking, shocked at his casual acceptance of his fate. They were, however, less shocked than he had hoped; moreover his acceptance of his fate was less casual than it seemed, for his knees were trembley when he found himself irrevocably outside the building, sagging down the steps towards the deserted yard, a gentleman at large, or whatever you were when you left off being a schoolboy. He sighed, and the sigh came out of him bumpily, like a sob. Why did he die? Why did he die?

That phrase, half intelligible, half abracadabra, often came into his head in moments of stress; he had no clue to its origin, but he could not remember a time when he hadn't been saying it to himself. As a child, when performing tragedies before the mirror shrouded in a brocaded table-cloth, he had declaimed it in mournful cadences. And one day at St. Basil's, when he had fallen from a nightmarish trapeze and stunned himself, he had come to murmuring it cryptically,—why did he die? Why did he die? Whereupon a shout of relief had gone up from his scared mates, the unexpected and unconscious friendliness of which had turned his bump into a blessing, for it had been the sign of his belated acceptance as one of them.

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He was now out in the world with a vengeance, and instead of being filled with zest for life's battles, he had a desire to walk on and on, out through the gates, down the narrow streets, past his dormitory, past all the houses, Longfellow's and Lowell's and President Eliot's, past everything historical and exemplary, till he came to fields of grass into which he could fling himself and forget the doubts and dreads that were in the back of his mind, waiting for a chance to pounce upon him. But one never seemed to get beyond the historical and the exemplary; the green fields were indeed, as the old hymn expressed it, "far away."

In the world he was so desperately out in, was one person and one alone who ignored the tiresome orthodoxies that had just beaten him. In a few more days Sophie's house, his haven, would be closed, and Sophie would have departed. His passion for oblivion transmogrified itself into a passion for Sophie's presence, Sophie's coolness and heretical naturalness and strange, soothing fragrance, her tacit, all-enveloping comprehension. He swung on his heel and set out for town, —wondering, in the subway, if he still looked like a student.

Graduation from youth to manhood under Sophie's tutelage was so much more significant than academic graduation. He was tired of thinking, tired of talking and reading; he wanted to listen and listen and listen to Sophie's unexpected views, her unexpected sentences, long, crisp, and curly, like the smoke that

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ascended from her cigarette when she leaned back and held it at arm's length,—rose-gray smoke, lilac smoke, smoke from the ashes of the unknown flower whose spirit clung to her. His head was full of iridiscent, forbidden fancies, a spectrum in pastels. Some mysterious fusion could deepen the colors, blur them ecstatically together, cause him to forget everything he had ever diligently learned for something worth it all, something blinding and deafening ending in a blissful hush.

She was at home, writing letters at her desk. Looking up as he entered, she laid down her pen with a strange little expectant finality. He hesitated a moment, then as she stood up, he came forward precipitately, as though he had an important message, then stopped short, realizing he had none. Sophie raised her arms as naturally as his mother might have done, and as naturally he found himself in them, found Sophie pressed against him, then *fitting* him, as though he were a mould she had been poured into. Even in disorderly flights of imagination he had never realized that an embrace could be such a from-head-to-foot experience. His whole body had become sensitive; it was like catching sight of one's emotional contours in a mirror. The surprise of it brought him to himself, made him draw away and look at Sophie. Her eyes showed nothing of his own astonishment; they were seeing farther ahead, and swimming a little.

Dazed, he surged forward again, closing his eyes,

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letting his hands see for him, every vestige of consciousness directed to his mouth, to Sophie's mouth—he scarcely knew which. Wild new unmannerly instincts invaded and conquered him: famished instincts, greedy and cruel. Feelings suddenly blossomed where before had only been bulbs buried deep in his soil.

A smothered cry checked him, and, without knowing how he had got there, he found himself sitting shyly on the sofa beside Sophie, his hand in one of hers, while she, with her free hand, restored the havoc he had wrought with her coiffure,—he who had hitherto been almost apologetic about helping her into a car!

They had spoken no word since his abrupt entrance, and he could think of nothing to say now. He would rather have died than translate into words his new feelings. Sophie too seemed transformed, as though the revelation of what was in him—or her!—had drained her. She looked like the sort of little girl one calls old-fashioned: grave, precocious, incongruous. And even as he watched her she turned again into a woman of the world, unsurprisable: a woman of the world who looked as though the worst, thank God, had come to the worst and what a pity! He was both thrilled and abashed by the changes in her. He felt suddenly young and empty and schoolboyish; what reserve of experience had he with which to meet the half humorous light that was creeping into Sophie's eyes! In a minute she might make fun of him.

Instead she pressed his hand against her forehead,

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and bowed her head against his breast with a lovely, reassuring tenderness. "Why, oh why did you do it?" she whispered.

He was too astonished to reply. For he had thought *she* had done it! He hadn't even known that there *were* kisses as utter as that; he hadn't dreamt that really nice people took such dizzy liberties with each other; even had he known, he wouldn't have dared. Swiftly his shadow-self prompted him. Women, it explained, were not supposed to take the initiative, consequently had to pretend they hadn't; the pretence was a mere convention, to be respected. Perhaps they weren't actually aware that they *were* taking the initiative. It was gentlemanly to give them the benefit of the doubt. He felt older again.

"How could I help it?" he said ambiguously, but with a clear conscience.

Sophie lifted her head and looked into his eyes. "What must you think of me?"

This inconsistency made him laugh, and with a sudden new sense of his authority and the license it implied, he gathered her up beside him. It was far less embarrassing to have her pressed close to him than to sit facing her. For as long as she remained in his arms, clinging, confirming his right to molest, there was no need to answer the insistent little questions that were beating against his brain: what next? what next?

There was a sound of footsteps in the hall, menial

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footsteps, and Sophie drew away. "Mercy!" she exclaimed. "What would Matthew say!—not a word of course, but what he *wouldn't* say! . . . What time is it, dear?"

Trying not to exult at the new tone of endearment, —had things got as far as that!—Grover looked at his watch, as he had done on the memorable evening when Sophie had walked straight into him, to stay. "It's eleven-twenty," he said, and added, "Or the beginning of forever." It sounded like a title.

"Dear me!" said Sophie. "If that's what time it is, we'll need lunch. Wouldn't you like to drive far away, to Concord for instance, have lunch at an inn, then walk in the woods and contemplate Nature?"

"The farther the better," said Grover, "though I don't feel exactly Emersonian."

Sophie got up to fetch cigarettes. "*Non, je n'irai pas au bois, non! Non, je n'irai pas seulette,*" she sang, in muted tones.

Grover lit a match and completed the quatrain. "*Tu connais trop le danger, où l'amour pourrait t'engager.*"

"Isn't French convenient, so sparing to one's pride," said Sophie, her face puckered into the composed smile that made her momentarily beautiful. If there were enough Sophies in the world, Grover was thinking, the standard of feminine beauty would be quite a different one, and pretty girls would be ugly. She was her old self again, as though nothing had happened, as though nothing ever could happen. "Do you know

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that we're a pair of silly children?" she was saying. "I don't know which is sillier; probably I, for I'm old enough to know better."

"There isn't any better," said Grover, then blushed. "Besides," he plunged on, to hide his thought, "you promised once never to talk like that."

"Like what?"

"About ages."

Sophie was standing before the mirror, tucking in her hair, examining the reflection of her face in various poses. Finally, as though she had just remembered that he was still in the room, her eyes peered at him from the glass, testingly. He got up quickly and stood beside her, feeling six feet tall and twenty-five years old at least, then he bent down and kissed the place behind her ear. "Grandmother, what tiny ears you have!" he remarked. There was a faintly brownish smell to her hair; but it blended with the mysterious odor of the unknown flower, might even have been a part of it—crazy thought!

"Go get your hat," he commanded. "We're going far away."

Half an hour later they were seated in Sophie's car, fleeing the noise and dust of the city. In the narrow mirror Grover caught a glimpse of their two faces and, in this bright sunlight, it flashed upon him what it must mean to a woman to be "at least thirty-five." For there was a noticeable contrast in the texture and lustre of Sophie's cheeks and his own, and

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the contrast,—how beastly unfair,—was in his favor. It made him suddenly very, very fond of Sophie,—fond over and above the delirious assurance of being in love, that state so long held in prospect, that had nothing really to do with fondness.

"A penny for them," said Sophie.

He was startled. How strange to be as intimate as this, and yet to be obliged to be careful, more careful than before. Was it ever humanly possible to know anybody well enough to say everything? He gave her a smile to put her off. "I wasn't thinking at all, Sophie dear. I'm never going to think at all again; I finished school today. That's what we're celebrating."

"Oh!"

He hated himself for his amateurishness, and he was dismayed at the implication of what he had said, for in a psychology course he had learned that Truth often chooses an inadvertent moment, indeed prefers them. Here he was, steeping and cooking in the heat of passion, fairly living in terms of Sophie Scantleberry, yet he could speak of this excursion as the celebration of something that did not include her. Was this intoxicating adventure, after all, merely his old egoism in a new guise?

"Let's not pay any attention to words today," he pleaded. "They're so hopelessly in the habit of saying what isn't meant. Let's just *be*—I be and you be. That's enough, isn't it?"

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"Be—good for you?" she teased him.

"Aren't I being good for *you*—a tiny bit?"

He could hold Sophie's hand, but not her thoughts, which were obviously roaming. There was a droop in her lips. He took advantage of the open road and the chauffeur's back to kiss her, deftly. What a lot, he was thinking, one can learn about the language of caresses in one brief hour!

"Tit for tat—a penny for yours," he said finally, concealing a trace of anxiety. Why should her thoughts go so far away?

"Oh mine! There's no charge for them, though if all were known they've cost *me* enough. . . I was merely thinking, and it's a discouraging sort of thought, that after you've waded through all their systems and philosophies, and tried all their synthetic substitutes, you come back to what you originally suspected; and that is, that it all boils down to—"

"I know—this!" And he kissed her again, gently, ironically, triumphantly, while a lady of Arlington looked on aghast. "I for one don't think it's a bit discouraging."

"That's the discouraging thing about it," said Sophie simply, looking at him wistfully, compassionately, almost the way his mother might have looked. His remark echoed rather emptily in his ears. He felt bumptious and chastened.

. . . .

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The nicest thing about Concord, Grover decided, was not the faint aroma of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Emerson, and Louisa Alcott, but the way the Chinese wall-paper went behind Sophie's brown and amber silhouette, as she sat with her elbows on the table at the inn.

"You were Chinese in a former reincarnation if there would have been any, Sophie," he declared. "You have their serenity, and their kind of translucent teeth, and their kind of puckery smile, as though the things that made you laugh were a trifle tart to the taste."

"But I laugh at you," protested Sophie, "and you're no quince. You're very sweet."

"Perhaps *I* am, but with your private thoughts sprinkled on me I'm puckery, ever so slightly. Pure sweetness would bore you."

Sophie's eyes softened. She patted his hand. "You're a strange boy; you've seen so little, but you see so well."

After lunch they walked through the village, passing at intervals historic houses, till they reached the open countryside. Intimidated by a troop of turkeys on the edge of the road, they joined hands, and proceeded in that fashion toward fields and groves where they imagined Thoreau had roamed and meditated.

"Do you like Walden?" asked Sophie.

"Never read it. Do you?"

"Neither have I."

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"Have you read all the books we've discussed these last few weeks?" he asked, suddenly suspicious.

"Mercy no! Have you?"

Grover shook his head.

"Naughty child!"

They swung arms in contentment, and wandered away from the road across the fields.

"Have you read Emerson, on Love?" asked Sophie.

"Only in school. . . He made love sound like a Christian duty."

"Whereas it's a pagan prerogative."

"It's the fault of these placid fields and respectable trees. With Nature setting such an orderly example what could you expect? The only people who've understood love are those for whom Nature has manifested herself in terrific superlatives."

"How do you know?"

"I don't. I'm only—sort of quoting myself. . . Of course if this were Aldergrove we could sit on that fallen tree over there on the edge of the woods and revel in the countryside. For in Aldergrove we'd be in the sort of clothes you sit on fallen trees in."

"Let's try and see what it's like."

The fallen tree was in a little depression. "I thought of course there'd be a babbling brook down there," Grover remarked. "But apparently there's only an unused river-bed—rivulet-bed." He felt himself blushing again, which was positively crass.

"One does feel rather citified," Sophie admitted,

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accepting a cigarette and surveying her narrow shoes. "Something's wrong; here's Nature, and here are we."

"I know!"

A different kind of man, Grover was desperately reflecting, would soon make right whatever was wrong —but what *was* wrong? Why should he feel shy again—now! Shyer than he had ever felt in all his shy life! He sat on the new grass at Sophie's feet, flung away the citified hat he had been carrying in his hand, and blew smoke in nervous gusts towards the silent trees.

"Insects make such foolish noises," he remarked.

How grotesque to be in the fields, the very fields he had been thirsting for only a few hours since, and, after all, not to feel at home in them! How grotesque to be in the country with the person you were in love with, the person who was having a positively chemical effect upon you, and not to feel romantic. "Has it ever struck you," he asked in a tone of discovery, "that people who may know each other awfully well in a city sometimes almost have to begin at a new beginning with each other in the country?"

Sophie didn't reply, but after a few moments she got up and threw away her cigarette.

"I think you do feel a little Emersonian, after all. This air inspires you with Immortal Thoughts. Grover Thanet on Friendship! Let's go find the car. I can't bear New England—never could. Little Women, Little Men—Jesus!"

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All the way back to Boston Grover was hurt and shocked and unhappy. This morning he had been so thrillingly on the scent of something that "made way for the Thanets,"—and now, like everything else in life that had fired his hopes and desires, it seemed to be jeopardized for some impenetrable reason. If this happiness too were going to elude him "for no reason at all," as Rhoda would have put it, it would be a sort of death-blow to his self-confidence; it would mean that he had flunked his examination for manhood. So keen was the dread of it that he sat back rigid and silent, his feet pressing hard against the floor of the car. He wondered whether Sophie was regretting what had happened this morning, whether she expected him to go back to the house with her, whether it was his cue to ask her to drop him in Cambridge. If he suggested it out of politeness, would she mistake his motive and believe that he didn't want to accompany her? If he only knew whether she did or not! If he only knew how to let her know how much he did want to! What a hellish maze of unnecessary wonderings! By what magic had old John Scantleberry brought it off! . . . Why couldn't they be frank? How had this abyss opened between them —or was it pure imagination on his part? Above all, why couldn't he reach out and take Sophie's hand in his? Was she paralyzed too? Was this the catastrophe whose shadow had been creeping up on him for weeks! Sophie was tapping on the window.

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"Stop at the next corner," she cried.

Grover's blood ran cold. Had it come to—ejection! Then his heart gave a leap.

"It's a shop I discovered a few days ago," she explained. "They make the most heavenly cakes. I'm going to get myriads of them for tea. You'd better come in and choose your own. *I* like the ones that look like Mohammedan mosques all out of drawing and I don't care who knows it."

Now he *could* take her hand, to help her down, and he squeezed it, which brought back her city smile, and he laughed to think how near he was to the verge of tears—ass! Ass!

He chose cinnamon buns.

We won't go to the country again, he was thinking, till after.

. . . .

Nothing, thought Grover, could be more hopelessly innocent than sitting before all this silver, eating cinnamon buns and,—now that you knew Sophie well enough,—licking the sugar off your fingers. He remembered a passage in the *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle* that was as unlike the present impasse as anything could be, particularly the behavior of the lady. Sophie wasn't flirting at all; if anything she looked as though she had had a mild headache but was now feeling better, thanks. Over his cup he watched for some sign in her of his own subcutaneous restlessness.

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"What celestial tea," she said.

Grover put down his cup. "In all my life put together," he blurted out, "I haven't drunk as much tea as I've guzzled in this room. What *do* women see in it?"

Sophie gasped. "Why, you poor child, you could have had whiskey. It never occurred to me."

Grover lit a cigarette in exasperation and got up to move about. It wasn't reassuring, at this juncture, to be taken so completely for a poor child. His only consolation was that John Scantleberry was so obnoxiously alcoholic. At this very moment he was doubtless absorbing rye in some country club near Chicago and negotiating for the purchase of more polo ponies. Sophie drew the line at Chicago. "Jack has things called interests there, but I haven't," she had once briefly explained.

"There's a bottle in that cabinet. Ring the bell if you want ice and a siphon."

Grover didn't want them at all; but he rang, imperiously. And when they came he poured himself a liberal measure of Scotch, in secret trepidation, and though he wasn't used to it, drank a good deal at one gulp, as if it were wine.

Sophie was gently punching a cushion, but instead of going to sit on the sofa he carried his glass and his gloom to the empty fireplace and leaned against the mantle, vaguely recalling a moving picture he had once seen. Already the whiskey was blurring the edge of

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his restlessness, transforming it to a faint glow of hope. Perhaps the future would after all make way for him; perhaps, indeed very likely, it was merely a question of learning a few ropes.

"Have you decided where you're going to spend the summer?" he asked finally. The question had been on his mind for days, but it took whiskey to bring it to his tongue. The Rondes de Printemps was stealing back into his head. Did he really want to go to Paris?

Suddenly it seemed to him absurd to be standing so far away from her. He finished his drink and came to her side. Instantly he rejoiced that he had done so, for Sophie greeted his move, oh so casually, by taking his hand and twisting his fingers in a way that sent warm shivers up his spine.

"What nice nails you have!" she remarked.

He wanted to lean forward on her shoulder and be stroked,—but he was afraid that would be out of character. Men who tossed down glasses of fearfully strong spirits didn't lean forward to be stroked.

"The agent says I can still have that gingerbready house at Pride's Crossing," said Sophie, "the one I looked at. But it's so big and foolish. . . Sometimes I wonder what on earth I came home for. It's all very pointless. I really don't care how many teeth my cousins' babies have cut. And the only alternative to relations is to make new friends, and one's already had so many, and it's so fatiguing to try people out,

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and end by accepting two or three who are at best only *pis aller's.*"

"Sophie dear, was I a *pis aller*?"

Their fingers were now quietly interlaced, palm against palm.

"You," she said, "are the Good the ill wind blew me."

"And not one of those little almosts—that life is so desperately full of?"

She patted his hand. "You're almost a quite!" Turning grave again, she rested her head against the back of the sofa. "In fact you're the Element,—and it's rare enough,—that saves one's native land from being a howling wilderness. . . For two pins I'd clear out, and find myself a houselet somewhere on the Bay of Biscay."

Grover's thoughts plunged ahead. He was not only committed and resigned to the future now, but impatient for it. "Would the Element be allowed to run down from Paris once in a while and—walk on your beach?"

"Has it never occurred to you," she said, "that people who may know each other fairly well in cities have to start at new beginnings—on beaches?"

He buried his head on her shoulder.

"Aside from that," she went on, "the Element, if it's worth its salt, will be absorbed in its painting,—perhaps in its models, who knows?"

"You needn't be horrid," he said, drawing away.

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"Besides, what about my solemn promise to my husband to try America for a year?"

Grover got up and boldly poured himself another drink. He felt that if he remained on the sofa he would say something impolite about an exacter of promises who had not been notable for the keeping of his own. Under his breath he was saying, *"Que le diable l'extermine!"*

Over the cabinet that contained the precious whiskey,—why had he waited so long to learn its benign anaesthetic properties!—there hung a portrait of Sophie that had been painted in Paris ten or fifteen years ago, judging from the sleeves. Grover stood before it, glass in hand. He had always admired it reluctantly, for while it was clever, it was clever at Sophie's expense. The painter had let his own personality obtrude, and his personality was out of tune with Sophie's.

"The man who painted that," said Grover, "was a boor. For instead of paying homage to your nice little turn-up nose and summery dress, he fairly taunts you with them. Painting a study of *honnêteté*, he was badly handicapped by a preference for everything in life that is *malhonnête*. He was odiously clever; but if he had been one degree more clever, he wouldn't have!" Does Scotch, Grover was wondering, make one clearheaded or merely glib?

On turning to compare Sophie with her portrait, he saw in her face something dark, faintly bitter, and

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unfathomable. Her eyes seemed to be looking beyond the canvas, into the studio where it had been painted. She made no comment on his criticism, but he guessed that it had, somehow, gone deep under the surface. In his mind was running the little song, *"Cruel portrait, tu fais couler mes larmes."* Sophie was now looking at him with the abstracted regard she had turned on him at luncheon, when she had said, "You've seen so little, but you see so well."

As he stood looking over at her, a wave of longing and loneliness swept over him, for what he saw was that, no matter what might happen to them, he would always be a little boy in Sophie's eyes. However much Scotch he might be able to carry like a gentleman, however telling he might be in his observations, Sophie would always have the advantage of experience and feminine divination. But the wave of longing was succeeded by another wave, a warmer wave, of assurance, for, though her attitude toward life differed fundamentally from that of Rhoda and his mother, Sophie was their sort of woman, the generous and true sort, with rich resources of imagination and charity and tenderness. As this thought grew in him his fondness for Sophie, his gratitude toward her, became blended with his passion. Deep within him new harmonies were sounding, climbing toward a full, sonorous, spreading chord that resolved an intricate pattern of youthful wonderments. As if hypnotized, he had laid down his glass and was surging a little unsteadily

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toward the sofa, when he was brought to a halt by the apparition of Matthew at the door.

"Miss Marple is calling, Madam."

Sophie threw Grover a look of dismay, followed by a wry smile. "Oh dear!" she murmured.

"Oh hell!" said Grover.

. . . .

"I know I should have telephoned," said Rhoda, walking briskly to the sofa and thrusting aside the cushion which Sophie had been stroking. "But I happened to be passing. We've been rehearsing at Alcie Pender's for the charity garden fête. Guess who's coaching us, Grover—Noémi Janvier! . . . My Lord, he's taken to drink! Congratulations! Pour me one; I'm all in. May I, Sophie?" And Rhoda helped herself to a cigarette. "How was the exam?"

"Thank you, rotten."

"You mean you failed?"

"I do."

"Oh, Grover—what will your poor mother say!"

"That I'm breaking her heart. She'll add that it would have broken my poor father's. If they didn't want their hearts broken they should never have *had* me."

He had poured himself a third whiskey, out of sheer desperation. Rhoda's intrusion and the tone of irrelevant exuberance she had brought into the house enraged him. A mood that might never be recaptured

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had been spoiled. And the most annoying part of it all was that Rhoda had done nothing for which she could be technically reproached. She certainly might have been more tactful about referring to Noémi Janvier, for she knew,—indeed he had in a very weak and mellow moment confessed it to her,—that Mme. Janvier had for years been the goddess whom he secretly and ardently worshipped from a distance. Rhoda knew that he had got up at eight o'clock on cold winter mornings to stand in line for student tickets to hear Janvier sing Dalila, Carmen, Kundry, Elektra. For Rhoda, Janvier was merely a flamboyant public personality; for him she was a symbol, an embodiment of intangible forces that had stirred his imagination to the depths, arousing vague creative longings in him. More than that, Janvier was the glamorous centre of a group in Paris, a friend of half the people he hoped, some day, to know. That Rhoda should have had the privilege of talking to her, of stripping her to the soul with her merciless gray eyes and then come and gloat, or even worse, maintain a tacit but superiorish indulgence toward his romantic interest in the lady,—was a little too much. If Sophie would only invent some pretext to get Rhoda out.

But Sophie was politely saying, "Do tell us about the fête. What are you doing in it?"

"A lot of thankless work," said Rhoda. "Organizing committees, collecting funds, bullying workmen, doing nineteen things at once and expecting a twentieth

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any moment. Alcie's mother roped me in; it's to be given in her garden at Brookline. Of course we all wanted roles in the pageant thing, and I thought for sure I'd get one, but no, they sent me out to wheedle bank presidents into being patrons. The chief parts are twelve famous women in history, and after a lot of spilt blood twelve girls were chosen and put through their paces. Alcie's father, who's an old rip, persuaded Janvier to sing at the fête as a special drawing card and to coach the girls, so today she was dragged over from the Copley Plaza, all hot and cross, with a young man that looks like a human lap dog.

"If you could have seen her making those poor things do everything different from the way they'd been directed! She cut out parts and put in others, scolded, threatened to walk out, but gradually warmed to it and galvanized them all into life—all but Hilda Venables, who is stunning to look at but mentally nul and void. Hilda was supposed to be Jeanne d'Arc and she was drooping around the Pender ballroom like Ophelia looking for a muddy stream to lie down in. Janvier finally stopped the whole show and said Hilda couldn't do the part. 'That girl wouldn't hear angels if they used megaphones,' said Janvier, 'and if she ever led an army into battle the war would be over before she got there.' . . . General consternation. Hilda in hysterics. And dear old Mrs. Venables, who's literary and thought up the whole idea, was sitting there, her pride in ruins, being perfectly sweet about

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it, while Janvier rolled back her sleeves like a cross between Brunnhilde and strong-armed Katrinka, her fancy young man sitting on a lounge smoking cigarettes through an ivory mouthpiece and pretending not to know that all the girls were talking about him and the trick way he'd done his eyebrows. Mrs. Pender purring and placating and loving the whole God-awful mess because it gave her such a good chance to be tactful. If Alcie had been given the hook instead of Hilda, Mrs. Pender would have devoted the rest of her life to running Janvier off the stage, if she had to gas her.

"Just then I was called out to the telephone, and a few minutes later came back fairly bursting with the news that Morty Pearn had subscribed the final thousand we needed. Janvier saw me come blurting in and grabbed me by the shoulders. 'Here's a girl,' she shouted, 'who looks plausible. At least she isn't sound asleep.' She shoved a broomstick into my hand, saying it was a sacred banner, and pushed me across the room. 'Walk over there,' she commanded, 'and don't budge. I'll tell you what to do when it's your cue. Meanwhile be feeling like a Marshal of France with secret orders from God Almighty.'

"So that's what I'm doing in it, and why. I felt beastly about poor Hilda, but did what I was told. Janvier was decent to her afterwards and explained that acting was a brutalizing profession and no nice person should ever go in for it. She told me I had

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perfect horse-powers of energy under perfect control, and I liked her and hated her both at once. It's quite a wonderful feeling, being bossed by somebody who's a reincarnation of Potiphar's wife—little Joseph and all—and yet she'd go out in the kitchen if she was hungry and fry herself a T-bone steak, or sit down and get drunk with the cook."

Rhoda glanced up at Grover, who was standing by the mantel, staring at nothing. She studied him for a moment, a little uncertainly, then turned away. "What a pretty little dress, Sophie. You're the only person I know who can wear those shades of tan and still look cool. What I really came in for was to see if I couldn't persuade you to come up for a few weeks this summer. You can have two rooms and a verandah and a little garden, if you want to be alone. If you don't there's us, and the boat, and the horses, and anybody you'd like to invite—dull but healthy, and you do like Dad. . . Perhaps if you come up Grover will decide to stay home. He can dine with us and make music on the piano, or tell you about Henry James. Between us perhaps we can hold him."

"Why should he be held?" asked Sophie. "Why try to make people do what they don't want to?"

"I don't. I merely try to make them not want to do what they want to do! . . . Which doesn't make my invitation to you sound half as cordial as I really mean it. We'd love to have you in any case."

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Sophie forced a smile, and Grover took a vindictive pleasure in the constraint that had arisen between the two women. There were some things after all that Rhoda couldn't organize. He knew Sophie would decline, and for reasons which wouldn't be explained. It was comforting to have even this shred of a secret understanding with her.

"It's sweet of you to ask me," said Sophie, "but I'm afraid I can't. I may take a house for the summer,—then perhaps you'll come to me instead."

Again Rhoda's eyes were studying Grover. It was as though she had come up against an invisible wall. Grover knew he was standing in an unnatural attitude, but he couldn't change it. He *felt* the frown on his forehead but he couldn't relax it; his nerves and his patience had been stretched too taut.

"Janvier's little playmate is French," said Rhoda with a smile at the recollection. "It's you, standing there like an actor, that made me think of him, though you don't dress half as well."

"Nor 'do' my eyebrows," he retorted.

"After all the famous men she's been accused of," Rhoda reflected, "you'd expect her to produce something more substantial in the way of a *bon ami*. And how even he, pale weed that he is, can let himself be mawled by an old lion-tamer with vermilion hair and a record that makes Catherine the Great look like a Carmelite nun, is beyond me. Perhaps she *sings* him to sleep! Hilda called her a cradle-snatcher, where-

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upon young Alcie, who's so blond you imagine she doesn't know a thing till she springs something, piped up and said he was Janvier's biological escape from reality and a natural phenomenon. 'Every old tart,' said Alcie, 'has some good-looking boy around as a sort of personal maid. Look at George Sand!' "

"Why bore *us* with Alcie's profundities!" Grover exploded. George Sand evoked de Musset, and the allusion was singularly infuriating because this very afternoon the *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle* had flashed into his own mind.

Rhoda's expression changed. She got up cajolingly and went over to take his arm. "If it's the stupid exam that makes you so touchy, forget it, old top. What difference does a degree make? It can't be worth much if Pep can get one. Your mother won't mind, really. She thinks Harvard has gone steadily downhill since your father dropped out of it, and she'll blame it all on the faculty,—I can just hear her! Which reminds me that I had a letter from her last week beseeching me to take you by the hand and get you a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, the kind that don't break when you drop them; she underlined it twice. But I didn't, partly because I forgot and partly because I was sure that whatever you might be straining it wasn't your eyes."

She had dropped his arm, having failed to dispel his moroseness. A little perplexed she left his side.

"Do change your mind, Sophie. We can always

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find room for you. If the house gets too full of noisy kids you can beat a retreat, the way poor father does, and be like the dove, at rest. . . Now I'm off. I have a horrid sort of feeling that I interrupted an important discussion about Life and such. I'm sorry."

That she genuinely was sorry was evident to Grover in the ring of her voice, just before she turned and vanished. Rhoda was not lacking in intuition, and he could imagine her hurrying back to Alcie's, locking herself in her room, and weeping: first at the discovery of some deep entente with Sophie; second at the belated realization of her own maladdress in dwelling upon Mme. Janvier's liaison, with the grotesque but ineffaceable analogy it implied,—Potiphar's wife and Joseph, George Sand and de Musset, Sophie and himself. Most disquieting of all was Sophie's white face. There was a hint of horror upon it. He himself felt as though every bit of courage and hope had been drained from him. He was numb and rigid, and his limbs ached as though they were braced for the assault of all the troubles that had been lying in ambush for him.

He sat down in an armchair opposite Sophie and reached for her hand. It was lifeless. Sophie tried to say something, but her voice stuck. She swallowed and tried again. "I never quite realized before that you—that Rhoda and you—"

"That we what?"

Sophie had shrunk into a cold little effigy of herself.

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"She was so sweet about your examinations, and your mother. She seems such an integral part—"

Grover went over to the sofa and resumed his old place, but Sophie was still inert. In her eyes was the dark, faintly bitter light that had been there when he had spoken of her portrait.

"Naturally!" he tried to explain. "We grew up together. She's a sort of sister. At times, when she comes blundering into my affairs I have a truly brotherly desire to murder her. She didn't know what she was doing—"

Sophie got up suddenly, with a dreadful hollow little laugh. "Nor did the Marshall of France with orders from God Almighty!" As she spoke she struck a match viciously and reached for a cigarette.

"Sophie!"

"You being the Dauphin!"

He sprang up and seized her arms. Her eyes met his, steadily. They were hard, but it was an assumed hardness masking some deadly hurt. Her rigid unresponsiveness baffled him to the point of frenzy. After a moment she pushed away his hands.

His whole body trembled. He had no voice, and nothing to say. Rather he had so much to say that the words jostled and jammed solidly together at the exit.

Sophie was crushing her newly-lighted cigarette into an ash-tray. She began walking toward the door. When she was half way across the room he hurried

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after and caught her in his arms, kissing her forcibly against all her stifled protests. In the end she wrenched herself away, and he saw her face puckered into a pitiful travesty of the girl in the portrait. He had never seen such a strange expression, and didn't know whether it was an indication of mirth or woe, until the tears broke through and she began fumbling for a handkerchief.

"I don't mind being forty," she said with difficulty. "What makes it all so final is that *I* can't cook beef-steaks."

A laugh broke from him, and turned into a sob. "That," he said, "is the most foolish thing I've ever heard anybody say." The incongruous humor of it made the whole analogy break down, but only he saw that it did. Sophie was walking away, and his protests were dying within him. He followed through the hall, to the foot of the staircase, but at that point he was paralyzed by something relentless in her silhouette as she withdrew further and further.

"Sophie!" he called brokenly, "It's my tragedy too!"

At the top of the stairs, without looking back, she crossed to a bedroom and closed the door behind her. He heard the lock turn.

The big black and white tiles of the floor seemed to undulate. Outside, as if in another world, motor cars went glibly by.

He reached mechanically for his hat and went to the door, leaning against the wall a moment for

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strength to draw it open. This sickening hollow feeling was a new and terrible thing. Was it whiskey, he wondered a little wildly, or grief?

. . . .

He had walked across the Common and come within sight of the Park Street subway entrance when the image of his rooms rose before him. It seemed as unnatural to be going back to them as it would be to go back to English 2. He turned down the street, drifting with the crowds who were hurrying home from the shops. For once the faces and advertisements and noises were not repellent; they had the effect of a strong liniment. He wandered through a maze of narrow streets until his back ached with weariness, and when he sank exhausted before the marble-topped table of a tawdry restaurant near Scollay Square, he felt as though he no longer existed in a region, but in a state. All things concrete seemed but magnified particles in a vast shifting cloud, as though the only thing ultimately stable was a yearning for the unattainable, a vacuum which life filled with mere weather: winds and showers of futile reality. He thought of himself as a sort of hour-glass. For twenty years the sand had been running into his consciousness, and all he could see was a void into which the sand would have to be poured drearily back.

At his elbows dispirited men and women were feeding: hour-glasses every one, taking life witlessly in,

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pouring it mechanically out, recording time for leisurely gods. The world, he was thinking, is one little factory in an industrial cosmos; each man at his lathe, each turning out some part that will presumably be fitted into other parts, and the gods too contemptuous of our intelligence to show us the plan of the finished machine. That was their privilege, but it was caddish of them not to protect us against injury while we slaved for them.

An old man noticed that he needed sugar for his coffee, and pushed the bowl along the table. This attention brought Grover to earth. That old walrus, he reflected, is kinder than the gods in whose image he is made.

But perhaps the gods were kinder than one knew; the bitter things they put before one might be a sort of divine sugar for which one had to acquire a taste. This thought, and the narcotic coffee, and the metallic eyes of a young woman who was staring hopefully at him gave him courage to return to Cambridge.

On reaching his rooms he found under his door a note that had been delivered by messenger. "Dear Grover," he read, "it just struck me that often, when people are moody, it's bills and nothing else. I bet you have dozens of unsettleable ones this week. If you can't stall, let me be your banker. I'm flush at the moment. Also I really am sorry about the exam, for I know it means more than thumbscrews would make you admit. Love, Rhoda."

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With the ache set throbbing again he sat down and began to scribble a reply. "Dear Rhoda, why in God's name can't you let my life take it's own course—"

He crumpled up the paper and threw it away. He was thinking of occasions when he had played a hand in the course of her life, of the time for example when he had advised her not to go to college and risk being turned into the sort of compromise Radcliffe had made of Emma Sipe, that appalling theorizer. Furthermore it was becoming depressingly clear to him that Rhoda's intrusion had not been the cause of his adversity but merely the hastener of it. With her feminine intuition she had long ago foreseen the day when the wind would be taken out of his sails, but it wasn't in the bond that Rhoda should take it out; she might have had the grace to leave Sophie a free hand. Had she done so, he and Sophie might have progressed at least to a momentary state of felicity from which, if it proved to be more than Sophie with her aesthetic scruples felt willing to consummate, she might at any rate have retreated without humiliation. Whether or not Rhoda was aware of what she had done, she had acted with a sureness that could not have been more deadly if she had been Sophie's foe. He had every reason to absolve her, but the incident had none the less taught him that no woman who has an interest, mild or intense, in a man can be trusted to see another woman as he sees her. It also confirmed a theory about himself which he had already formulated as a

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result of his school and university experience, that no matter how wide a circle of friends and acquaintances he might make for himself, his relations with society would always be essentially *à deux*.

He had turned on the light in his bedroom and thrown off his coat. As he moved about the room his attention was suddenly transfixed by a second message, in the form of a yellow oblong on the pillow of the bed.

"The idiot!" he exclaimed.

In an excess of care the janitor had placed a telegram where he thought it would be most likely to be found.

Hasn't there been enough already, Grover was thinking, standing cold with the unopened message, warding off premonitions of further harm, shrinking from the confirmation that he knew he must eventually read.

"Your mother dangerously ill. Very little hope. Come at once. James Marple."

He walked back into the study and closed the piano, then returned for the coat he had thrown on the bed, and put it on. Why did they always leave the laundry-bag on the chair! He hung it on its nail in the closet. How intricately the Marples were bound up in his life! The tidying urge gradually released the cogs in his brain, and his thoughts began to revolve, slowly. This is It, they were saying: It, It, *It*, the Thing that had been getting ready to happen, the Thing he had known without knowing it.

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He read the message again. More cogs were released. Business men were so monstrously terse. Monstrous, monstrous, monstrous!

Vales were only Aves turned hind-side-to. Everything went hind-side-to when the past turned into the future.

He rummaged a drawer for his cheque-book, but it wasn't there. Could he have left it on the work table? King Lear—Keyserling in two volumes—he carried them to the book-shelf. So many books to sort,—some to go back, some to be sold. And that bloody cheque-book staring him in the face all the time!

Somebody upstairs was playing jazz, and the door was ajar. He slammed it, for the news was grating on his nerves.

He had already put one pair of pyjamas into the bag; why in God's name put another! Why any? Why the bag? The thing was to get there, to get to a train.

Perhaps she would never know of his failure after all—

He would sell everything but the bust of Voltaire, and go into the wide world with that—armed with a terra cotta grin.

He darted back to examine the telegram once more. It hadn't occurred to him to see when it had been sent.

Eleven-thirty! Just as he was leaving for Concord—the beginning of forever—and the *same day*! It was now ten o'clock. A wave of sickness came over him.

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Someone was on the stairway—the janitor's heavy tread. Grover hid in the bedroom, listening. The knock that he was waiting for startled him.

It was a second telegram. "Aldergrove has been trying to get you on long distance all day," said the janitor in a tone of reproof.

"Yes," said Grover. "I wasn't here."

When the door was shut he read the new message.

Anything might happen now; for he was beyond feeling the blows. It was all over.

"IT'S the twenty-fifth of August and about the fourth day out," wrote Grover, using his knee as a desk and looking up from the paper to stare away at the tumbling gray waves of the Atlantic. He recalled another letter he had written to Geoffrey Saint in the spring: a letter outlining in confident detail a plan for the salvation of his soul. Now that he was, after many setbacks, though perhaps not as confidently as then, on the road toward salvation, it was not going to be easy to explain to Geoffrey, and thereby to himself, how it had all come about. If a lot of self-satisfied nobodies would refrain from spoiling his view of the lovely desolate ocean, he was thinking, it would be

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easier to concentrate on this really important missive.

"My fellow-passengers are very trying," he wrote. "They walk seven times around the deck each morning and announce each lap in loud flat voices to their recumbent friends, and accompany the information with bright looks, as though they had said something witty. The fact that they aren't sick is nothing to brag about: better men than they *have* been—though I'm feeling less green now, thanks.

"It's Sunday morning, and far away over my left shoulder I can hear holy strains. Why do voices sound so high and bitter when singing hymns? A deck steward came and got a dollar off'n me to swell the collection for widows and orphans, but when he'd gone with it, it seemed to me that the inveterate hymn-singers themselves were orphans and that Church was a sort of foundling home for the essentially heavenly-fatherless. If you enjoy perpetual converse with God, why get all dressed up on Sundays and make formal calls on him! As a matter of fact the Church isn't half so much God's house as it is God's tomb."

God's Tomb sounded like a title, and Grover gazed at the sea, listening with an indulgent smile to the accusation of sententiousness with which Geoffrey would greet that last sentence. But everybody is sententious when they're just barely twenty-three, Grover was thinking: give me time.

"I believe I'm in a state of mental and moral convalescence," he continued. "June was a month of

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casualties; in July scars formed; this is August, and the thing I call a creative urge,—at any rate the thing that sent me down to the passport bureau,—may merely be an itch caused by the scars, though I dare hope it goes deeper, something in my blood. You on your Californian hilltop, you who are omniscient, tell me by return post whether all creative desire is diagnosable as an itch; if so, it's frightful to think how many future blows I've got to steel myself against and how many scars I've got to scratch, for so help me God I'm going to create something, if it's only Christmas cards, and go on doing it till I'm a decrepit old man. But maybe you arrive at a point where you scratch from sheer habit. Even Sargent's late things—"

Damn! Divine Service was over, and the faithful were coming out on deck in a thin stream. Grover cursed because one of the faithful occupied the deck-chair next his: a clothey old woman who was forever dropping things,—her book, her shawl, her other sweater, her orange, the end of her rug. She lowered herself cautiously into her chair and landed with a thump. "My rheumatism," she explained, and reached for a cup of bouillon from the tray which a patient steward was extending. "I see you're a writer," she said.

"Only letters," Grover replied. If she asked him what he was going to do for a living he would have his chair moved to the hurricane deck. Hurricanes were merciful.

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But she settled down to her bouillon and grazed slowly on her crackers, crunching them one by one and brushing the crumbs from her bosom to her lap.

"Even Sargent's late things," Grover resumed, "look as though they'd been done by heart—"

"Have you read The Little French Girl?" The old woman had seen him glance up from his paper. She had extracted the novel from a shawl and was feeling around for her spectacles. Grover had read it, but not even he, polite as he was, could be expected to discuss Anne Sedgwick with this crumby old bore, so he kept his eyes on his letter.

"Creation," he wrote, "is the only solution I can see to my problems. In Aldergrove the future seemed to recede rather than advance. Everything you do there is merely a prolongation of the past: a poor old past that's like the watch you got for your fifteenth birthday,—nice, but it won't *go* any more. You just can't conceive of anything in Aldergrove ever being essentially different. As you grow up it doesn't seem so far from Boston; you can even commute, like Mr. Marple and Mr. Sipe; the fields turn into real estate, and people come for the summer. But that's not *different*; it's only *more*, and a wrong kind of more. What I'm trying to say is that in Aldergrove your only prospect is to become more completely what you used to be,—and God knows I'm enough of that already. I want to be something else!

"I went home from Harvard on flat tires. The last

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day in Cambridge was like an explosion for which the fuse had been burning through four slow, slow years. For a while I couldn't see myself for the smoke, nor feel anything for the bruises, but after two months as a guest of the Marples, I got my bearings; I mean I got *some* bearings,—whether they're mine or not remains to be seen. I came to the conclusion—don't smile—that the vein of discontent in me may be a vein of precious ore. After the shaft is sunk it may turn out that there's no gold there at all, but till I'm certain of that I can't settle down to a life of—tin. When I was sixteen, and bad at algebra, you used to say to me—and how I hated you for it—'work it out for yourself.' Well, bless your heart, I *am*!

"Circumstances—Geoffrey, there's an old woman sitting beside me who's spoiling this whole lovely trip for me; she can't hang on to a bloody thing; I just picked up her Baedeker for her and she said she had a daughter who graduated from Vassar and writes for the Ladies Home Journal, and don't you think it's a dirty trick to interrupt this letter like that? If I'd been the kind of man I hope to become, I'd have told her to go walk around the deck seven times. What I was saying, circumstances were all against this experiment,—and if she butts in again I'll go down to my cabin (minimum price and stuffy) and finish this there, even if it makes me seasick. The first circumstance was poverty. After Mr. Marple had sold the house there was enough all told to yield me about

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fifteen hundred a year, and you know one can't live on that—I mean not *live*. The second circumstance was public opinion, of which there's an awful lot nowadays. It regarded me as another young man going wrong, an impractical youth full of notions that would lead but to the grave, via temptation and radicalism and starvation, unless he were given a good hard job. Public opinion couldn't see the Paris idea. Neither could Rhoda, and that brings me to the third circumstance—*no Circumstance.*

"No human being could have behaved more humanly than good old Rhoda, when the bottom dropped out. Geoffrey, when I think of all the mean little things I've done and thought, and that I still have a Rhoda, I could almost weep—in fact I have. She gave up all her engagements in town and came home, not to be officious, but just to be there and do the thankless, nameless trifles that wouldn't have been done if she hadn't done them, to place screens wherever there might possibly be a draft. You knew my mother, and you know what it's like when there isn't anybody like that any more, suddenly, and perhaps you can imagine how comforting it is to have a Rhoda hovering in the background, and *not asking questions*! And preventing Mrs. Daggett from asking them, not to mention Mrs. Sipe and the others. I'll never forget how Rhoda held the motherly neighbors at bay. She didn't even invite me to live at her house; she just damn well moved me over, then left me to myself.

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"Some mornings we got up early and rode. We sailed and swam with John Marple, who's fourteen now, and Frances, who's turning pretty after an ugly duckling start and who has two fascinating big gaps waiting for a pair of belated second teeth. I spent long afternoons in the woods with books I'd saved up to read and then couldn't be bothered, and long evenings talking to Mr. Marple about the days when you used to have a carriage and a coachman. There were a few guests, variegated Marples and Pearns and Scantleberries,—though not Sophie, who's in Quebec, —and Alcie Pender, a doughy girl whom Rhoda is turning into celluloid so she won't sag, nor keep getting crushes on Jewish violinists. All very domestic and quiet.

"It's a new experience to have everything unobtrusively done for you, to come down to breakfast on a porch that overlooks acres and acres of lawn falling away toward a sea framed by evergreens and sounding pleasantly of crickets and lawn-mowers, to find your bath and your clothes staring you in the face when you come up before dinner, to have invisible slaves put stamps on your letters and waft them away. All my life postage stamps have been my despair. At home, as you remember, nobody ever wafted away anything, unless complained at, or ever brought anything back that you really wanted; nobody remembered what day it was and the calendar was last year's, and

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dinner wasn't until you happened to finish doing something else and began to wonder about it.

"Luxury is terribly insidious. At first I didn't pay much attention to my surroundings, but when I came to, there I was actually depending on them. That worried me a little. But it's hard to go on worrying about being comfortable. Sitting on the terrace after dinner, with pre-war things in your glass, and the moon creeping up out of the sea to make silhouettes in the garden, smelling thick sweet smells and hearing the fresh rustle of the trees and the fountain, it seemed downright fanatical to think of giving up all that for a remote, doubtful, single-handed fight for something you couldn't even define. I kept reminding myself of the austere vows I made at Harvard to keep my flame burning high and bright, to go out into the world and preach the gospel of Me, as though by doing that hard enough and long enough I would get somewhere and make something happen. But where, and what? What more could one ask for? The Marples comfort you with apples and stay you with flagons; they have a Corot landscape and a Sargent portrait of Rhoda's mother to look at; a piano to play on; and a bay with a wonderful canter to ride. And the tacit implication was that I could go on eating and drinking and cantering right into Kingdom Come if I wanted to.

"One night when Rhoda and I were roaming alone between hedges of roses and I got out of my shell a bit and spoke of the forlorn little Thanet acres far off

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on the next hill and a garden of pettings and protections and tender scoldings, a hundred affectionate old-fashioned posies than can never, never blossom again, quite gone forever, Rhoda went all soft and said, wouldn't I see if some of them couldn't be transplanted into her garden. 'It won't be the same,' she said, 'nor nearly so nice, but it will be as nice as it knows how.' I told her it was lucky for me there was a her, because what would I have done if I'd had nobody but the Daggets and Sipes,—me with my one solitary relation who lives in Santa Fe and wears an ear-trumpet. She didn't tell me what I would have done, but she did tell me that while she probably wasn't at all in love with me in the way people are when they're 'in love,' she was certainly in love with me in some other sort of way and had been since the days when she used to 'say' me in her prayers along with John and Frances and her father, and it was absurd that people should give her all the money she wanted when she signed her name on a hunk of paper and only give me a tiny bit when I signed mine. 'As far as I'm concerned,' she said, 'you could have half all I've got tomorrow, and now that I'm twenty-one there's quite a lot. I don't see that it's any wronger to give somebody you like ten thousand a year than it is to give him a dozen handkerchiefs.'

"That little speech made me think; and it became clear to me that even the gift of a dozen handkerchiefs would have a demoralizing effect on you provided you

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were not in a position to buy a dozen for yourself. But I didn't argue the point; she was being too sweet and direct. She wasn't even making the mistake of proposing to me, though the last time it happened, rather flippantly, during the Christmas vacation, she said she wouldn't take my No as final.

"Her father, she went on to tell me, would have offered me a job, only he had a proud feeling that I would scorn his sort of life, and it *would* seem rather an 'anachronism' for me to be making rubber roofing. I called her Rhoda Malaprop which didn't phase her at all. She said she had come across anachronism in a new novel and had been waiting all day for a chance to use it and couldn't wait any longer.

"There were such oceans of kindness all about me, warm buoyant oceans, that something in me got unstranded and floated free. Old hurts had been massaged into memories; the future was a nightmare I'd had from eating too much poetry; the present was real and warm and sufficient. There I was walking hand in hand with the person I've known the longest, contented, grateful, uncritical, unresisting, just *there*. Suddenly, I don't know why, I had to stop and kiss Rhoda. I couldn't not have! And that was odd, because it wasn't an arrival or a departure or a birthday or anything. Moreover, it wasn't that kind of kiss; it was the other kind—head-on collision. I've often surprised myself, but this was a real shock.

"It took her all of a heap too. She went limp and

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looked awfully subdued,—as though she'd seen a bad accident. And what I had my arms around wasn't the substantial Miss Marple who had had a mysterious life-long authority over me, but a being I'd never seen or felt before, a willowy, wide-eyed, *timid* girl, whispering wasn't it time to go in. So we did, frightened stiff—at least I know I was."

"My, is that all one letter?" Grover was startled by the question. The bugle was sounding and his neighbor was heaving herself slowly up, intent on food. He rose and gave her a hand. "My rheumatism," she explained again, as The Little French Girl and sundry other paraphernalia went sliding to the deck. Grover stooped to pick them up and as the ship lurched the lady lurched too, steadying herself against the only part of him at the moment available. Stay home next time, you old moose, he muttered to himself, and drop things on your own floor. He wondered if the girl from Vassar was too highbrow to pick them up.

. . . .

"It's three days since I wrote the last sentence. Since then we've sailed into a calm blue stretch, where you don't even have to touch wood, not to be sick. We're almost there, and my nerves are singing little tunes—French tunes. It's hard to get one's thoughts back into a letter-writing mood, but having got so far into my life story I must give you the sequel, provided

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we don't arrive before I finish. Incidentally I've unbent and made a few acquaintances; it takes so much strategy to avoid people on a boat, and you can't read *all* day.

"How far had I got? Oh yes, to where we went in the house because it was too much like being lovers, being out in the garden. I don't know how to explain what that incident did for me. For one thing it kept me awake all night. Two minutes before I kissed Rhoda I had virtually accepted Things-as-they-are on a golden platter; two minutes after the kiss I was a man-who-makes-things-happen,—things that wouldn't have happened except by virtue of him. You may laugh at the triviality of the incident, but you can't laugh down its significance. All night I kept reliving that sudden flare-up in me, and seeing the change it wrought in Rhoda, as though I were someone she didn't really know. All my life, I kept thinking, I shall be surprising and shocking myself with spasmodic gestures that will sweep Things-as-they-are straight off the platter. There's something rebellious in me that will always refuse to conform to a given pattern, something that will insist on making a pattern for itself.

"I came down to breakfast a little crushed. In the morning light, eating berries on the porch and hearing drowsy drones and buzzes in the garden, it seemed to me that I wasn't such an energetic anarchist after all—but rather, a tired, flat, docile young man. Rhoda was

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getting ready for her annual visit to the Pearns in Lenox, and left before lunch. So I had several days in which to think my way through.

"The first thing I discovered was that Aldergrove without Rhoda is like food without salt. I was amazed to find that I had to exert myself merely to share the daily existence of the family. Mr. Marple and I are good friends. We haven't a single taste in common that I know of: he likes Mark Twain and golf and chess and President Coolidge, and they make me tired; but that doesn't keep us from liking each other. Yet with Rhoda gone I saw that it was she and she alone who had been creating the setting in which I had begun to feel so comfortable. She was my only reason for being in that setting at all. And it dawned on me, as it would have done long ago on anybody else, that I was being kept, pure and simple.

"From that moment on I put a lot of twos and twos together and got a lot of fours,—perhaps I got too many; if I'd only inherited my poor father's head for mathematics, instead of my poor mother's impressionistic noddle!

"Another trifling incident drew a line under the fours and faced me with the grand total. I had gone down to the beach to go for a row. John and Spikey Daggett were at work on some momentous nautical invention but came to give me a hand with the boat. When it was in the water they returned to the boathouse. From outside, as I took off my shoes and

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socks, I could hear their voices. 'Does he live with you?' Spike asked. 'Sure, he does now.' John's voice always sounds negligent but authoritative. 'Why?' persisted Spike, 'is he your cousin?' 'No.' This in a tone that seemed to deprecate the taste of the interlocutor. I thought the discussion was at an end and put the oars into place when John, somewhat more conciliatory, resumed, '*His* mother's dead, too.' That was rather touching, for there was a hint of wistfulness behind John's male nonchalance. 'I know, Folly went to the funeral,' said Spike, horridly concrete as usual, then added, 'Frances says Rhoda's going to get married to him.' 'Frances,' said her brother, 'talks through her hat.' 'Well, aren't they?' John became impatient, perhaps because he had been offered a startling new thought by a boy for whose intelligence he has no great respect. 'How do I know!' he exclaimed. 'They can if they want to. If they do, though, I hope it's when I'm at school. I don't want to go to any old weddings.'

"With muffled oars I rowed away, like a culprit, *assommé*. Spikey's voice and freckles and vulgar assumptions were Aldergrove in a nutshell. The future there would be a thing peopled by grown-up Spikes. As I got clear of the shore I saw the Marple estate rolling and dipping and a big happy house sprawling firmly, oh so firmly, on top of it all,—while aloof on its own little knoll stood the deserted house I was born in. I saw a gigantic pair of scales, with Rhoda on

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one side surrounded by fields and forests, relations and servants, factories and banks, Mrs. Daggett bowing to the Bishop of Massachusetts and hugging the social register,—also, as Max Bruff would say, the book of etiquette,—and, for good measure, orange blossoms, a motor car from Aunt Sarita Scantleberry, a Babylonian statuette from Mortimer Pearn. And on the other side of the scales—what? Nothing but the way my cheek went from the corner of my eye to my chin. I didn't want to go to any old weddings either!

"Late that afternoon she got back, all cool, fresh, competent, and solicitous. Inside an hour she had speeded up the household, put flowers in shady corners, consulted Emma Kittendorf about Frances' diet, and changed into a dinner frock and thereby a sort of radiant prettiness of the elusive kind which,—despite the gray-blueness of her eyes, the straightness of her nose, the waviness of her brown hair, the sheen of her skin, the slenderness of her feet,—you always associate with girls on the horizon. I mean I'm repeatedly taken by surprise to find Rhoda seductive, when heaven knows it's evident enough!

"I didn't know how, nor what to tell her. A complete explanation was out of the question, for I couldn't explain it completely even to myself. All I could say was that I was going away to give my soul a chance,—and as I said it I could hear my soul piping up inside me and echoing, 'Yes he is, he's going away to give me a chance, he is, he is.'

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"This was after dinner, on the terrace. For a long while Rhoda just made smoke go quietly out into the air. Then she said about the last thing on earth you would have expected her to say. 'I thought about you a lot while I was away. And I'm sure you'd be making a mistake not to go. Everybody has to find out what it's all about, in his own way. All I wish is that I had as much to look forward to as you have.'

"That from Rhoda, who has always treated my drawings as pretty things which I'd grow up and stop doing! Had she only been teasing me; or did she detect a new strength in me; or was she getting tired of having me around?

"Somehow her calm acquiescence gave my conceit a punch in the wind. And I was even more chastened to find her entering so completely into the spirit of my pilgrimage that she helped me pack, helped me add up my accounts, and actually drove me down to Boston, bag and baggage, in her own car, without a whimper. I kept wondering whether I had got on her nerves, whether the episode in the garden had made her dislike me. That thought was a new thing under the sun, and not a very cheerful one. I kept wondering how well the Pearns knew their neighbors the Pepperells, and if Rhoda was perhaps beginning to take Pep seriously. Why shouldn't she, for that matter: there's absolutely no reason—no reasonable reason. On the contrary. But if so, why not be frank about it? If I can think of Rhoda as a sister, I ought to be

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able to think of Eric as a brother-in-law; but I can't. That was what the drive down to town was all about, —that and the thought of the final break with home and the old order, and how awfully hollow you'd feel if there weren't any Rhoda to absorb shocks for you between now and the time you were eighty, if you could bear living till then. Now, when I put it to myself in those terms, I can see how beastly selfish my whole attitude has been, and what you meant when you told me I always wanted to have my cake and eat it. I couldn't see it at the moment; I was too busy being miserable.

"Until I actually got on board the train. And then, when my bags were stowed away I looked around and saw Rhoda's face. Like magic, misery and all the nasty little doubts went crashing into Limbo forever and ever. For any girl who controls her feelings in the adorable funny way Rhoda was at that moment visibly controlling hers will always be there for you, no matter if you both get married in the meantime and have a dozen children apiece. The combination Rhoda-and-me, whatever it is—I'll tell you what it is: do you remember Joseph Vance and Lossie? Well, that sort of thing. And I'm taking it abroad with me as a talisman.

"The rest of my impedimenta is precious light. It consists of one trunk, a good deal of nervous excitement, a nineteenth century romanticism, and my mind made up to turn into Somebody. Like every other

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American on this boat I'm ridden by the curse of self-consciousness; you see it so clearly when three hundred of you are penned up for a week together,—and that's the first thing I have to outgrow. Perhaps that's all I shall accomplish! The soul I'm in search of may be like the poor stoker who tried to jump overboard yesterday. On some incongruous urge he threw his suit-case into the sea first, and as he was climbing the rail to follow it, he was pulled back by the ship's barber and hustled below. Meanwhile a confused report of the event reached the bridge with the astonishing rapidity inherent in such bits of news. The officer on duty gave an order to lower the life-boat. The ship cut a beautiful circle, the sea was strewn with beautiful life-buoys, imaginative passengers pointed out the poor man's head in the water, and a boatful of sailors went grimly to the rescue of one dilapidated, imitation leather portmanteau, while the distraught devil who was theoretically drowning was being pinned down in his bunk.

"So with me: in the watches of the night, as we glide toward Europe, I lie awake thinking my distraught soul may after all be safe in Boston while I fare heroically forth to its rescue in Paris. Oh, Geoffrey, to come back with a suitcase full of washing and find your poor creative urge locked up in the Harvard Union, dead or crazy!"

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"Next day. We are now at anchor off Cherbourg, within a stone's throw of a long black mole,—French lights winking on a black felt hill; a sky of dark gray gauze behind it, in rags, with stars showing through. Early in the morning we land, and the search commences,—not the customs, my soul! Pray for it, Geoffrey, and write me encouragingly thereof. The most encouraging thing I know is that if I've acquired enough perspective on the immediate Past to be able to state it at as great length as I've stated it in these presents, I ought to be able to turn the same apparatus on the immediate Future and at least find my way *into* it; though I'm quite aware,—so don't you go and tell me,—that the future has to be lived, not stated.

"*Allons, enfants de la patrie!* Life begins tomorrow!"

Of the various addresses he had been given, Grover best liked the sound of "rue Truffaut, just off the rue des Batignolles."

"It's fairly near the heart of the city yet gives the impression of not being so," Geoffrey Saint had written, "and I think you would find it a more satisfactory neighborhood to work in than the left bank, which

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since the war has become the stamping ground of students who don't study and painters who talk. For really invigorating flings I commend the honest Parisian gutter, uncontaminated by theories about art. Indeed there are no theories worth bothering about, except those you shed in your progress, like an impeding garment. Ideas hinder thought.

"Within a stone's throw of the Place Clichy or the prosaic rue de Châteaudun there's not a single idea, but there's a lot of life—more than there is the length and breadth of the Boulevard du Montparnasse. Life on that overrated hill wears foolish disguises; the quartier exists for those who have more talent for dalliance than for creation."

Grover would have given a good deal to know what had disgruntled his cherished ex-tutor on the overrated hill. But there were limits to the confidences between tutors and tutees.

After a day of unreal but extremely fatiguing colloquys with porters and taxi-drivers, a day of miscalculations monetary and topographical, a day of zigzagging through streets that smelt stuffily of asphalt and petrol, a day of whirling around corners in little vehicles which were saved from destruction only by the famous *esprit gaulois*, Grover went to bed with a headache, too tired to take stock of his landlady, who seemed fat and fluent, or his room, which was both grander and shabbier than anything he had ever slept in.

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He dreamed he was drawing a portrait of a woman who sold horrid cigarettes in yellow packets, but no sooner had he sketched in her shoulders than they began to shrug, and, when he protested, the drawing walked right off the page and said to him with humiliating emphasis, "If you can't draw me in French don't draw me at all."

When he awoke he found himself in a world of faded brocade and tarnished gilt. Facing him was a titanic clock that said ten minutes to twelve, and probably had been saying it for a quarter of a century. The clock on his night table said nine-thirty, and his own watch two to four. Not one of us is right, thought Grover, or ever will be.

Between him and the remote ceiling was a stiff canopy that bowed and shook whenever he moved in the bed. Between the windows was a prodigious mirror framed by porcelain cupids, porcelain apples and swallows, porcelain rings and garlands. There was an armoire so big one couldn't imagine how it had got into the room. There was also an inlaid desk with peeling legs, a nicked mantle built over a false fireplace, a dusty bust of Marie Antoinette, sinister gas jets too far away from the bed to read by, and you took your bath, Mme. Choiseul had said, around the corner in the rue des Dames, which made it sound improper.

He kicked off the sheets and lay still, luxuriously cool. Even if all the clocks hadn't stopped, it wouldn't make a particle of difference what time it was; the

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thought was a little terrifying, for surely it always ought to matter, else why were people forever asking what time it was! Outside were several million souls, —one could hear the faint drone of them,—to whom time did make a difference, people whose lives were scaled in twelfths and sixtieths. Why didn't the French introduce a metric system of hours,—I'll meet you tomorrow at ten decimal three three three, and if you stretched the threes right across the Atlantic it would still be the same time, which proved the essential foolishness of Arithmetic.

The long windows were wide open and his eyes rested on the green of a circumscribed court that smelt faintly sour. His room was in the shade, but the cream-colored walls across the court were bathed in sunlight, except for still shadows cast by a linden tree.

He got out of bed, stretched, and sank into a low chair facing the window. A woman dressed in black cotton was folding sheets at the window-sill opposite. She glanced over at his pyjama-clad form and gave her pillows a final smack. She thinks I'm lazy, Grover reflected, and so I am, and hope I'll outgrow feeling guilty about it.

Down below a muffled altercation was going on. A dog, he gathered,—doubtless the suspicious button-eyed little weazle named Mouche with whom he had shaken hands last night,—had been trespassing on the concierge's patch of geraniums, and, the concierge was alleging, loudly, in rather difficult French, that

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that, for example, was too strong, that that passed all the boundaries, and two persons who sounded like four were very angry and it was restful to let somebody else do all the spleen-venting in the world. When you came to think of it, there was so infinitely much that needn't be worried about by oneself. He felt remote and disembodied, though he knew that the moment he arose from the chair and began to think about shaving water and clothes his body would reassert itself in manifold aches and heavinesses.

The air was strong and cool; one wanted to close one's eyes and bathe in it, instead of getting into the same old trousers and the same dreary shoes. Beyond the garden wall somebody was beating a carpet, and beyond that, far beyond, were the raucous cries of a vendor of unintelligible wares: just like the second act of Louise. Beyond that, on all sides, was Paris, a mystery, a trick of civilization, an exciting new chapter in the Thanet saga, and it was pleasant to loll here in the tiny heart of it and imagine what Paris "was like." Always, he reflected, in whatever city or in whatever situation, pleasant or desperate, he would be somewhere in the tiny heart of it, imagining what it was like while being ever so concrete a part of it. Life was an eternal preparation for something that never came off. Paris, Sophie Scantleberry had once remarked, was more than any other city an amplifier of moods: if you were of a blithe temperament it fed you gaiety till you were surfeited; if you were

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melancholic it whispered unbearably sad secrets in your ear; if you were romantic it wove enchanted tapestries for you; but bitter dregs were at the bottom of every glass Paris had to offer. That's all right, thought Grover,—just sip carefully when you're nearing the dregs, and fool it.

His drowsy musings were interrupted by a young tenor voice, which emerged from the neighboring court where the carpet had been beaten into complete submission. The beater, rolling it into portable form, was singing snatches of a love song with a haunting twist in its rhythm, as though at intervals half a bar were dropped out. The singer was unseen, the song of no musical consequence, but there was in the timbre of the voice and in the blend of sentiment and irony it expressed something that gave Grover a hint as to the nature of his need for coming to Europe. I need Europe, he was thinking, because I believe in the ultimate significance of life, and in America they see only the immediate significance, if they see that. We Americans see the facts of life as a blur; we are like children rolling hoops through a garden. Europeans are gardeners who watch the children go scampering by, trampling the beds, occasionally stopping a moment to exclaim inanities over a rose-bush cultivated by dint of endless pains. From Maine to California no beater of carpets would have sung that sort of ditty in that sort of way; in America a cruder ditty would have been sung and the sentiment expressed would have

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been either naive or vulgar. Here in Paris nothing was naive, and though many things might be evil, there were few that were vulgar. Something is happening to me already, he reflected, as the song broke off and gave place to an energetic oath,—"*Nom d'un nom!*" the carpet-beater having collided with something solid, apparently a high-voiced chambermaid,—and when I go back to America, if ever I do, it will be as a man who is Gallic, a man with an interpretative way of looking at the commonplace, a man with a waistcoat pocketful of ironic little pills that will render life less indigestible, a man—with a haunting twist in his rhythm! Half a bar left out here and there to break the obvious and eternal tum-tum, tum-tum. A man "*comme ces musiciens qui jouent faux par raffinement.*" Life in America is written in strict four-four time in the key of C Major: anything subtler than that we, to use our own immortal phrase, have to be educated up to, God help us. As if you could be educated up to fine sensibilities! Here people were born with them, even the boys who beat carpets. Here people caught subtleties on the wing and recognized the myriad shades between the black and white which don't exist in nature but which Americans, with their incurable belief in hundred percentism, were forever postulating as realities. Where, thought Grover, is my patriotism?

He wondered all the more later in the day when he watched the antics of a number of his compatriots

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from a chair on a sidewalk cafe on the Boulevard du Montparnasse. Having been gently warned by Geoffrey Saint against the Dôme and the Rotonde, he had of course made a bee-line for them, and a little timidly taken his place in the throng sipping apéritifs in the late afternoon. Every language smote his ear. Before his eyes was a jumble of types: indigent Russians and Roumanians, clumsy but affluent Danes; Englishmen wearing their dégagé air with a difference, a little subdued by the Frenchness of it all; and several groups of Americans, some quiet and serious who looked as though they were thoroughly bored with their surroundings but had been there too long to venture home, and some who were wearing corduroy jackets and bérets and doing as many other things as possible that you couldn't do in Kansas. But whatever they did, the measure of their triumph was indicated by their appearance; for in Kansas you certainly couldn't look like that,—not with impunity. More self-assertive even than these artists was a group of three American girls who, though decidedly the worse for wear, would have passed muster in a Ziegfeld chorus and probably had. With them were some American sailors, pink and robust, and, for all their bravado, slightly embarrassed. One of them, a giant, was eating ice-cream. They seemed torn between a desire to take the girls at their very liberal word and a desire to respect them, for while their physical insolence was even more marked than that of the average street girl of New

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Orleans, yet their clothes, their perfume, their rings, even their talk with its strange allusions to Brancusi, Stravinsky, Pitoeff, proclaimed them bafflingly different. The hostess was a young woman with hard green eyes and a Hollywood manner. Grover thought of the recruiting signs he had seen near the Boston waterfront: Join Uncle Sam's navy and see the world. Verily!

People coming and going, the purplish taste of his *byrrh à l'eau* growing gradually sweeter, the afternoon shadows making fantastic patterns, the leaves whispering overhead, the whole scene gradually losing its hostile character,—something more was happening to him. The little song with a twist in its rhythm was being played, badly, by an itinerant musician. The laughter, the tinkle of ice, the scurrying of insufficient waiters, the greetings tossed here and there, the warmth of the air, the blend of unknown scents,—he heard someone saying that the man who had just passed, bare head, blue shirt, and walking stick, wrote snooty articles for the American Mercury and had stolen himself a new wife,—he was slipping into a pleasant abyss of loneliness, a new kind, for he was yearning for something he couldn't have defined if his life had depended on it. All these people, however impossible they might be, possessed the secret that eluded him. Even the most self-conscious of the Americans within his range of vision had discarded an inhibition which still ham-

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pered him. What could it be? Something, he presumed, that had to do with erotics.

He had finished his second drink and was searching in vain for a waiter to pay, when he was startled by the sight of well-known faces, grotesque in this setting, and a shout of recognition. "Hey, fellahs, here's young Thanet, right in the middle of Paris France! Hot dog!"

Four Harvard classmates were surging towards him, led by Max Bruff, who made his way forward with ruthless unconcern of tables and chairs and elbows, to deposit a paternal and patronizing kiss on his bare head.

During the noisy installation of the four youths at his little table, a waiter who had made no response to Grover's mild proffer of money, came rapidly forward in answer to Max's compelling cry of "Gahsonne! Gahsonne! Words with thee—*avec toi*!"

"We been here two weeks," said Max. "Come on a cattle boat—like the Hamburg zoo, with the elephants and the wild kangaroo. Ponderby'll pay for the drinks so have another, his sire being a profiteer, and us being bums. Some town!"

As the whole four represented an element in his class he had instinctively avoided, Grover wondered why he was glad to see them. Lowbrows they were, to a man. But when one's own brow is so desperately high! he sighed.

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"Well here we all are," said Max, when little glasses of cognac stood before them.

"Which nobody can deny," Grover assented, and got an exuberant crack on the back.

"The American intelligentsia, what!" Max added.

"I wouldn't go so far—" Grover began.

"Have another drink and you will," Max interrupted. "Farther!"

"This is an expensive joint," protested Ponderby. "Have a heart."

"Thank you," said Max, "I will, having had four already, to wit, two blonds—wash blonds—a brunette—and a Halgerian. That's why you go to college, to get to be a bachelor of hearts. When a Halgerian, though never so black, uses 'Oubigant's *Some* Flowers—well, one touch of nature—ain't it the truth!"

A bleary-eyed beggar was holding out his hat. "How's your mother?" Max politely inquired. As he did so he caught sight of a plump, full-blown, weary cocotte who had arrived at the table behind him.

"*Parlez-vous français?*" Max asked her.

The woman glanced up, her powder puff arrested in mid-air.

"*Parfaitement, Monsieur,*" she replied in husky but incisive tones, "Only not with monkeys," she added in English.

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," said Max, pounding philosophically on the table for the waiter.

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"Doesn't your pride *ever* feel anything?" asked Grover.

"What do you mean, pride! I make at least one woman out of every ten, and I call ten per cent damn good business! Ho hit's the rich wot 'as the pleasures—"

. . . .

After dinner they progressed by easy stages, each stage an oasis, to the other side of Paris, coming to a terminus at the Bal Tabarin. Next day Grover had a confused recollection of pink lights, a great blare of music that was tossed from one orchestra to another with merciless continuity, a slippery floor over which five Harvard men, himself included, had belied their hard-earned culture once and for all by lurching through a ring-a-round-of-roses that scattered narrow-booted men and gaudy women to right and left and brought from a man who introduced himself as the Management a waspish threat of gendarmes. A hundred per cent American interruption, in which if none of the five participants could be said to take any pride, they all, at the moment, took delirious pleasure, a pleasure converted into ecstasy by the poisonous shower of Gallic arrows it evoked.

Somewhat before dawn a pair of waiters, after a frigid but excessively polite discussion, maintained that Grover was obligated for two bottles of champagne ordered by a thin young woman in a dress that

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looked like a yellow lampshade. He freely admitted having danced with her more than once; he was prepared to bear witness that he had concluded no further business with the lady; he could never hope to make anyone understand how bored he had been by her talk of the high cost of practically everything,—but as to two bottles of champagne, dear but not good champagne, he would have no hesitation in telling St. Peter at the pearly gates that he would have seen the lady in tophet first—in short any man with a sense of logic would see—did they realize they were talking to the son of *the* Professor Thanet!—

But he paid. And that left him barely enough francs to placate the dragon in charge of his hat and stick.

After that there had been the unexpected damp coolness of the air, the green-gray of the houses, the stale slatey smell of the pavements as waiters in aprons and shirt-sleeves sluiced water over them in preparation for a rapidly approaching morrow.

As he set out for the rue Truffaut he wondered idly what had become of his companions. One by one he had lost sight of them. By now each had disappeared into a furtive side street, accompanied by some night-moth with gay wings and sore feet. "Lulu, Froufrou, Dodo—" Max would no doubt spring forth at noon, undismayed by strange walls and a pink dress over the chair, and proceed to the nearest cafe to drink coffee and jot down harmonies built up on unheard-of

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intervals to be worked into a new prelude symbolic of the soul's aspiration toward the ineffable. Inside Max there burned a sizzling flame that baked his very common clay into lovely porcelain.

Why on earth, Grover wondered, had he behaved in such an idiotic fashion. And having gone to such a blatant haunt, why had he *seemed* so to enjoy it—for surely he hadn't! He supposed it was the sort of thing you did once, like Coney Island. This first day in Paris, he mournfully reflected, as he crossed the empty Place Clichy, had scarcely proved the "tomorrow" on which life was destined to begin. Though chockablock full of happenings, it had been merely a day *comme les autres.* Life was still elusive, still over the brow of the hill. After a good sleep he would set forth again—in earnest. Perhaps a schedule would help.

He rattled the chain and rattled it yet again, and yawned, and shivered in the raw air while the concierge kept him waiting at the foot of the stairs.

A schedule allowing for play hours, hours for exploration, and hours for work. He must inquire right away about the chances of working under some painter who would instruct without imposing, and criticize without blighting.

The house was almost sinister in its stillness. A vague sense of heavily somnolent humanity pervaded the stairs and the passages. He had the feeling that if he didn't get quickly to bed, shutters would begin

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to go up and alarm clocks off, and somehow ensnare him into the activities of the day.

As he turned up the gas jets in his pompous bedroom the titanic Empire clock was stubbornly maintaining its lie. His own watch had stopped. A towel, the only one, had fallen into the water pitcher. His washing had not been sent to the laundry. Little waves of despair lapped at the edge of his consciousness, and his poor head buzzed.

I and schedules! he thought. I and time! I and an atelier full of snooty painters who know *why* Cézanne is good! I and thin girls in lampshades! I and life! Dear God.

. . . .

It took several weeks to draw up a schedule, and when it was drawn up there was no point in putting it into effect before a Monday. As he stepped from the cool entry into the narrow street on the Sunday morning before the first available Monday, Grover was enveloped in billows of heat. It was like stepping into a bowl of warm soup. If this were Aldergrove, he was thinking, it would be Indian summer, with a vengeance. The laundress across the way was sitting in the strip of shade before her establishment mending the socks of her customers. The sun was beginning to encroach upon her knees, and when she bent forward to take the scissors from her basket it shone through her pale hair, giving her an aura that belonged to a

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type far less efficient than Grover had found her to be. I wouldn't put it past a Botticelli virgin, he reflected, to have been a sharp-tongued boss of a lot of wilted dark-eyed girls perspiring over long ironing boards. The girls often looked at him, while he waited to have his wash wrapped up, as though they were noticing the way his cheek went from the outside corner of his eye to his chin. Poor Rhoda. Her last letter, blowing into the sultry and exotic air of Paris, had seemed strangely simple, like fresh dainty muslin against rich but threadbare brocade, like a Scarlatti sonata after a Scriabin prelude. And as always, his affectionately.

The laundress looked up for a moment and smiled, impartially, the sort of smile that Parisians seemed able to accomplish with their thoughts far afield, just as certain persons say Thank You without being conscious of doing so. It would be so comforting, he reflected, as he walked down the tiny street, to feel that one did not impress them as being so fearfully harmless. Is it because I buy peaches and spit the stones into the gutter? Is it because I sprawl on Mme. Choiseul's balcony and play with Mouche? Is it because I never seem to know whether my laundry is going to be twenty francs or five? Is it merely the way my cheek goes? And if it goes that way when you're twenty-three, will it keep going that way even when you're sixty and it's all over white stubble?

The woman who kept the odds-and-ends shop where

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he had bought sewing cotton for Mme. Choiseul and pastel crayons for himself peered through the curtain as he went by with his portfolio tucked under his arm. Her pristine cordiality had waned a little when she learned that he was not acquainted with her nephew, Hercule, who lived in Philadelphia, America.

Before the window of the antiquary's shop near the rue des Dames he paused to look again at a little bronze statue of Corneille he had coveted. He could not buy it because the antiquary was holding it for a prohibitive sum, on the strength of its having once belonged, allegedly, to Lafayette. Some day, Grover reflected, a big Swede will come in and pay the thousand francs on the strength of its having belonged to Bernadotte. One of the many ramifications of the *esprit gaulois*.

This Sunday was to be devoted to art. As he turned into the Boulevard des Batignolles his mind was on an inn near Suresnes where he had spent a pleasant afternoon two weeks previously: a remote spot with shady plane trees, trellises, and a lawn sloping down toward the Seine.

The bus took him as far as the Pont de l'Alma, and he walked to the boat landing. It was only eleven o'clock, and the Sunday promenaders had not got a good start. Soon the city would be at its festive worst. As the little steamer drew alongside he was cheered by the sight of an empty bench on the shady side of the deck. As they left the city behind, he slid down in the seat till his back was in a straight line with his

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legs, and watched the glassy waves roll from the prow of the boat and collapse crisply on the bank. After the dust of the pavements it was a renovating experience to breathe air filled with an earthy fragrance. Between Bas-Meudon and St. Cloud people still in summer dress were sitting on terrasses or in the gardens of tidy villas, and their voices came over the water above the murmur of kitchen sounds.

He landed with regret, in spite of the hard bench. The breeze had ceased as the boat slowed down. Dust and glare were ahead of him, and aggressive passengers behind.

After walking a mile he was welcomed by Félix, the waiter, and escorted through a crumbling house to the cafe above the river. Would Monsieur eat in the garden, as on the former occasion?

Monsieur would, at the little table under the big acacia. And Monsieur, all to himself, was pleased at being remembered by one casual soul in a universeful of casuals who didn't know him from Adam. Moreover, aloud, he had great thirst and would commence with a Turin sec.

He threw his portfolio on the grass and sailed his hat after it. The pebbles were uneven and his chair had to be adjusted to a lazy angle. The old landlord, in shirtsleeves, came out to greet his solitary guest and pass the time of day in language which was neatly economized. Only a Frenchman could say nothing so adequately. Only Frenchmen had the kind of men-

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tal machinery that never knocked or missed—even though their mouths might be in ruins.

It was flattering too to be taken automatically for an *artiste-peintre*.

Lunch could be protracted, for there was any amount of time—oh any! It was frightening to think of the myriad things there weren't to do. Never in your life had there been so many. But in twenty-four hours the schedule would be in operation, then time would come back into scale. Meanwhile there was a patient landscape waiting to be recorded on a brand new sheet of oatmeal paper, and the whole afternoon in which to do it. The little island in the middle, the canal boats trailing off toward the left, the poplars on parade, and the whole composition would lead up to the group of factory chimneys to the right,—a modern pastoral, with industry invading the meadows.

After his second Benedictine, and his fifth or sixth cigarette, he stationed himself in an advantageous corner of the garden. He was feeling uncomfortably responsible. Having come for the ostensible purpose of painting, he couldn't put it off any longer without compromising his gentlemanly understanding with himself. Of course he was perfectly willing to paint, but he dreaded the straining and tightening process which would be entailed by trying to bring "composition" out of the pretty disorder before his eyes. It was so hard to see a tree as a tree and not as a bundle of branches. If one could only be as a little child

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and see credulously! A third Benedictine was of no help whatever: it softened the outlines instead of giving them an edge.

He resharpened his charcoal and filled a page of a sketch block with studies of the cat that had begged him for part of his excellent lunch. The cat scratching, the cat washing her face, the cat yawning, the cat sound asleep—and it was already four-thirty. Oh Time in thy flight! Real artists, he was thinking, don't approach their Muse so gingerly; they take her by storm, the brutes. Unlike real artists I have only a finite capacity for taking pains; it would therefore seem that I am no genius.

Painting was like fishing. It was one thing to lie on the bank of a stream and watch flashing ideas dart in and out amongst the mysterious mosses, but it was quite another to be a clever angler and induce them to attach themselves to your expedient hook. And if by chance you did succeed in landing one, you were disheartened at the utter unattractiveness of the thing as it lay gasping and moribund at your feet, reproaching you for having wheedled it out of its setting, resisting you with its last volt of energy. Even Mona Lisa, compared with the image on the painter's retina, was a fish out of water. And how infinitely far removed from her was anything *you* might ever hope to depict.

So with those damn chimneys. Here one sat, seeing a perfect allegory: man-made clouds of smoke

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casting a shadow on a God-made river, perfectly simple and quite paintable. Just enough irony to give the picture the suggestion of caricature that every good picture should have. Any fool, thought Grover, can paint what's materially there. It takes some one with a philosophy, or at any rate an attitude, to convey the little tilt that makes all the difference, to point the moral and adorn the tale without actually *doing* so. All I need to do now is to do it. And am I going to? Apparently not. I'm going back to a stuffy flat with seven useless sketches of a useless cat. Rhyme and all. No moral or anything Is it always going to be like this with me—sort of all dressed up and no place to go?

Worst of all, he reflected, as he packed his materials neatly into the portfolio, he had actually postponed his departure for the sake of looking like an inspired painter in the eyes of the benighted bourgeois who had strolled in with their families for a Sunday afternoon apéritif, all dust and alpaca,—and I hope I'll remember this to my dying day, and never accuse anybody else again of being a poseur, ever. I might just as well have been sitting at the Dôme all afternoon.

"All I need," he wailed that night, in a letter to Geoffrey Saint, "is a reason for being."

. . . .

The first item on the schedule was the following note: Look up Monsieur Ripert.

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M. Ripert was a painter personally known to one of Grover's professors at Harvard and recommended as a master "sympathetic with the modern movement but not carried away by it." To Grover this sounded rather depressingly like Harvard, but, like Harvard, it would do for a start. M. Ripert had a commodious studio but no telephone. "You had better call in the afternoon," the professor had added. "He paints in the mornings and doesn't like to be disturbed."

At three o'clock, therefore, on a Monday afternoon late in September, Grover emerged from the Nord-Sud subway station at the Rotonde and walked somewhat gingerly down the rue de la Grande Chaumière to the number indicated on his correct letter of introduction. There were obviously a number of studios in the building, but no names on the doors, Paris being a casual sort of city.

A businesslike young woman, seated at a small table in the entry, was writing names on cards and placing them in a file. Three or four students armed with portfolios not unlike his own stood about chatting in low tones. Grover stepped forward timidly; he hoped no one would get the impression that he overestimated the worth of the paltry sketches hidden under his arm, for no man had ever felt more humble than he was feeling at the moment, here at the portals of Art.

An inquiry, in studied phrases, was on the tip of his tongue, and he was all ready to get it off to the businesslike young woman, when she astonished him

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by asking him his name and thrusting a card before him on the table. Dutifully he wrote it and she told him, briskly, with the bright hard smile of Parisians, the smile of the laundress in the rue Truffaut, to enter the door on the left. He had not mentioned his errand, but assumed that M. Ripert was so famous that one approached him by stages and through anterooms. So without remonstrance he opened the door *à gauche*.

And stood there in the doorway transfixed with horror and embarrassment!

Beneath him, in a small amphitheatre, sat a hundred young men and women, with sketch blocks before them, engrossed in the task of drawing the portrait of a girl who hadn't a stitch of clothing on. There she sat on the platform in an attitude that only a model could have got herself into, arms and legs going in every direction but a comfortable one, being as hard to draw as she could possibly be.

He felt that at any moment a gendarme might arise from some corner and eject him. To make matters worse there was no sign of anybody who might be M. Ripert. Not an eye was raised to greet or banish him. To retreat was difficult, for the door had been shut behind him by the businesslike young woman. He had never been so frightened and unhappy in his life.

At the height of his dismay a pale young man on the back bench looked up and saw his plight,—at least his external plight. Moving over on the bench he

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made a place and jerked his head toward it. As there was nothing else to do, Grover tip-toed to the youth's side and sat down, his brow damp and his knees trembling. The youth paid no further attention to him and Grover took out a providential sketch block and pencil and turned his eyes on the model.

More embarrassing even than his maladroit intrusion was the thought of having to confess on paper that he had no right to be in such precincts. Over the shoulders of his neighbors he saw dozens of skilful strokes. A good many of the drawings failed to resemble the naked girl. Indeed the pale youth beside him was translating her into something that looked exactly like a proposition in Euclid. But every design seemed so appallingly professional. And something in the air made him feel that the use of an eraser would constitute grounds for arrest.

Beginning with her forehead and nose, he was relieved to find that no curiosity was manifested, but before he reached her shoulder a voice across the room called out something which he couldn't catch, whereupon the girl yawned, undid herself, and proceeded to get into another attitude, full of foreshortening. With one accord his neighbors turned to a fresh sheet and set to work on a new design. The pale youth, in doing so, emitted one word under his breath, an exceedingly coarse word, from which Grover judged that he was annoyed at the briefness of the periods for each pose; it was as though he hadn't had time to work out his

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exercise in geometry. Fatalistically he began a new design of his own.

He was calm now, and delighted with the adventure. Only, how was one going to get out?

An hour later, as he tucked five or six drawings into his portfolio,—drawings which he would have been afraid to show, but of which he was privately quite proud,—the process of getting out took care of itself. One just walked out. And nobody paid any attention. This emboldened him, and he addressed the pale youth.

"*Pardon, Monsieur,* could you tell me which of these gentlemen is M. Ripert?"

"*Je regrette, Monsieur—je ne le connais pas.*"

"You know him by name, though?"

The young man still regretted.

"But he's supposed to be very well known!"

"*Oh ça!*" The shrug that accompanied the words implied utter willingness to concede the fame of the unknown gentleman in question, plus utter lack of interest in fame. So are millions of others, the shrug seemed to say. To become well known is a misfortune that assails many.

"Doubtless Monsieur is also well known," he added, "In spite of which I have not, until this fortunate occasion, had the honor—" There was no mockery in the look of tolerant fatigue which accompanied the remark, merely Frenchness, and Grover smiled apologetically.

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"My name is Thanet, and I am the least well known of mortal men."

"*Erreur, Monsieur,* I have that distinction."

And he's going to let it go at that, thought Grover, chagrined to see that the Frenchman was preparing to saunter off. They were now in the entry, where students were jostling their way out of the building.

He had lost interest in M. Ripert, and his instinct was to depart as inconspicuously as he had come, but he dreaded the scolding he would be sure to give himself later in the day for having shirked the issue. At the risk of a snub he must face it. He walked out behind the bored young man and caught up with him as the latter paused to light a cigarette.

No one ever offers you a cigarette in this country, Grover reflected, fishing for his own,—nor yet a match, he added to himself, unless deliberately asked.

"*Pardon, Monsieur, voulez-vous me donner du feu?*"

The pale youth saved his flame, for which Grover thanked him with an echo of the ironic tone that had characterized the other's remarks throughout their brief exchange.

"I propose to walk with you at least to the top of the hill," Grover persisted, "come what may. I'd like to ask some questions."

"What questions?"

"On second thoughts they're not questions at all; they're statements." And without a trace of the mortification that had been surging through him an hour

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earlier, Grover made a clean breast of his intrusion into the life class.

His companion, whose name turned out to be Vaudreuil, was diverted. Or rather, he seemed to find amusement in something behind the episode, in the attitude of the narrator. He thinks me naive, thought Grover, and perhaps I am, but D. V. I won't always be. Give me time.

"*Sans blague,*" asked Vaudreuil, incredulously, "you had never seen a woman before?"

Life is so funny, Grover reflected. Here he is shocked because I hadn't, and here am I shocked because you're supposed to have!

"I swear it," he said.

"*Ne jurez point, mon ami; dites plutôt la verité! Quel âge avez-vous?*"

"I'm twenty-three," Grover confessed, and the confession merely increased the bewilderment in his companion's countenance.

"But of course, in America—" A large gesture completed the sentence. It conveyed not only incomprehension of the new world, but a final disposal of it.

"Do you know America?" inquired Grover, a little testily.

"Only from a brief sojourn."

"What part did you visit?"

"Principally Boston."

Grover was startled. It was as if the man had read

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his mind and had decided to tease him. "I come from Boston," he said.

"You did well to leave."

"Why?"

"What conceivable reason was there for remaining?"

"When were you there?"

"This very year—in the spring. The lady with whom I travelled, a very old friend, treated herself to a rich American who objected to my presence on the same side of the ocean. So I withdrew."

"Without a fight?"

"*Qu'est-ce que vous voulez!* Money—it's always a *force majeure*. Why fight it?"

The implications in these remarks were astonishing enough to make Grover feel in need of a drink, and he invited his new acquaintance,—his first real French acquaintance and for that reason not to be too carelessly relinquished,—to stop at a cafe near the Gare Montparnasse, which they had reached.

For once Grover was accepting a man at his immediate value. There were many points in the appearance and the views of his companion concerning which his judgment was being reserved: the languid pose, the floppy hat, the cynical droop of the mouth which at moments gave him the appearance of a man of forty, whereas he could not be more than twenty-eight at the most, and might even be a mere twenty-two. For the moment, however, the decadent aura enhanced the value of the companionship. This young man

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knew so many things that Grover needed to know. The difference between Frenchmen and us, he was thinking, is that they are born with an ability to take for granted facts which we spend a lifetime in merely becoming aware of. And he desperately hoped, as he ordered the drinks, that Vaudreuil would not too quickly plumb the chasms of his own ignorance.

Carefully he brought the talk back to painting, and sought counsel as to a master. He was a little discouraged at the outlook for himself, for, if Vaudreuil could be believed, it was highly dangerous to "study" under any master, even the best,—whoever the best might be, and opinions seemed to differ collosally on this vital point. Our American need, he was thinking, to classify everything into worsts and bests!

"But you must have worked under a good man yourself," he argued, "to have acquired such a high degree of subtlety as one can detect even in your ten-minute sketches."

"I have never worked in my life," affirmed Vaudreuil with an air of fatigue that lent weight to the statement. "The object of work is to be able to pay your bills. I have very few bills, and there is always somebody willing to pay them."

"Will there always be?"

"There isn't any always."

Already stalled in low gear, thought Grover. And in the back of his mind he was avidly wondering what could be at the foundation of such a laconic philosophy.

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There must be something below it all, for no human being could exist without a foundation, certainly no human being as highly sensitized and discriminating as his companion, who, however languid he might appear to be, was curiously consistent.

"I suppose you mean that there's only the present," said Grover. "But how can you make that square with your recollection of the past? Think of yourself fifteen years ago, ten years ago, five years ago, and today; when you look back over it doesn't that period present itself to you in the light of a fraction of an always?"

"Not at all. It presents itself as a multitude of little presents flowing into a big present, just as each wave that leaves the shore of America flows into a next and a next till the water contained in it touches the shore of France; yet it's only one ocean. Each new present creates a situation to which one automatically adjusts oneself. The whole trick consists in keeping up, exactly, with the present. If one does that, there is no problem of a future. It's like paying all your moral bills in cash."

"Sufficient unto the day, in other words."

"What would Americans do without their Bible!"

This isn't getting us any nearer a clue to Art, thought Grover, and he came back to the charge. "It may be true that you have never worked, but it's equally true that you have developed a talent for

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drawing, and I should like to know under what auspices, or whose."

Vaudreuil shrugged his shoulders. "My uncle," he said, "was régisseur of an abortive art theatre in Lyon. Ibsen held no thrall for the makers of silk. I spent my childhood back-stage; my sister and I played Nora's children; and I constructed miniature settings out of bits of cardboard. When I first came to Paris I danced in a ballet at the Chatelêt. For one production I submitted designs, which were accepted. I knew Casimir in the days before he had become a cult, and he let me paint in a corner of his studio. His criticism of my work was valuable."

"Who is Casimir?" asked Grover timidly.

But it seemed a matter of indifference to Vaudreuil that the name of Casimir had not yet penetrated the consciousness of this particular outlander.

"Since Cézanne," he said calmly, "he is probably the first innovator of any real consequence."

Grover's mind leaped ahead to an interview and foresaw a contemptuous dismissal as soon as this rare genius should get a glimpse of the old-fashioned sketches in his chaste portfolio.

"Does Casimir take pupils?" he asked.

"He has a small group of disciples who imitate him and pick up crumbs of wisdom they can't digest. No painter who respects himself will seek to impose a method of painting. The best he can hope to do is to point out to a less experienced painter wherein he is

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being false to his own conception. Casimir has only one principle in art, as in life, and that is that it is one's duty to progress in the direction in which one's temperament has foreordained that one shall go: that any road leads to truth provided you walk far enough on it."

"It must be difficult," said Grover, "to recognize another man's direction and give him advice that will help him to progress in it, rather than divert him into your own direction."

For the first time since they had met, Vaudreuil looked at him with a gleam of cordiality, as though recognizing a vein of intelligence that saved the encounter from being a total loss. "That's precisely why most art and most teaching is futile," he exclaimed. "Most painters and most teachers are so enchanted in giving birth to one idea that they nurse it to death. It's only the rare man who fathers a whole progressive family of ideas and who can be at the same time a good godfather to the ideas of others. Every artist must resist the temptation to be a moralist; that is the besetting sin of Anglo-Saxons. Casimir is the unwilling and almost unwitting centre of a cult that has no more to do with his real contribution to art than it has to do with Mohammedanism. Ten years ago, in one of his experimental moods, he happened to paint a picture of a lightning storm. It was a canvas with certain merits and certain defects. It caused a violent altercation among the critics, who

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staked their reputations on it, pro and con. Since then he has developed in many directions. He has forgotten and almost abjured the painting in question. He is many years ahead of the public. The public knows him as the painter of lightning storms. And for him the public doesn't exist. He leaves it to his wife."

"And she keeps the legend going?"

"She has a private secretary who helps her fabricate news items about Casimir, and for moments of relaxation a handsome chauffeur whom she selected from the model market one Monday morning. Matter of habit. She had always done her own marketing."

"How much talent must one have before one dare make a bid for Casimir's critical attention?"

"One must have the talent of seeming good in the sight of Mme. Casimir. That procures one an introduction. From that point it's a matter of chance. If you have a minimum of talent but a maximum of earnestness, Casimir may encourage you. He is very simple and very good-natured—when he isn't in a thundering fury. On the other hand you may have a maximum of talent and yet fail to rouse his interest. In which case he will tell you so, *sans façons*."

Grover decided on another plunge. The little glasses of cognac were giving him confidence, and he had begun to feel that this all important day, the first of the schedule, was more than living up to his expectations of it. In the back of his mind he was composing

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a letter to Geoffrey Saint: "Well, on this day of grace, Life *began*—"

Meanwhile he had only one object, and that was to cultivate the friendship of this pale young man until it led him to the door of the great painter. But how, he wondered, in a sudden panic, does one cultivate this elusive kind of being? Is it enough to offer them meals, or have they strange subterranean tastes that have to be catered to? Does one have to go to dives with them and respond to baleful creatures who come and sit on one's knee? He felt lonely, and a little outclassed. In Boston you would have dinner in a hotel and go to a theatre and feel that the evening had been more or less adequately passed.

The street lights were aglow and the afternoon had perceptibly turned into night. People who had been crowding the terrasse were drifting away into the noisy chaos of busses and tramcars. Across the way clerks and shop girls were streaming into the station to catch suburban trains. Waiters were laying cloths on marble tables in preparation for dinner. The peculiar odor of Paris, a mixture of petrol and sour wine and steamed vegetables, rose with renewed force from the pavements. Though he was by now sufficiently accustomed to his setting to take it pretty largely for granted, Grover was every now and again lifted out of himself by the exotic thrall of Paris. There was something exhilaratingly unreal in being a part of it which lent a touch of adventure to the simplest

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exploits. He was certainly in no mood for returning to his lonely abode and playing Noémi Janvier records on Mme. Choiseul's victrola,—arias from Samson and Die Walküre, mournfully evocative of enchanted nights forever ended. And in his bedroom the treasured terra cotta bust of Voltaire, with its grin; he wanted to stay out in the streets of Paris and find out once and for all what Voltaire had been grinning about! Surreptitiously he felt in his pockets to ascertain how much money was there.

"I'd like to get into an open carriage and drive straight across the city, to the top of Montmartre," he said. "Will you dine with me?"

"*Volontiers, Monsieur!*"

The journey was made in silence. It's funny, Grover reflected, to be driving across Paris so sort of intimately with somebody whom, you may find, after you've seen a few of his friends, you'll have a hard job living down. Who may have done time, for all you know to the contrary. Who would be sardonic if he had a little more energy; cynical if he didn't say such truish things, once you've analyzed them. Who would think you a romantic ass if he could see how excited you are by this simple adventure. Who is so bored by the things that exalt you that you wonder what on earth he could be exalted by, if anything. And with his long fingers and fox-like chin and instantaneous registration of every passing phenomenon, how can he be so damned apathetic? Is that the ul-

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timate effect of Paris? If a little of Paris intoxicates you, perhaps a lot of it drugs you. The cab had arrived at the Place du Tertre.

"If you don't mind my making a suggestion," said Vaudreuil, as Grover led the way to the nearest restaurant, "we might dine across the way, over there in the corner. They give you an excellent châteaubriand quite cheap, and the *vin de la maison* is better than most *vins bouchés*."

Grover acceded with alacrity, grateful for this sign of life. Every Frenchman, he reflected, even the palest, knows where the best food is, and to look at this one you'd never guess that he ate more than two or three times a week. Perhaps, he thought, with a sudden shock of illumination, the poor devil doesn't!

All through dinner, as they talked of Paris and art and the theatre and women, Grover had the impression of being in the presence of something unfathomable. The wine fulfilled its promise,—a pale, rose-gray fluid in thick decanters,—and made for the friendly give and take that had so far been lacking. Even so, at the end of two hours, Grover felt that the "cultivation" of his new acquaintance had not even got a start. At any moment the Frenchman might get up, bid him a courteous farewell, and walk off into the intriguing nothingness from which he had emerged. Grover's resources were exhausted. The very thought of any further effort wearied him. I and Frenchmen, he was thinking, are doomed to stand on opposite sides

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of a wall, looking over at each other. All I need is about twenty years more experience, or a sense of humor, or something equally vast.

Lost in his own depressing thoughts, Grover was scarcely listening to Vaudreuil's remarks about a new novel, when the name of Jean Cocteau smote his ears and roused him to a recollection of some animated discussions at the house of his French professor in Cambridge.

"Do you know Cocteau?" he asked.

"Very well. Shall we go round and see him?"

Grover could have cried out for relief. An offering at last and a promising one. As casually as possible he agreed that that might be a pleasant way to polish off the evening.

He had visions of being ushered into some recondite apartment on the left bank but was amazed to find himself being introduced to the celebrated young man in the kitchen of a cafe on the rue Caumartin. For a few moments he was not sure which was Cocteau and which was a dancer from the Casino de Paris. But as the hours drew on toward morning he didn't care. He was sitting and drinking gin rickeys in the company of a motley collection of actors, writers, painters, and unguessable creatures, male and female, including two hard-eyed American women from the middle west via Greenwich Village, a dishevelled countess who sniffed cocaine from an enamelled box, and a prize-fighter with polished fingernails. They were all talking

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at once and all saying things which were difficult to seize on the wing, quite often witty, always sophisticated, sometimes obscene. As he looked about him, beyond the knowing, tired faces, at the bepainted and bescribbled walls, at the flame-like gray-haired woman dancing a tango with Vaudreuil, at the proud American negroes blowing into saxophones, at all the acutely intelligent dregs and caricatures of people who came and went, he caught little glimpses of himself that alternately excited and shocked him. My long lost soul, he reflected, is flitting about somewhere in this room, either in search of a light or an exit.

At three o'clock he arrived at his door in the rue Truffaut, his portfolio still under his arm. It was already the second day of the famous schedule, and already the schedule was shot to pieces. The only item now to be observed was a lunch appointment.

As he got into bed his mind traced a wide circle back to the events of the afternoon, and rested on the life class.

Their smoothness is nice, he was thinking, and their softness and whiteness. But parts of them are quite ugly.

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Next morning he awoke later than he expected, as usual. As usual he made shift with a dressing gown and a pair of bedroom slippers and sauntered into what Mme. Choiseul perversely styled the *grande pièce*. Madame, as usual, had postponed her morning tasks and with Mouche upon her lap was heaving and palpitating over the news of a crime committed in the market place the previous evening. An impatient butcher had chopped up his wife with a meat-axe. Resignedly Grover sat down to listen to the details of the victim's ill-starred passion for a rival butcher, but in the middle of the recital the milk on the kitchen stove, as usual, boiled over with a nasty hiss, and Madame, with a stifled scream, departed. That meant that his coffee would be delayed, and the best way to fill the interval would be to play something on the antediluvian piano and try to avoid the three keys that stuck.

As he played, and ultimately as he drank his coffee, his immediate humdrum surroundings floated away and he was back, in imagination, among the strange company of last night, recapturing the aroma of it as one recaptures an arresting tune. Bits of witty talk darted into his recollection, with an echo of the voices and an image of the tired, over-wise glances, and he caught his breath with "holy dread." For these people had fed on honeydew and drunk the milk of paradise. Should one not therefore weave a circle round them thrice!

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Here, in an ugly little room, surrounded by hideous furniture, presided over by a gossipy, incompetent, good-hearted landlady, he felt if not at home, at least safe. Whatever he did in this dull flat passed unchallenged; if the mood seized him he might go into the kitchen and boil a cabbage, and nobody take it amiss. If he chose to stay in on a rainy day and read, or draw pictures, there was no criticism, uttered or implied. Madame and her two or three other nondescript lodgers accepted him unquestioningly as a sort of harmless embodiment of the Declaration of Independence. And in no other company was this quite the case.

Least of all in the new world on whose threshold he had stood last night,—a world peopled by the fabulous beings, human gargoyles and griffons, about whom his intellectual curiosity had long been hovering. As a youth, in the stacks of the Harvard Library, he had robbed many hours from study to scan the pages of illustrated journals published in London and Paris, and reflected enviously on the lot of those who were privileged to inhale the rarefied air breathed by the gifted, the famous, the picturesque, whose daily bread, at least in the eyes of a student, looked so much like cake. He had never dared hope that any one as commonplace as himself would ever be admitted into an exotic setting. He had supposed that some indefinable but automatically operative rule would see to that. He had come to Paris, on tip-toe, prepared to

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be thrilled even if allowed to peer through the windows, and already, after a few weeks of Paris, he had spent a night in the virtually intimate midst of a group of people whose names stood for the apex of accomplishment in avocations which held for him the highest allurement.

And the experience was disconcerting. In the innocence of his heart he had supposed that cleverness was the open sesame to the society of "intellectuals." But from his first glimpse of their world he judged that the open sesame was something quite other. Indeed cleverness, per se, was even a grave liability, for cleverness, at least Anglo-Saxon cleverness, was very apt to be allied to priggishness, which was the cardinal demerit in their eyes. Rather, the qualifications for membership in the ranks of exclusive bohemians seemed to be keen intuition allied to a tolerance that would stretch to the condonation of any conceivable sort of moral aberration. To be a member in the best standing you should contribute original views or subtle criticism or a marked talent for listening. An ounce of instinctive knowledge counted for more than a pound of academic information. A college education, for instance, unless carefully lived down, was damning. If you were exceptionally handsome of person, that alone might gain you admission, provided your body was reasonably negotiable. In general a strong taste for the ribald was an advantage, especially if it expressed itself in a pretty talent for making light

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of sacred things. Intellectual prejudices, or even downright dumbness, would not blackball you, but a moral prejudice or any sign of aesthetic insensibility classed you as a bore. Even if you brought a refreshingly quick wit and a sharp tongue you were under suspicion until it was shown beyond doubt that your senses came in for a commensurate amount of exercise. In other words, to find favor in the eyes of these rare spirits, you must have lived up to the hilt, which meant that you must have given a free rein to a number of urges that Grover Thanet, for one, had held piously in check. Consequently, an hour or two before fulfilling an engagement with the man who had sponsored him in this society, he had an acute problem to face.

If he were to go on satisfying his curiosity about them he must either "live" a bit, or prove clever enough to conceal the purely intellectual quality of his cleverness. Imagination, in the latter case, would have to fill in the lacunae. So far, imagination had served him well, indeed rather too well, but whether under an extreme test it would furnish enough material to serve as foundation for an attitude toward life that the true bohemians attained only as the result of picking life up in handfuls and tactually examining it, he couldn't predict.

He had seen that to know them one must be, in some sense, *of* them; and to be of them implied commitments in theory, if not in deed, that would, if not

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completely alter his inherited flavor, at least radically compromise it. He had never before been so pressingly under the necessity of appraising his New England inheritance and deciding whether or not it was really precious to him. For four years he had been scoffing at it; but that was in New England, at close range to all the obviously irksome aspects of it. At the same time, in Boston, even in the rowdiest set he could imagine there, the fact of being the son of the Professor Thanet would give him prestige; in the rue Caumartin somebody would make an awful funny joke of it.

Trying anything once was a popular motto of his contemporaries. But the problem that faced him was this: would it be possible to dip into this pool and come out merely wet? What if one came out slightly dyed, forever? And if one did, what if one grew tired or ashamed of the tint? "You and your moral reactions and your grandmother's ducks!" he could hear Max Bruff scoffing.

A third cup of coffee didn't solve the problem; it merely heightened his nervous restlessness.

"What a horrible man!" exclaimed Madame, and for a moment Grover was startled. Then he realized that she was still thinking of the impassioned butcher, and he went to the kitchen for his shaving water.

There was still time to draw back, he reflected, as he selected his best clothes. If he failed to keep his appointment with Léon Vaudreuil, there would be no

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reaction on that young man's part but a shrug of the shoulders. It would be comfortable to be French and have shoulders in place of a conscience. On his own part, however, there would be a far-reaching reaction. His trust in himself would wane. For the chances were, he would never forgive himself for losing the opportunity to fill out important gaps in his information. That answered his qualms, and as he finished dressing he knew perfectly well that the doubt as to his going forward had never been more than academic. It would have been better for me, he reflected, if I'd never heard the word "inhibition"; for the more inhibitions you hear about, the more things you have to do to prove you haven't got any.

As he left the house he caught himself sighing at the coming burden of translation,—not the translation of English thoughts into French words, for that he could accomplish with a fair amount of ease and accuracy, but the far more difficult task of translating the very substance of one's thoughts and sensations into the thoughts and sensations of one who has lived, rather than one who has merely been a precocious imaginer, translating them till one's personality stood revealed not as the Harvard faculty had tried to make it, but as a psychoanalyst would see it, all inside out, familiar but astonishing, a humble but terrible and rather exciting thing to witness.

As he stood before the door of an elegant building overlooking the Parc Monceau, another disconcerting

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thought smote him. What if Vaudreuil himself failed to keep the appointment? It was entirely on the cards that he had more diverting errands, less innocuous company at his disposal. For all Grover knew to the contrary, one encounter with Vaudreuil's friends had proved him, Grover Thanet, all too unsophisticated. True, he had said very little, and tried very hard not to be astonished at anything, but his very caution might have given the impression of aloofness, of private weighing and judging, of self-consciousness, the unpardonable sin. Perhaps Vaudreuil thought him a bore. Well, there was nothing to do but find out, and he pulled the bell.

The grand proportions of the entrance hall, and the thickness of the red carpet on the stairs gave him a shock. How could such an obviously penurious man live in such a luxurious apartment house? A porter directed him to the second floor front, and he rang nervously. An unfriendly old woman came to the door. Yes, M. Vaudreuil lived here, but her eyes conveyed grave doubt as to the likelihood of his wishing to receive anyone, particularly a stranger. It flashed into Grover's mind that she suspected him of coming to collect a debt.

After a short interval devoted to a muffled colloquy which made him feel exceedingly intrusive, he was admitted and shown to the salon: an enormous room with high windows, through which could be seen dapper little tubs of privet, dripping wet from the drizzle

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that had been falling all morning. For some moments he stood at the window, his own thoughts slightly feverish, looking out into the clean, bleak street and across at the studied pattern of the trees in the Parc Monceau. This was patently another of the tomorrows on which life was foredoomed to take a new spurt, for these unexpected surroundings were charged with some psychic force that both excited him and made him uneasy. Something came at him from the walls and the chairs that held him stock still and gave him the impression that to cough or make any human sound would be catastrophic. Much had happened in this room: there must have been nights when the great dark yellow curtains had been drawn across the windows and the discreet Venetian lanterns which projected from the angle of the floor slantwise toward the ceiling had shed a subtle glow over people whose lives were written in some fascinating cypher. The low couches, the rich hangings, the solidity and delicacy of the lines bespoke a proprietor whose tastes were at once robust and finely corrupt,—moreover a proprietor who was certainly not Léon Vaudreuil. Vaudreuil would fit into the room, a sort of human carved ivory, but he could not by any stretch of the imagination have dominated it, much less conceived it.

All of a sudden Vaudreuil was there. He had emerged through a door behind the sleek black piano, dressed in a frayed silk dressing gown. Grover was thinking of the sickly de Musset, appearing at the door

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of the room in Venice, his haggard eyes on the watch for signs of betrayal. Vaudreuil's pale hair hung straight over his forehead, and his long fingers were deeply stained with nicotine.

"I'm afraid I disturbed you," said Grover, leaving the windows and coming forward to a chair.

"Not at all," replied Vaudreuil, stretching himself on a couch and reaching for a cigarette case which proved to be empty. He accepted one of Grover's cigarettes and lit it. "I'm sure it's time to be up."

It has been for hours, Grover was thinking, shocked at such laziness yet envying the other his lack of concern. Artistically, he reflected, it's a sin to feel you must be up and doing. Sleep is a pagan blessing, to be accepted whenever it vouchsafes itself. Schedules are unaesthetic.

It was an absurd situation. Grover had nothing to say. Apparently this young man was inarticulate so early in the day, and there was no indication of a move on his part to prepare himself for the lunch to which Grover had invited him. Only Vaudreuil's lack of embarrassment saved the situation,—that and Grover's private sense of being in the right. After all he had come, by appointment, to take his friend out; if the friend sat there like a broken idol, apathetically smoking, let him do so, and make the next move when he was ready.

A door in the rear of the apartment slammed faintly, and brought a sign of life from Vaudreuil.

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"She has gone to fetch some fresh rolls," he said.

A smell of coffee confirmed this supposition.

The thought of eating in this room, with its dead air and its ghosts, gave Grover a slight feeling of nausea. Vaudreuil's bedroom, he was thinking, would smell of pommades, and not of hot water and soap. And on a table, within easy reach, there would probably be a little white box—

He wondered why the words "New Jersey" had bobbed up in his mind. A few seconds later he traced their source to a monograph on the back of a volume, which he picked up. It was a stoutly bound score of Parsifal, and on the shelves beside it were many other opera scores. Near the piano he saw stacks of music, a rich and enticing variety. Many of the sheets were stamped with the same initials: N. J.

He had got up to look through the music when the hostile old woman came in with coffee and rolls. There was nothing to do but accept the place set for him, though for two pins he would have bowed and walked out of the house forever.

But the presence of the coffee revived his host. They talked of vague things then, the tedium of life, the foolishness of human aims, the unsatisfactory status of civilization. It was most depressing.

If he would only open a window, thought Grover, or go and get dressed.

But Vaudreuil's dilatoriness in dressing was accounted for, an hour later, when the talk had come

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back to the persons with whom they had foregathered the night before. The hostile servant interrupted them by coming in with a parcel of laundry. The concierge, she declared, was outside, waiting to be paid.

Somebody, Grover recollected, with an inner smile, is always willing to pay his bills; this time I bet it's going to be me.

Vaudreuil had tossed the parcel on a table beside his couch. "Could you lend me some change, *mon ami*? I don't seem to have any at the moment."

When this rite had been accomplished, and the table cleared, Grover asserted his advantage to the extent of giving his host a hint.

"While you are dressing," he suggested, "I'm going to take the liberty of reading some of your music."

He went to the piano, and rummaged among the sheets. There was a preponderance of songs, many of them difficult, though all the old concert standbys seemed to be included. As he played his way through them, absorbed in the task, he was aware that some indefinable impression was working free in his subconsciousness and floating up toward the brim of recognition. When Vaudreuil came back into the room, clothed and groomed, it burst upon him.

Good God, he exclaimed inwardly, he's done his eyebrows! And at the same moment the N. J. unrolled itself across his mind's eye: Noémi Janvier!

For a long moment his thoughts stood still, then

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exploded in another inward exclamation: she keeps him!

It was romantic, fantastic, repellent, and highly provocative, all at once, while the disciplined New England part of him calmly said, "Where shall we have lunch?"

"Are you hungry?" asked Vaudreuil in surprise.

"Not at all," said Grover, "But it's something to do." What a horribly American point of view, he reflected, too late.

"As for things to do," said Vaudreuil, going for his hat and stick, "we might walk a little in the park; the sun is coming out." Then, with a sudden impulse, "Shall we go and see Casimir?"

Grover approved the suggestion, but it turned out that Vaudreuil's telephone was out of order. Somebody, Grover suspected, had been willing to pay the telephone bill but just hadn't. As a matter of fact it was Noémi Janvier's bill, and again a romantic thrill shot up his spine.

From a cafe a few streets distant Vaudreuil succeeded in getting a message through to Mme. Casimir, who would be enchanted to see them.

"They live in a very unfashionable quartier, near the Buttes Chaumont," said Vaudreuil. "We can walk there in half an hour, or would you prefer the tramway?"

"Let's walk," said Grover, reflecting that the taxi fare could be better spent later in the day.

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"Casimir inherited his apartment from his parents," Vaudreuil explained as they approached a drab building in a drab street lined with third rate shops. "His father was an upholsterer with the soul of an upholsterer and the manner of a president of the Senate; Casimir has the soul of a pagan saint and the manner of a wholesale wine merchant. *Vous allez voir.*"

They mounted to the second floor and were received by Mme. Casimir in a large salon which overlooked the court in the rear. Across the court could be seen the high windows of a room which Casimir, many years before, had converted into an atelier.

Mercy, how dreadful! was Grover's first inward exclamation, on surveying the gilded legs of Mme. Casimir's stiff chairs and the large pink and yellow roses in her carpet. Nothing could be less like the salon of the wife of a painter who, next to Cézanne, etc., indeed nothing could be more like the salon of the ambitious daughter-in-law of an upholsterer in a small way of business in a poor section of the city. There were photographs in beribboned frames, including one of Mme. Casimir herself as a little girl in her confirmation dress. There were China shepherdesses and plush portières with tassels. There wasn't an object in the room that couldn't have been bought at Dufayel's; not an object that wasn't trying its best to look grand.

Mme. Casimir herself looked far more like the woman who did her own marketing than the woman

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who treated herself to handsome chauffeurs. Having prepared himself to come into the presence of a rather determined sort of siren, Grover was disconcerted to find a peaceful, stout, tidy, middle-aged, practical woman in a plain calico house dress, her feet shod with felt slippers, her lap heaped with wool from which she was knitting socks for, Grover hoped, her genius of a husband.

"*Bonjour, mon Léon,*" she called out as they entered. "Come and kiss me. It's months since you've been near us. Casimir is quite vexed with you. Give an account of yourself!"

The glitter which Grover noticed in her small black eyes while exchanging polite introductory remarks with her furnished the confirmation of Léon's allusion to her rapacity. Her cordiality, he reflected, is due, first to the fact that I'm brought by Vaudreuil; second to the fact that, being an American, I may have a million dollars in my waistcoat pocket which I'm dying to exchange for the portrait of a calla lily.

"What, all that distance!" she was exclaiming, referring to their walk from the Parc Monceau. "You must be dead. Rosalie!" she called to an invisible but audible maid. "Some wine for these gentlemen!"

Mme. Casimir, Grover reflected, is impressed by the elegance of Vaudreuil's address. It's nothing in her life that a lady keeps him there; she and Noémi, she feels, *c'est quasiment,* and if a national institution like Noémi, who has the Légion d'Honneur and sings the

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Marseillaise whenever the nation's in danger can afford to be nice to Léon, it's no more than fitting that she, Clothilde Casimir, wife of another national institution who, alas, hasn't yet got the Légion d'Honneur but who, God willing or God induced, soon will, should at least be particularly civil to him.

"He doesn't know you've come," she said, when Rosalie had deposited the tray and departed. Grover had discovered that she had a way of referring to her husband as He,—as though he were of the divinity. "He is working on an important canvas today and I thought it best not to disturb him. If we are lucky he will come up before long. He has had no lunch."

It was appalling to think that they might have to sit in this beastly candy-box of a room till dusk, on the offchance that the fires of genius might burn low. But the droop in Vaudreuil's eyelids was a signal that Madame was talking for publication.

And in point of fact scarcely a half hour had passed when Casimir was seen in the court below, emerging from his studio accompanied by a great overgrown dog to whom he was talking with cheerful animation. His steps were soon heard on the stairway, and Mme. Casimir, after calling out a swift injunction to Rosalie to prepare lunch for four, motioned Grover to another chair.

"He will be tired," she explained in a hushed tone, "and he always prefers that seat. He won't even let me have it repaired for fear they will make the

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cushions too hard. They say that Victor Hugo, too, was a great child about such matters."

Casimir proved to be a burly man with big blue eyes, a red face, enormous moustaches, and the hands of a butcher. He greeted Vaudreuil with a heartiness that spread through the fussy parlor and included the young American guest, who was, however, spared the kiss that Léon had received and filially returned.

"B'en, c'est épatant!" he bellowed. *"Quelle agréable réunion! Plus de travail. On chômera ensemble. Allons, less gosses, un verre de vin rouge. Ça donne du courage. Ça change les idées. Rosalie! Rosalie! On a faim."*

Mme. Casimir fetched another glass and placed the bottle before her husband. The gesture, Grover observed, was ceremonious rather than affectionate. She peered through the window at the narrow strip of sky visible above the rooftops. Then in an explanatory tone she told them that the clouds had come back and the light was no longer good.

"Rubbish!" cried Casimir. "There's far too much nonsense talked about the light. A good painter can paint in the dark. When I'm tired of painting I believe in saying so, frankly. Good common energy is at fault far more often than the innocent sun. Is it true?" he asked.

"Perfectly," Vaudreuil acquiesced.

"Is it also true that the men who have the prettiest

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studios and the biggest windows paint the most rubbishy pictures?"

"Perfectly true."

"Then let's drink to their worldly glory and eternal shame!"

Grover drank and set down his glass, hoping that after this propitious start the talk would revolve about art and artists and divulge precious secrets. But it didn't; it revolved about what Rosalie was preparing for lunch and the specific virtues, charms, and possibilities of the lowly onion. Onion soup, with plenty of grated cheese, it was agreed, was a solution of half the human problems. In the words of Casimir, *ça donnait du courage.* French servants are good, Grover reflected, because they have sacred rites rather than menial duties to perform.

When the possibilities of the onion were exhausted, and other articles of diet enthusiastically endorsed, the talk passed to America and Americans, and Grover found himself under the wearisome necessity of defending once more the thesis that Americans were not all solely preoccupied with their dollars, their bathtubs, their skyscrapers, and their jazz-bands. His defence was mechanical and dispirited, for he knew from experience that no amount of argument would alter the continental conception of an American.

Why did he die? Why did he die? He heard the old formula in his mind as he surveyed a mutton chop poised on his fork. The formula was trying to express

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some deep, indefinable disappointment; it was tolling the knell of another illusion,—the illusion that genius dwelt on a mountain top, spoke in esoteric phrases, and lived on nectar and ambrosia.

"What if you went down to the cellar and brought up a bottle of the very special Tokay!" Casimir was shouting to his wife. "One bottle! No, two bottles! What do you say to a sip of some very special Tokay, young friend from America? They don't give you that in Chicago, *hein!*"

Though Grover had never set foot in Chicago, he agreed readily to the truth of the assumption, and was awarded a hearty thump on the back. Ho hit's the rich wot 'as the pleasures, as Max would have said. If Casimir was a fair criterion of genius, he reflected, Max's future was assured.

"But, *mon ami,*" protested Mme. Casimir, "we were saving the Tokay for—"

"*Oui, oui,* good spouse, for the present moment. *Allez! Houp!*"

With a tinkle of keys and a glitter in her eye, Mme. Casimir departed for the cellar. A kind Providence, thought Grover, probably lets her get even by bossing the chauffeur within an inch of his life. Where on earth, he wondered, did they keep him? Was he had in periodically to drive Madame through the Bois, did they motor down to some bourgeois estate in the country for week-ends, or was the chauffeur a mere figure of speech on the tongue of the ironic Vaudreuil. Vaud-

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reuil's irony was a faint overtone which in no way hindered him from chiming in with Casimir. The difference between Anglo-Saxons and Latins, Grover was thinking, is that your Anglo-Saxon tries to pretend that the fine blossoms of his culture grew without the instrumentality of mud and manure, whereas your Frenchman not only acknowledges the fact but delights in it. Both are right and both are wrong. To be a thorough-going specimen of either, an Emerson or a Verlaine, is splendid; but to be on the fence between the two would be a barren fate.

Casimir himself mixed an interminable dressing for a big bowl of salad. Grover was bursting with the food that had been heaped on him, and there was more to come. It was already after four and friends of Mme. Casimir were due for tea.

"*Quelle agréable réunion!*" exclaimed Casimir once more.

"There are times," his wife put in, "When he won't speak to a soul, and all but drives people out of the house."

"There are times," her husband complacently added, "when people are insupportable, and what's the use of having a house of your own if you can't drive idiots out of it. Let them go to a madhouse. Rosalie! *Un bon café! Mais bon! Pas de la boue cuite à l'eau!* And if you wish to rejoin your mother in paradise, no chicory. My good spouse," he confided to Grover, "whose qualities cannot be denied, has a few wrong

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ideas which a lifetime of perseverance on the part of a sorely tried husband has failed to eradicate. One of them is a false sense of economy which tries, by wiles, to insert little doses of chicory into the coffee tin."

"Chicory refreshes the blood," protested Mme. Casimir, and Grover had lived long enough in France to know that phrase by heart.

"Chicory is an abomination," thundered her husband.

I wonder what he'd say, Grover was thinking, if he didn't like the way you were painting a picture.

"Who's coming this afternoon?" Casimir inquired, when Rosalie's coffee had been carefully smelt, sipped, and approved.

It was easy to see that Mme. Casimir had been complacently awaiting this opening. With visible pride and conspicuous self-control she informed him that several persons *très-bien* were doing them the honor to visit them, including Mme. de Saint-Luc, whose patronage—

"*Quoi!*" shouted Casimir. "That old camel! Rosalie! Bring the liqueurs to the studio. My wife will stay up here with the débris of the Empire. We other honest Republicans will vanish into a realm where we belong, and where, on pain of immediate dismissal and eternal damnation you will allow no other mortal to penetrate until further notice."

With a great heaving and pushing of the golden chairs, Casimir arose and beckoned Vaudreuil and

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Grover to follow. The hard glitter had returned to the dark eyes as Mme. Casimir performed the last rites over the devastated table and retired to the corner by the window to resume her knitting.

And now, thought Grover with a sigh of relief, as he followed the other men downstairs and across the cold gray court, now that food is disposed of, perhaps art will have a hearing.

. . . .

"My wife," chuckled Casimir, as he unlocked the door to his atelier, "is not allowed in this room. She calls me Bluebeard. I let her have her way about everything else; but with my work she shan't interfere. Once my paintings are finished, I give her a free hand. She hatches them out into real estate and government bonds."

They were standing in a studio that had the austerity of a tomb. The only furnishings were a dais, two easels, a couch, a few plain chairs, and some pieces of colored cloth thrown over a table on which reposed three lemons and an egg-plant.

Vaudreuil examined the half-finished canvas on the easel and exclaimed over the subtlety with which the painter had worked out the relationship between the objects,—whatever that might mean. To Grover the painting looked like the effort of an imbecile child. To avoid being drawn into the discussion he mounted

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the dais and looked through the high windows into a small rear court beyond which stood a garage.

A young man in oily khaki was mending a punctured tire. That, said Grover to himself, is undoubtedly Mme. Casimir's biological escape from reality. He was stocky but trim, with bright wavy hair, sturdy shoulders, a slim waist, and big flexible hands. Entirely understandable, thought Grover, as he meditated upon Mme. Casimir's means of consoling herself for being excluded from the spiritual summits upon which her husband walked. Casimir has his fine creative raptures, and all she has is a hearty old butcher who spends the best part of his life in a room to which she has no key. Why shouldn't she have a human puppy to pet? As for puppies, he reflected, watching the mechanic whistling at his task, they need to be fed and tended. You can't possess youth without paying for it, and probably it all balances out in the end.

Casimir was bringing out more canvasses for Vaudreuil to look at, and Grover returned to his side, out of politeness.

Upon each canvas was a weird and wonderful pattern. There were nebulous flowers pushing up out of vague, unearthly swamps; rubber beasts prowling in the background. In the foreground there were oppressive black and purple mountains, with lonely trees that looked like gigantic cloves. Canvas after canvas was devoted to eggs, in groups of three or four,—suave, sinister eggs, pinkish, bluish, and mauve, like

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horrid smooth shapes seen in a dream. The pictures were bewildering, and a little terrifying, but as you grew accustomed to them you were conscious of a curious identity which related even the most widely divergent to one another. Grover felt that in the future he would never fail to recognize at sight any picture that Casimir might paint, no matter how far his experimentation might carry him. No standard that one had ever applied to the paintings of other men, ancient or modern, availed one in seeking to judge the present offerings. They obeyed some occult law of their own, but what they sought to express was a complete enigma to Grover.

"Bit by bit I'm getting nearer to my goal," Casimir was saying with earnest complacency, looking less like a butcher now, his head thrown back and his eyes narrowed in judgment before his own handiwork.

"And that goal?" Grover timidly inquired.

"The goal is to eliminate everything, but *everything* between myself and the object I am painting. My goal is the pure sensory reaction caused by the object."

"Then why not photograph it and be done with it?"

"Because the camera has only one faculty; it has an accurate eye, but no sense of touch, no instincts, no fear, no hunger, no desire."

"And no preconceived idea of the object?"

"That's the camera's greatest merit,—that, and it's indifference to the past and future of the object. Preconceived ideas are the greatest stumbling block of all.

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They arise in the mind, which is the great distorter of truth. What the artist seeks to do is to approach his object as innocent of knowledge about it as a baby. The camera approaches it innocent, but insensible. The artist, on the contrary, must be highly sensible. A photograph is a one-sided experience; the object alone is undergoing a sensation, and the camera merely recording. A painting is a duet, a struggle, a love affair; the artist's senses are eagerly absorbing a part of the object and vigorously rejecting other parts. That's why a painting is a definition of personality and why no two good paintings of the same object can be alike."

"I don't think I, for one, could ever restrain my mind from whispering to me and telling me what the object *meant*," said Grover thoughtfully. "I'm afraid, even with hard training, I could never see things as uninterpretatively as a baby."

"So much the worse for your painting," said Casimir, drawing forth another canvas.

But so much the better, reflected Grover resentfully, for my everything else. After all, if cultivation of the mind was a sine qua non of growth (and you were prepared to swear that it was), then the deliberate setting aside of mental processes, even for the sake of pure painting, must be by way of being a degrading occupation, however good sensual exercise it might be. Perhaps I'd better be a philosopher, he concluded sardonically.

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This train of thought was arrested by the last canvas which Casimir had placed on the easel. Involuntarily Grover gave a little gasp of interest, which brought Casimir's eyes swiftly in his direction.

"What do you think of it?" asked the painter.

"I don't know," replied Grover, slowly, then added with conviction, "All I know is that it's by far the best thing you've shown us."

Vaudreuil looked at him in surprise, and made a protest.

"The little American is right," confirmed Casimir.

Vaudreuil was even more surprised. "To me it doesn't compare with the others. I'd like to know what you see in it."

Grover was at a loss for words. "It's a little crazy," he confessed, "But it's an exceedingly authentic sort of craziness."

Casimir laughed and slapped him again on the back. "You've seen it truly," he said, "without any preconceived ideas about it, which no other person who has looked at it has yet been able to do. I showed it to some of the critics, to test them. They shake their heads and make no comment. You, you're a promising child."

"But," Grover protested, wishing he had a right to this praise, "I couldn't tell you why I approve if my life depended on it."

"You needn't," laughed the painter. "Neither could I. But I know it's good. Not only good, but probably

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the best picture I'll ever paint. I won't even show it to my wife. She would sell it to a Dutch banker and invest the proceeds in Roumanian oil or Brazilian coffee. It deserves a better fate."

He restored it to its place in the rack and Grover held in his mind a vivid image of it which he tried in vain, now that he was self-conscious about it, to analyze. Apart from the fact that it had stirred him deeply, making him feel half sick and half excited, the painting was meaningless enough. The central object in the composition he could only have described as a cross between a dynamo and a jelly-fish: something that resembled a bulbous piece of machinery floating at the bottom of a cloudy sea, in which grew soft spindley objects like highly magnified moss-flowers, waving about and reaching up toward some unseen, but potent influence, possibly some sun, possibly some purely symbolic goal.

"What I want to know," he finally said, "Is how you can explain *that* as a pure and simple duet between you and an object, with everything between you and it eliminated."

The painter burst into his butcher's laugh. "*Il est malin, le gosse!*" he remarked, with a note of fatherliness. "Would you understand it any better if I told you that the painting is a pure and simple duet between me and an object held in remembrance from a dream twenty years old?"

"Not at all," replied Grover. "In fact that compli-

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cates it horribly, for it implies the intervention of mind."

"Mind intervened between the time of the dream and the time of the painting, but at the moment of painting, mind was banished, and the senses were in full charge."

Don't kid yourself, Grover was vulgarly thinking, but put his thought into politer words: "That's hard to grasp."

"Don't grasp it, *mon petit*. Instead let's join our cherished Léon, who is bored with us for disagreeing with him, and drop all this useless chatter. Let's see what the slave brought us."

"Cognac and cointreau," Vaudreuil informed him. "Shall I pour it?"

"Some cognac," said Casimir. "Three doubles. And let Rosalie take the cointreau upstairs to the low-lived duchesses. We'll drink to the friendship of the little American who knows nothing about painting!"

In Grover's mind was the echo of a phrase which made him homesick, He saw Sophie Scantleberry's white little face against the Chinese wallpaper of the inn at Concord. "You've seen so little," she was saying, "yet you see so well." A rather pathetic accomplishment.

"I knew you would get on, you two," said Vaudreuil, and Grover was shocked to find himself disliking Vaudreuil for something veiled and calculating be-

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neath the remark. "As you know," Léon added, "I don't bring many people to you."

"You are consideration itself," said Casimir. "What exquisite cognac!"

Complaisance itself, rather, Grover was thinking, a young man with a faculty for guessing what will be agreeable to persons from whom he has something or other to gain, and having guessed, supplying it, or taking steps to have it supplied. And he gets paid for just being Léon Vaudreuil, which, as a matter of fact is a quantity as undefinable as a glass of water. He wondered what it would feel like to get paid for being Grover Thanet,—and how much they'd pay!

It was with something akin to stage-fright that he returned with Léon late that evening to the rue Caumartin. But after sitting a few moments and steeping in the hot, loose, humming atmosphere he relaxed, and with a sensation of immense relief persuaded himself that he passed muster, even if he didn't belong. Going about Paris with Léon was like having the run of a house which previously one had merely encircled on the quiet, peeking into windows. Inside the house were objects and customs which one might privately

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decide were spurious, but as long as one was a guest one behaved accordingly. Léon, too, seemed more elastic away from the dominating presence of the Casimirs. The small group of patrons included several acquaintances of the previous night with whom Grover exchanged nods. The gray-haired woman who had danced the tango with Léon came in with a Spanish-looking man and sat at the next table. Léon addressed her as Marchesa.

"You are going chez Floss afterwards?" she asked, and Léon replied that he hadn't been invited.

"That doesn't matter," said the Marchesa, diving into her vanity case. "Neither was I. Come with us and bring your friend."

"Who is Floss?" inquired Grover when the lady had got up to dance with her Spaniard.

"Floss is a habit to which many restless souls are addicted."

"A bad habit?"

"I should say she was an excellent one, in moderation. People are drawn to her big house as tired birds are drawn to the centre of a whirlwind. Shall we look in at her party and see what she's got?"

"She may not like it. It's very late."

"Not for Floss."

In a short time it became evident that half the patrons of the place were on their way to Floss, and Grover soon found himself wedged into a smart car racing up the Champs Elysées past cartloads of carrots

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and cauliflower on their way to the market. They stopped before an imposing house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and entered.

Judas! exclaimed Grover to himself, livery and everything! as a species of Cossack relieved him of his hat and coat. He had gathered from stray remarks that Floss was a fabulously rich American married to a Balkan prince of sorts.

He mounted a broad flight of stairs behind Léon and the Marchesa and proceeded to a big room, all soft and rosy and buzzing with laughter. Clever looking wrecks in all sorts of elegant and shabby garb were lolling about on plum colored sofas under peach colored lamps. Rich tapestries lined the walls, and under them stood pretty cabinets filled with ancient treasures. At the piano a popular composer of jazz was playing at haphazard while a famous comédienne from the Palais Royal hung over him and tapped out the rhythms with her fingers. A skinny dark woman with a livid face and great eyes shaded with emerald green stared at him and asked her neighbor in clearly audible tones, "Who is that young man with Janvier's tame rabbit?" Grover couldn't be sure whether she wished to poison or abduct him, but he couldn't pursue the matter for he was being introduced to Floss's prince, a handsome nonentity with a good-natured smile.

"I'm just back from a motor trip in the south," he explained to Léon. "It's a curious thing: I've travelled

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in Europe since I was a child, yet I still keep meeting the Rhone in unexpected places. . . Here's Flossie," he added in relief as the princess came heaving into view like a ship whose ballast had slightly shifted. She was a jolly creature with pink cheeks and fluffy yellow hair, too yellow. Clad in pale blue tulle, with many pearls, she looked like a gigantic bon-bon.

"You are superb, Madame," said Léon.

"I begin dieting again next week," said Floss. "If I keep on growing I might get ashamed of myself. . . Go pour yourself a drink, honey," she said to Grover, giving him a hospitable shove. "Bring mother a little ruin, too," she added. "We're going to dance pretty soon. Some wonderful coons are coming to play. . . Only I got to let Mamie get a song off her chest first, God help us. Hey, Mamie!"

A tall girl in a soiled mustard-colored frock came slinking toward them in response to the Princess' yell, and Grover was presented to Mamie Mangum, alias Mignon Mangini. All he could say for her face was that unlike Helen of Troy's, Mamie's would never launch a thousand ships. She had eyes which she herself would doubtless have thought of as intense: to Grover they goggled. Her lower lip shot forward at the expense of her chin, and she made horrid little pushing sounds with her nose. Her fingernails were dirty but red and highly polished, and her mouth was twisted into an enigmatic smile that she had copied

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from the pet of the Palais Royal. All wrong, thought Grover.

"Just wait till she springs her new name on the folks in Idaho Falls," laughed Floss.

"Well," Mamie defended herself, "they shouldn't have sprung Mamie nor yet Mangum on me. Try to get an audition with a name like that! . . . What shall I sing?"

"Anything but Carmen," said Floss positively. "I just can't bear it when you're being seductive."

Mamie went to the piano and communed with her accompanist.

"My sister sent her to me," explained Floss, sitting on a sofa and making room for Grover as he returned with glasses and joined the group around her. "Mamie had got herself as far east as Chicago to study for opera. Her voice was contralto but she discovered that all the good roles were written for sopranos, so by all that's logical Mamie started turning herself into a soprano. You'll hear the result in a minute. I've tried insult and everything, but she goes right on, and you can't help having a sporting feeling about it. What I say is, anybody who wants to sing *that* bad ought to be let."

As Flossie spoke, Mamie commenced to sing, bitterly. To Grover it seemed as though she shifted gears too audibly at the top and bottom of her register. In neutral she wasn't so bad—coasting. I wept in my sleep, she bawled, I dreamed that you were dead.

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That's tough, thought Grover, and the song grew grimmer. Step on the gas, Mamie, he muttered to himself, a little savagely, for he was oppressed by his middle-west surroundings and was assuring himself that he hadn't come to Paris to be tortured by an immigrant from Idaho Falls who should have stayed there and got rid of her voice in the great open spaces.

Floss had departed to greet another influx, Léon was in the toils of the Marchesa, and Grover was left to roam at will, feeling that he was the only guest who hadn't been snapped up by somebody.

When the dancing began he fared somewhat better. Floss, crossing his path, sent him a quick beaming nod, and he began, against his Bostonian prejudices, to like her. "I ought to been born in the days of Rubens," he heard her remark to the Marchesa's Spaniard, who replied with affected ardor, his eyes on Floss's pearls, that he would love to paint her as she was. "Go on, man!" mocked the princess, "you haven't got enough paint."

For his sins Grover had to dance with Miss Mangum, who drooped and swayed and leaned upon him and kept breaking into bad French. Her gestures, like her garments, were borrowed, and not one of them fitted her. The worst of it was, no one came to his rescue, and he had Mamie on his hands for an hour. When he brought her some champagne and sandwiches he found her powdering her long nose with a powder that looked like pollen. That operation achieved, she

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continued to peer into the mirror, humming an aria from Thaïs: *Dis-moi que je suis belle, et que je serai belle, éternellement—éternellement*—which no mirror outside a Coney Island sideshow could honestly do. Meanwhile he had to stand there and hold her plate and glass.

On the pretext of seeking food for himself, he took leave of the princess and fled.

"Come again soon, honey," Floss had called out after him. "Just love to see you."

. . . .

If Americans would only refrain from Americanizing everything they touch, Grover philosophized next day. You no sooner ran down a scent in Paris than it brought you out on a path leading straight to Chicago.

The last few days had not only tired him but estranged him from himself. He needed time to sort and range a mass of impressions. He had parted from Vaudreuil on a vague understanding that they would "see each other soon." The schedule had fallen into the discard and he wasn't sure whether it would be better to draw up a revised version or let circumstances work out a routine for him. He thought of returning to the life class in the rue de la Grande Chaumière and enrolling honorably as a member. But as the vision of all those sophisticated students flashed before him, himself standing ignorant, amateurish, and forlorn in

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their midst, he shrank from it. Better to seek out Casimir quietly and take counsel of him. The distance from his present self to the Grover Thanet who would be deferred to at international art shows seemed almost farther than he had courage to go.

His way of life during these last few days had also depleted his money. Bohemians, he had discovered, will drink up everything you set before them.

A new mood settled on him, a mood as gray and still and sombre as the October skies over the smutty roofs of his humble neighborhood. As the trees in the court had been shedding outgrown scraps of foliage, so had he been dropping his boyish extravagances; and just as the creamy walls across the court were less bewilderingly lacey, so his mental shadows bore witness to the simplification of his daily habits. On the other side of the house, when the laundress in the rue Truffaut began to appear in a brownish-red cloth blouse which had a suggestion of winter about it, he deserted the balcony to read indoors. On cold days he would build a fire in the grate of the *grande pièce* which was anything but *grande* and stretch before it with Mouche and a book. Sometimes Madame would come and sit near him to trim hats.

Hats were a rite with Mme. Choiseul. Three or four times a year she would sally forth to the Galeries Lafayette, spend an afternoon in the millinery department, and order a wide assortment of trimmings and a dozen bare hats on approval. For a week there

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would be a continuous orgy of tryings on and consultations with Grover, M. Courso her *avoué*, the maid (if any, and usually she had just been discharged for reasons which were beyond Grover's comprehension), and the postman,—never with the concierge's wife, for the latter was ex-officio Madame's bitterest enemy. The concierge's wife said horrid things about Mouche.

At the end of the week the obliging delivery man from the Galeries Lafayette would call, and Madame, in a frenzy of indecision, would send back one third of the equipment and retain the balance on extended approval. Ten days later, when the delivery man again made his rounds she would keep and pay for one of the remaining two thirds and proceed, as soon as he had left, to regret her choice and mourn the rejected models.

And as she mourned she would trim, her only artistic principle being a wayward housewifely instinct to use up all her material. But as soon as the last gold rose and the last cluster of grapes had been made fast, their destiny was fulfilled, for Madame never wore a hat from January to December. Her hats were the concrete emblems of her perennial illusions. When she tried them on they settled down over bright visions of holiday excursions to Fontainebleau and Paris-Plage, visits to the Panthéon and Magic City and Longchamps, but for one reason or another "that never arranged itself," and of course her jiggings and joggings to market and to the cinema were negotiated

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in bare head. Accordingly every new hat found its way to a shelf in her wardrobe amongst the accumulated headgear of seasons.

And Grover would mechanically urge her to make a trip to the country and "change her ideas," feeling the while that his own ideas were jelling too hard, that the novelty of being a gentleman at large in a free universe, of being a young New Englander abroad for a purpose and not for a holiday, had worn somewhat thin. Once or twice it struck him as odd not to be preparing for a return to college. With the sense of freedom he had acquired was mingled a tinge of nostalgia for the red brick and the elms of Cambridge, the knobby pavements of Mount Auburn Street, the Japanese ivy at the windows of his dormitory, the smell of roasting chestnuts in front of the bookstore, the snooty, affectionate morning greetings in the street from Eric Peperell and other sleepy classmates, the letters from Rhoda and his mother—especially those.

Often now, after days of wandering through the byways of Paris, he caught himself hurrying back to the rue Truffaut, only to stop short with the desolating realization that in his mind he had been composing a letter to his mother, the only person who had ever completely responded to his whimsical enthusiasms about nothing in particular. What a blessed relief it had been in the old days to pour out one's imaginary woes and imaginary exaltations in chaotic letters home. What pain it caused, now, to be obliged to keep one's

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woes and exaltations to oneself. Every man, he reflected, needs a human blotter; that's why most men marry.

"If you but knew your Freud," Rhoda had once said to him, "you'd realize what an incurable mother-complex you've got."

He had retorted that she had an incurable son one, but privately he was inclined to think Rhoda right, for he was forever unconsciously drawing the maternal out of women.

It hurt him now to think how casually he had accepted the priceless care he had received at his mother's hands. Episodes long since obliterated in memory kept coming back to accuse him of remissness. He recalled one birthday when he had been naughtily ungracious at not receiving the present he had set his heart on: an English bicycle with fancy hand brakes which was beyond his mother's restricted means. He had been unfeelingly offhand about the leather music roll she had chosen for him, had even criticized the size of the monogram stamped on the flap. The following morning, in front of the cyclist shop on the main street of Aldergrove, he had come upon his mother in earnest conversation with the proprietor, asking absurdly feminine questions about the mechanism of the coveted bicycle. He had hurried her away, now stubbornly adamant against the purchase, humiliated and irritated at her public display of ignorance of gears and ball-bearings. Now, thirteen years too

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late, he saw the look of desperate courage in her tired little face as she ignored her own hurt and thought only of how she might contrive to give him the extra luxury. Thirteen years too late it wrung his heart and brought tears to his eyes. And now, with only the *memory* of her unfailing support, he had his own life to construct, upon all too uncertain foundations.

As he went about the altered city,—especially altered for him since the exodus of thousands of trying compatriots,—he caught occasional glimpses of the earnestness that lay beneath the much-advertized frivolity of Paris. He also caught occasional glimpses of the man that dwelt behind his own mask, a man far too serious for the meagre shadow he seemed destined to cast. Each day he divested himself of some prejudice or illusion. Shorn lamb! he half angrily commiserated with himself one afternoon, and on a sudden impulse turned toward the house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

For once it was empty, and when his name was sent up a joyful yell summoned him to a colossal bedroom, where he found the princess in a satin peignoir spraying herself with perfume.

"Just making myself smell presentable," she said, reaching out her plump arm. "How you been honey? Haven't seen you for a dog's age. . . Blue?"

"A little."

"Tell Flossie. How do I smell?"

"Like a bloody drug-store," said Grover.

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The telephone rang, and the princess' arm darted into a little silk and brocade kennel. Despite her many years of residence in the country, she spoke the weirdest pig-latin French Grover had yet heard. Her complete lack of embarrassment about it was refreshing. "*Non,*" she was screaming into the mouthpiece, "*vous viens voir moi* first."

"Miaow!" she said, when that was over. "Last year she lands here broke and begs me to put her up for a week. At the end of three days she's so drunk she tries to climb the wall and get aboard a ship in a picture hanging over the bed."

With a vigorous gesture Floss lighted herself a cigarette and gave her hair a final fluffing, while the cold afternoon sunlight picked out the facets in her diamond bracelets. On a sudden impulse she reached for the empty cigarette case on the dressing table and handed it to Grover.

"You can have that, honey—and for no reason at all."

"For the love of Mike!" he cried. "Are you vamping me?"

To his surprise Floss looked shocked.

"It's very sweet of you," he quickly corrected himself, "but why should *I* have it?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, if it's going to be a moral issue, don't take it," cried Floss. "I just thought you'd like one. It's for your blues," she added, going into the next room to change her peignoir for an out-of-

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doors dress. "I wish I didn't have so darn much figure," he heard her wail.

On her return she proposed going out for tea. "I feel cooped up," she said. "Besides I want to stop at a couple of shops, and I always get stuck for the French for words like hind-side-to. The French don't seem to use 'em. Mamie Mangum tried interpreting for me the other day but got herself all bawled up. Her French is mostly all accent and arm-play. Don't you adore Mamie? She's such a fool. To see her walking around like a mannequin with all the style of a damp handkerchief! Chuck me that hat, honey."

"You're such a comfort, Floss," sighed Grover as they walked downstairs. "For one thing you don't ask questions."

" 'Cause I know all the answers. Life's a gyp."

He looked at her quickly, as he held open the door. She pulled her furs around her neck and got into the car, still beaming.

"Why, aren't *you* happy?"

"Sure I am, but only because I've quit sitting at the window watching for Happiness to come up and call on me. High-hat Fate before she high-hats you, and you're safe."

Grover sat back meditating. Sitting at Floss's side he was reminded of the spring afternoons when he drove with Sophie. How palely orchidaceous Sophie's image seemed when compared with the abundant and luxuriant princess from Chicago, and how chastened,

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seasoned, and resigned the present Grover Thanet seemed when compared with that impossibly amative schoolboy of last May. Have I matured, he wondered, or just got tired?

"Did I tell you I'm having a great big portrait of myself painted?" Floss broke in on his revery. "I'm going to send it to my Christian sister. Not that she loves me so dearly, but she wants my picture on the dining-room wall just the same. So she can say, 'Yes, that's my sister, Princess Grushki'—it sounds so grand. My folks all thought I married poor Paul for his title, but I didn't. I married him for his moustache. And one bright day he went and cut it off because a thin girl at the Marigny didn't like it—it tickled her, I guess—that's how life is. Never mind, I get a lot of fun out of it, thanks to my old man who made the most bathtubs of anybody in the world. When poor Pa died, Etta wore enough crepe to drape the town hall, and under it all she was thinking, Now there isn't anybody left in the family who'll try to eat in his shirtsleeves. Each spring she comes over here to pick a quarrel with me, but I refuse to fight with my only-begotten sister. Very cordial and affectionate, you know, and give her the best rooms and all, then fill the rest of the house with all the lousey artists I know and let 'em raise hell. You'd be surprised how soon your sister leaves for Nice, and that's over for another year."

"The one thing about you I can't make out," he

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remarked, "is your extreme catholicity of taste in respect of people. You know more lost souls than any nice person I ever met."

Floss burst out laughing. "To the pure all things are pure. I'm getting revenge."

"On what, for goodness' sake?"

"On all the Elsie books they made me read," she parried.

Grover was silent. So even Floss's militant bohemianism masked a principle. Scratch an American, even the most scatter-brained, and you'd find a streak of idealism, sometimes straight, sometimes grotesquely bent out of shape. Privately he wondered whether Floss were not also taking revenge on a layer of society that had, to use her own term, high-hatted her. That would account for her none too deferential treatment of the Marchesa, who, whatever her *moeurs* might be, was solidly enough entrenched in the Almanach de Gotha. He was sorry for Floss, as he was sorry sooner or later for all the people he really liked. He thought of certain old ladies in Massachusetts who would run squawking from Floss's presence, yet Floss's character was proof against acids that would reduce them to a white ash.

. . . .

Is it merely because he's French, Grover wondered, or is it because the friends you make when you're grown-up never come so close to you as the friends

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of your youth? Whatever the reason, Léon Vaudreuil remained a curiously negative quantity, though at moments, avid for the kind of information Léon could supply, he still repaired to the cafes where he could be found. There had been occasions when he had gone on with Léon's friends to participate in routs which lasted well into the following day, but in every case his curiosity rather than his paganism had carried him through. The chief satisfaction that he brought away, along with the clinging scent used by the particular nymph that had fallen to him, was the knowledge that there were licenses he could allow himself with impunity. He was now convinced that there was no absolute right or wrong in nature. He was even ready to argue that two and two do not necessarily make four, for in the light of modern chemical science it appeared that if you added two and two *hard* enough some of the mass of the two twos went off into light, heat, or other forms of energy, making the total one and a fraction. In short, he had found out that every man must find reasons to support the conduct into which his strongest instincts lead him, and the sooner one perfected oneself in the art of casuistry the better for one's peace of mind. Of course if your strongest instincts led you to murder your grandmother, the State had to suppress you; but usually they didn't. Like the Princess Grushki, née Florence Mickle of Winnetka, Ill., he had devised the motto: Live and let live,—but the word "live" bore a more

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active and concrete connotation for him now than it had in the classic shades of Harvard, where talk had been rife and living a mere concept.

The Christmas ordeal was over: alone in the rue Truffaut he had thought of the happy family in Aldergrove, sitting on the library floor in a litter of red ribbon and tissue paper and tinsel and chocolates and oranges. For the first time in many years the Marples had not been at the window watching for him and his mother and the black Artelia to cross the snowy path from the little house on the cliff.

The New Year was approaching, and he had drawn up a brand new schedule to take effect on the first of January. The first item was a call on the Casimirs, of whom he had seen much less than he might have done, in view of their consistent cordiality. Casimir still thought of him as an inspired critic; and his "good spouse" still seemed to suspect the lurking presence of a million dollar bill. It's my grand manner, thought Grover.

His proposed visit had a double purpose: first, it would be a New Year's compliment; second, it would be a fitting occasion on which to offer for the painter's criticism a selection of his drawings.

Taking the precaution to set out early in the afternoon, that he might arrive in advance of other visitors, he had the good luck to find Casimir alone.

"My wife went out to distribute foolish gifts among her foolish friends," he explained. "Your flowers will

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enchant her. How kind of you to remember a pair of ugly old bores! Rosalie!"

As Casimir talked, chiefly of the cold weather and the painful effects of absorbing too much acid into the human body, Grover meditated on the fate of an aspiring poet he had met through Léon Vaudreuil. Seeking encouragement in his chosen profession, the young man, who was employed by day in the office of an insurance company, had with great trepidation brought a sheaf of his tender verses to a cynical member of the Académie. The older man, after reading them placidly, had handed them back with the remark: "By all means, go on writing verses, *mon petit—mais, si vous m'en croyez, restez dans les assurances.*"

Would Casimir advise him to remain in—but then there was nothing for him to remain in, except doubt, and that was intolerable.

"I took the great liberty," he finally confessed, "to bring a few of my drawings. Could I show them to you?"

Casimir clapped him on the shoulder and set down his glass. *"Mais, je vous en prie!"* he exclaimed, waving his thick fingers toward the portfolio which Grover was nervously fingering.

"I claim nothing for them," said Grover. "No doubt they are extremely ordinary. But one can't be certain oneself, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Faites voir! Faites voir!"

It was an odd assortment. There was one sketch

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of a tumbledown boathouse at Aldergrove, a portrait of Geoffrey Saint in charcoal done four years since, a half finished sketch of the naked girl in the rue de la Grande Chaumière, several studies of the rooftops in the rue Truffaut, a water color of a wineshop at Chartres (he had meant to do the cathedral!), and other odds and ends.

It was a strain to watch Casimir's noncommital face as he turned from sketch to sketch, and Grover was positively shocked to find which two the master had set aside for closer inspection. The first was a whimsical drawing he had once made from the window of his rooms at Harvard: the brick campanile of a newly erected Roman Catholic church, with a row of saucy birds singing like mad and thereby attempting to drown the pious sound of the bells. The second was the lazy series of sketches of the overfed cat at Suresnes which he had absent-mindedly drawn on the afternoon when his Muse had proved so recalcitrant.

The sketch of the birds and the belfry he had almost decided not to include because of its peculiar personal quality, a quality which he feared would seem trivial to other eyes. The tower had an aggressive slant, as though it were bigotry personified, and the birds were not Massachusetts birds at all, but a flock of winged little Thanets, scolding God in the terms of a Harvard senior. Yet the drawing was more than a caricature: the clouds and the branches, though inadequately ren-

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dered, had an energy and sweep worthy of a more ambitious composition. The longer Casimir regarded it, the more Grover realized, to his pleasure and surprise, that its very amateurishness was in its favor.

"This one shows originality," Casimir finally pronounced. "You have an appealing talent. Not a great talent—a nice little one. These others," and he waved his hand over the discarded heap, "are unconsciously imitative and mean nothing in particular. Your cats are original, too. Excessively feline, they are at the same time very human. You have drawn them not as a cat would see them, but as a man, and a very special man, would see them. You project your own nature into the object you are depicting, and that is well. But you are also capriciously reticent; you exercise a reserve which is no doubt a quality that makes for the strength of your race, but prohibits free expression. A true artist holds nothing back; he invests all and takes all. Half measures make for an attitude, but not for creation. Attitudes are of interest; they are not of importance."

A little chagrined, a little excited, Grover was thinking of de Musset and the pelican. For a moment the old enthusiasm flared up in him. At least Casimir had dug out of the rubbish heap two sketches which were not banal. And Casimir was a howling genius; M. Ripert would no doubt have found more. That indicated that he, Grover Thanet, had it in him to be a painter sui generis. Yet, alas, wasn't the meanest car-

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toonist in the cheapest Sunday supplement sui generis? And when he compared his own faint hopes with the sublime engrossment of a Casimir, his own dicky birds with the overpowering deep-sea dynamos of the man of genius, his flame went down and his body grew cold.

"Show me the next sketches you do," invited Casimir, with sincere fatherliness. "I will tell you truly if I see progress."

To Grover these words had the ring of a knell, but the gratitude he professed was genuine enough. However belittling the verdict might be, Casimir had at any rate thrown light on his path and distinguished his strength from his weakness. Henceforth it should be easier to *see* honestly, whether or not he should prove able to paint what he saw. If I could only make as pretty color combinations on my canvas, he morbidly reflected, as I can make on my shirtsleeves!

Before the sketches were restored to the portfolio, footsteps were heard and Casimir went to the door.

An incredible family of four trooped in, to the accompaniment of festive salvos on the part of Casimir.

"*Quelle agréeable réunion!*" he was shouting, in between crackling ceremonial kisses.

I'd be more at home in Alaska, thought Grover, marvelling at the fate that had plunged him into the heart of such queer goings on.

He was presented to Mme. Racicot, a dowdy woman who looked like a secretary bird. Her eyes were popping and sharp; so, Grover suspected, was her tongue.

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Her husband looked like a bad copy of an inferior portrait of Christ. His face was the color of plasticene, and it was framed with a dank, straggling beard. He wore brown spectacles and baggy black clothes and gave the impression that life in him was sustained only by recourse to lime-water and underdone spaghetti. Each Racicot held a child by the hand: a clay-faced boy of fourteen with absorbent cotton in his ear and a bridge across his teeth, and a little girl who clutched a tiny red leather handbag and kept curtseying in a panic. She also kept dancing from one leg to the other and had to be removed in the interests of hygiene.

After voluble compliments and countless amenities, the Racicots sank exhausted into various golden receptacles, whereupon there began a process of declining a number of beverages. M. Racicot, it appeared, drank no *alcool,* ate no meat, and abjured tobacco. His wife, like the wife of Jack Spratt, had a complementary list of abstentions, with a physiological justification for each, and the hearty, hospitable Casimir was being reduced to despair when the youngest Racicot, now at ease, was overheard to say that she would like some grenadine.

"Ah!" cried their host in relief, and shouted for Rosalie.

Rosalie was engaged in admitting two more visitors, whom Grover had once before encountered in this house: two nipped-in-the-bud souls whose harmless curiosities ran along the roomy grooves set for them

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in the *Mercure de France*,—men who thought in terms of *vin ordinaire* but expressed themselves in the champagne phraseology of Jules Lemaître. One was M. Espil, the editor of a violently Roman Catholic weekly. His features had sagged and were threatening to cave in, and his infantile intensity made Grover feel that the salvation of poor Espil himself rather than that of the nation depended upon the success of his projects for restoring the supremacy of the Church.

The other was Pol Saulieu who sold or tasted coffee for a living but who spent most of his time knight-erring and writing incomprehensible poetry. Before Racicot had taken to composing songs without words, —esoteric songs that a few venturesome concert artists had hummed in public to the vast discomfiture of the musical world,—Saulieu had collaborated with him on a number of lyrics about faded roses and langorous ecstasies. Pol was hirsute and oily; his fingers resembled the necks of gigantic clams; his waistcoat was never too well buttoned; and he had loud convictions about God,—had even located the habitat of Deity. As nearly as Grover could grasp, God dwelt in the small of one's back, and expressed Himself in the form of reflex actions.

Casimir had the satisfaction of pouring strong drink for this pair, and Grover took his leave as four glasses of the horrid pink syrup were being set before the polite and abstemious Racicots.

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Quelle anything but *agréeable réunion!* he was muttering to himself on the stairs.

And M. Racicot, that anaemic little squirt crumpled up in a golden fauteuil from Dufayels with a shawl over his shoulders, was the great man whom Max Bruff had been raving about for two years, the only musician in Europe, so Max averred, who had caught and expressed the spirit of the new age, a genius and a prophet, mothered by Debussy, sired by the later Scriabin, but with a dynamic new idiom of his own—something to do with a revolutionary use of intervals and a new conception of tone. One cold afternoon Grover had listened for hours to Max's renditions of Racicot's piano compositions,—preludes with occult titles and a still more occult purport. To get the purport of this music, Max had told him, a little patronizingly, you must banish from consciousness all the music you had ever heard before and listen with a new ear. Despite a few electrifying flashes, a few moments of inner turmoil, the net result for Grover had been a headache, though, as in the case of Casimir's submarine painting, he could feel the projection of some compelling, undeniably authentic force. That would explain the fast spiritual bond between Casimir and Racicot, than whom two men had assuredly never been more unlike as to externals.

How many times, in the good old safe, hideous, red sitting-room in Cambridge had he argued that only a man with "a beautiful soul and beautiful tastes"

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could turn out a beautiful composition, yet how many times in the last few months had his breathless eagerness on entering the haunt of a creator turned to disgust when the sanctum proved to be either a sort of moral shambles where after drinking a number of *anis del oso's* everybody, after the manner of the characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream, got crushes on somebody other than his or her acknowledged or suspected paramour, or else a musty parlor filled with bourgeois amenities and photographs in plush frames. Yet the oddest part of it all was that when you had learned to pick and reject, to test merit with a solvent that assimilated the spurious ore and left only the metal, you were back triumphantly to your old sophomoric convictions that beauty was engendered by beauty,—degeneracy and gold-legged chairs notwithstanding. It was only that in the first reaction one had mistaken the unlovely parts for the whole. True to one's heritage one had assumed that Beauty ceased to be beautiful when there were spots on her garment. Why, a splash of blood on the white doorway of a house in Chestnut Street would be, in the eyes of Massachusetts, a hideous blemish, not because red was ugly against white for it wasn't, but because Boston loved the respectability proclaimed by spotless doorways, and abhorred murder. Whereas beauty had no more to do with respectability and murder than—oh, than digestion had to do with the price of butter. The disillusion and the discouragement was a matter

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of mental, moral, physical, and romantic bias; once you had eliminated prejudice and prudishness and agreed on the angle of vision, on the definition of terms, the old theses over which, as Rhoda Marple had once remarked, you had been wont to muss your hair and talk yourself blue in the face till daybreak, held water perfectly. And he could almost wish to be back in the Harvard Union to display this new feather he had got in his cap. In the old days he had only passionately felt he was right; now he passionately and with a tinge of bitterness, knew.

He was skirting the Buttes Chaumont and at a turn in the road caught sight of Mme. Casimir, leaning forward in her car to give an instruction to the chauffeur she had once brought home from the model market. There was a softer light in her eyes than the usual glitter. Grover wondered what the chauffeur had got for New Year's and hurried on, picturing to himself Mme. Casimir's arrival at home: the two men of genius talking like a house afire about their symptoms,—their wives, with excessive amiability, falling into a discussion of the immorality of cooks, eyeing each other with a deadly accuracy, while the little Racicots nibbled cakes and viciously pinched each other under the table.

Idly he wondered what had become of Max Bruff. The essential cheapness of Max showed up clearly in contrast to the patient sufferings of the man to whom he paid such fervent tribute. Though Max had a very

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real gift and incredible agility, he was without the capacity for martyrdom. From the bitter musical truth of a Racicot, Max and his ilk scooped off and served up the sweet froth, catching the public fancy with it and enjoying an immediate vogue. But the public, after the first exhilaration, would tire of the froth and turn to Racicot for the real beverage. By that time Max would be rich and Racicot would be under the sod, his resting place marked by a heap of bead and wire wreaths.

And his gouty old friend Casimir, tenacious of life, fondly recalling *réunions agréeables* with his musical confrere, would say, with a pregnant shake of his massive head, not what a Harvard man's notion of a genius would be expected to utter, but just what a sorrowful janitor might say, *"Ce que c'est que de nous!"*

Amen, reflected Grover—and Selah.

To see the force of Casimir's counsel was one thing: to apply it another. As Grover turned from subject to subject, from still-lifes to portraits of Mme. Choiseul and Mouche,—which Madame confidently expected to see one day on the walls of the Luxembourg and for

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that reason had put on all her jewelry,—he nursed a growing resentment against Casimir's verdict. If there was one thing by which he didn't want to be identified, it was a nice little talent. That seemed to doom him to the role of an eternal gracer of tea tables. Cast down by his lack of progress, filled with frustration, out of touch with himself and life, he decided one cold afternoon of February to look up Léon. For weeks he had been lying low, eating in cab-drivers' resorts, washing his own socks and handkerchiefs, all because of his Boston bank's maddening accuracy in arithmetic. Now that his American clothes had worn thin it was not going to be so easy to make ends meet on his small income. But this morning a cheque had arrived, and he had rushed out to draw some cash. In the same mail had come a letter from Rhoda Marple, the first in months. She announced that she was departing for Egypt with the Pearns,—"and you know what I think of mummies," she had commented, in a tone of despondency which chimed with his own. The only mitigating circumstance of her journey was that Mrs. Peperell, who would be in Cairo, would see to it that she had an opportunity to go about with young people.

Not a word about Eric, Grover noted, as he walked to the apartment facing the Parc Monceau. The most bothersome as well as the most puzzling element in his relationship with Rhoda was the fact that he could never reconcile himself to the thought of her marrying any man he knew, though heaven was his witness that

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he didn't want to marry her himself. There was no more than a guest room for good old Rhoda in the house he was painfully building for himself.

He mounted the stairs at a run, no longer timid in this pretentious building, and found the door to Léon's apartment wide open. Doubtless the servant had descended on some errand. With a casual knock he walked in and crossed the lobby to the salon. This room he had never entered without experiencing the same sensation of a psychic presence, which, for convenience, he had decided to attribute to Noémi Janvier. A woman of such vibrant energy, he told himself, couldn't help leaving an electric charge behind which would remain potent for many months.

His mind on guard against this psychic force, he was all the more startled when he beheld a strange girl seated on the piano, swinging her legs either impatiently or nonchalantly, he couldn't make out, for her face was as smooth and expressionless as a stone.

For a moment he stood transfixed, then hastily excused himself for so rudely intruding, and stood ready to retreat, if desired.

"*Entrez donc, Monsieur.* You are looking for my brother?"

"I was looking for M. Vaudreuil."

She nodded her head. *"C'est le même."*

"But I didn't know he had a sister!" exclaimed Grover.

"No?" The implication which Grover read into her

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tone was that there might be many things about Léon he didn't know.

Then he recalled that Léon and a sister had played the children in A Doll's House to an unappreciative audience in Lyon.

He was extremely ill at ease. Something in the girl's calm surveyal of him made him feel weak and maladroit. If she had asked him to sit down he might have overcome the feeling, but apparently that amenity hadn't occurred to her. As for her, she hadn't budged from her strange perch, except to reach for a cigarette.

At length, with an explosive little sigh of impatience, she pulled off her dark blue béret and Grover took the liberty to place himself in a corner of the sofa, while she smoothed her hair. As he watched her his feeling of embarrassment took a strange turn; it was becoming a feeling of fascination. Her hair was like corduroy in color; and it had the same dull sheen. A mixture of gold and fawn, as though gold had been painted on where the light ought to strike and then the head had moved out so that the light really struck the brown patches and the gold was in shadow. The effect was dull, rich, mottled, bizarre. The gold and fawn shades stole into her cheeks and behind her ears. She was all in shades of ivory, honey, amber, and amethyst. For her deadish white skin the only adjective Grover could find was "callow," which he immediately rejected as absurd. Her body, sheathed in a

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dark blue tailored costume, was as strong and slender as something winged.

She looked up and caught his gaze rooted upon her. For a moment her expression seemed to say, Well, I hope you'll know me the next time you see me, then it relented and her brows raised slightly, rumpling her smooth forehead into an almost comical frown. Her eyes were intelligent, grayish in color, if one could judge by the peculiar light in the room, but the under-lids seemed to press them half shut, as though the eyes disliked to be left unprotected. These eyes seemed to be the jealous, exacting guardians of all her features. They saw everything but begrudged any acknowledgment of understanding. In consequence, when she frowned, or even casually spoke, there were tiny folds at the corners of her eyes and lips which served as a warning. This girl *will* say what she means, in spite of us, they announced.

Grover had felt all this but had not had time to formulate it. He saw merely a firm, squarish face which again surprised him by breaking into a smile, a broad but tucked-in smile, incongruously pleasant when contrasted with the hardness he had first noted and with the annoyed frown, which it hadn't quite dislodged. Her countenance was now a mixture of clouds and sunshine, as though while the stranger who had walked in was engaging enough to arouse a spark of friendliness, still he was *not* Léon, and she was

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waiting for Léon, in fact tapping her fingers in annoyance at his tardiness.

"The servant said he had just run out to telephone," she explained.

"The door was open when I came in. Perhaps she has gone to fetch him."

But this theory proved false, as the door presently slammed and the servant could be heard in the kitchen.

"She's none too amiable," said Léon's sister.

"*I* am very amiable," said Grover. "Perhaps I could be of some service."

She braced her feet against the arm of an ottoman, her hands clasped firmly on the edge of the piano-top. They were strong white hands, as white as though they had been soaked for hours in sea water.

"I'm in a very bad temper," she confessed.

"It suits you beautifully."

"Don't be silly," she said, and meant it. The toss of her head which accompanied the reprimand proved that her gray eyes were capable of occasional shafts of color.

"Well, since we're both waiting for Léon you might be nice enough to tell me what your bad temper is about. Of course I could go out and wait in the kitchen with the unamiable cook, if that would help."

"*Mais, regardez donc!*" she cried dramatically, twisting her leg and pointing to the back of her stocking.

"Is that all?" asked Grover in genuine surprise,

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though there was no denying the fact that the great jagged tear in the silk was a serious blemish in her otherwise faultless turn-out.

"All! All! And you expect me to get across Paris like that? *Bah, merci alors!*"

"I don't expect anything," said Grover humbly. "But why not make for the nearest shop?"

She heaved a great sigh of forebearance. "Because I had no money with me! Now do you see?"

With the best will in the world it was hard to take the situation tragically. Indeed when he reflected upon Léon's chronic insolvency, it harbored an element of comedy. Still the bills of the Vaudreuil family must get themselves paid by somebody.

He was about to suggest a solution, one of several that occurred to him, when she hopped down from the piano and went to look out the high window. Coming back at once and stopping before his chair, she amazed him by saying, "You're far too good for Léon; what the devil are you doing here?"

"Trying desperately not to bore you," he confessed with a grim rush of words.

She paid no heed to them, but again surveyed her stocking. "Oh-h-h!" she was crying, in a low tone of horror. "*Que c'est ennuyeux!* . . . Where do you suppose he is? It's always been like that—if at any time I needed him, and it hasn't been often, he wasn't there."

A dozen questions had arisen in Grover's mind as

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to the family of this strange brother and sister; the chances were that they would never be answered. The much-talked-of reticence of Anglo-Saxons, he had learned, was as nothing compared to the reticence of a Latin.

"How did it happen?" he inquired.

She explained that she had been on her way to a studio in Montparnasse. In changing omnibuses at Place Clichy her heel had caught in a step, and the damage had been done when she tried to save herself from a fall. "I scratched my leg too," she added, "and it hurts. . . . The worst of it is I shall be very late for my appointment."

By this time he liked her so well, or rather he was so completely under her spell, that he dreaded for her the postponement of her appointment, whatever it might be,—and it was as likely as not an amatory one, Paris being Paris.

"I think it is useless to wait for Léon," he said. "Won't you let me advance the necessary sum?" Thank heaven, he could.

"Oh, Monsieur, that would be noble of you."

"We can take a taxicab to the shop. Have you any preference?"

"Yes—the nearest."

He handed her the béret she had left on the piano.

"What's your name?" she asked.

He told her. "And yours?"

"Olga."

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They drove to the Avenue de Clichy. "Everything on this street is lamentably cheap," she said. "But anything will do."

They got out at a shop which displayed half its wares in the open. When Olga had picked out a pair of stockings which suited her she retired into the shop to effect the change.

She returned smiling, her merriment held in by the odd little folds at her eyes, and Grover walked with her as far as the bus corner.

"Don't tear these," he cautioned her as the bus was stopping.

"I'd do it in a minute," she threw out at him, over her shoulder, "if I thought it would gain me another nice little friend like you."

"There aren't any more like me," Grover declared, envious of the blackguardly rest. "The next one wouldn't let you off so easy."

She laughed, and the little folds made a valiant attempt to throw her last remark off at a tangent. "Sometimes one is lucky, sometimes not."

It was only after the bus had borne her away beyond recall that he reflected, with a start: which way did she mean that?

. . . .

If he had been depressed when he entered Léon's apartment, he was more than ever depressed on returning toward the rue Truffaut. It seemed to him

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that some mysterious principle, perhaps inherent in his own temperament, but none the less potent for that, was operating against him. Love, pleasure, the joy of work, the sense of contributing a quota to the profitable activities of the universe, of helping to further the aims of God,—all were denied him. In the place of such satisfactions was the burden of his own uncertainties. And the vision of Léon's sister, that astonishing apparition, instead of bringing him a joy that another man would have known how to wring out of it, merely taunted him.

He could not bring himself to return to the flat. Mme. Choiseul was under the weather. Her *avoué* had bungled some business for her, something to do with interest on a mortgage, and she had come out in red spots and taken to her bed, leaving a half-finished paint job on the kitchen floor. The apartment was vaguely redolent of woe and indigestion and turpentine and perfidy nobly, if very vocally, borne with; it held no charm for him. He turned on his heel and walked aimlessly, through the Place Clichy, along the cold, sordid boulevards of Montmartre, his feet damp, his mind dizzy, bewildered, crushed, and resigned. He dreamed of a Sophie Scantleberry twenty years younger, and cursed the fate that hadn't allowed them to be contemporaries.

The street lamps were making great dirty yellow moons in the greenish twilight. He had gone as far as the Place de la République and turned into a narrow

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side-street where his attention was caught by the semi-clandestine character of a dingy bar which bore the legend, in half obliterated lettering: Café International. International dregs, if anything, he reflected, and partly out of curiosity, partly out of weariness and a desire to hide, he entered and sat in a dim corner, ordering a hot grog to counteract the effects of his chill.

A handful of sinister but harmless young men sat about the room and he overheard scraps of strange talk,—talk which accorded with the gaudy and shabby purple crepe paper roses sewn upon the orange cotton lampshades. A smoky, smutty, indefinably illicit rendezvous. Except for the inevitable fat woman enthroned at the caisse, there was only one other woman in the dive, and she seemed oddly out of place, though apparently quite at home.

She was a street girl, and to judge by her neat costume and clear blue eyes, a reasonably successful one, but to Grover's mind, which today was exceptionally alive to every feminine manifestation, she was bafflingly different from the creatures who were forever begging cigarettes and whom one was forever sending about their business. For one thing there was no sign of a challenge in her candid regard. The eyes met one steadily enough, but there was in them a light which he could only describe to himself as "good."

At Harvard a popular professor of literature had railed against the sentimentalists who confused the

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psychology of saints and prostitutes. As Grover watched this girl sipping her cherry brandy he diverted himself by confuting the arguments of his professor. Sooner or later life riddled all academic theories, and sooner or later one found oneself willy-nilly on the side of the sentimentalists. At any rate here was a little prostitute capable of something very like saintliness,—Grover was ready to swear to it. No vice was unfamiliar to her; possibly no vice repellent, yet at this moment her countenance, like a mirror which remains unsoiled by the murkiest of its reflections, conveyed an impression of essential virginity.

As the strong, hot grog stole through him, his fancy became abnormally active and wove a background for the tidy, blond girl in the corner. He pictured her alone in a little room, mending her clothes, possibly with glasses on to save her eyes, sipping teaspoonfuls of a bitter tonic to save her health, preparing a fortifying breakfast of milk and eggs, tucking away the earnings of the previous night, making a laborious calculation of the amount still needed to buy herself a coat trimmed with fur, writing an illiterate postcard to a more fortunate friend whose lover had carried her off to Monte Carlo, giving a final touch to her lips and eyebrows, a little dab of polish to her shoes, pausing before going out to exchange the time of day with the concierge's wife, partly from policy, partly from a craving for some respectable woman's good will.

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Any adjective adequately descriptive of her, he reflected, must have started with a "w". Wistful, winsome, weary all applied, yet these adjectives bore merely a family resemblance to some as yet uncoined word that would define her identity. Perhaps the adjective was uncoined because the girl herself was in a sense uncoined. She was ready to be minted, yet the moment she should become stamped and put into currency at one irremediable valuation her most precious quality must inevitably be lost. Physically she had been in currency for some time,—on that score there was no possible doubt,—but some elusive quality, the quality that set her apart not only from women of her class but from all other women, had never been handled; that, to Grover's intuition, was equally patent.

Once more she looked up from her glass and met his gaze, steadily but not boldly. To his dismay then he heard his own voice saying to her, "May I offer you a drink?"

Calmly, a little hostilely, almost shyly, and with only a moment's hesitation she accepted, and he crossed to her table, conscious of a renewed buzz of chatter in the room. One of the neighbors had the temerity to call out, teasingly, almost affectionately, "*Vas-y, Marthe. Enfin tu t'es appliquée un Américain. Demandes-lui un manteau de fourrure; il fera frais ce soir.*"

"*Ta gueule!*" retorted Marthe, unmoved.

To Grover it seemed that the young men were on

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Marthe's social level—in a sense colleagues. This impression floated through his mind as he exchanged commonplaces with her. In her remarks there was no indication of an attempt to be superior to her surroundings, but as she talked the immaculate quality came through even more arrestingly than ever. With the point of view of the gutter she displayed the instincts of a lady. Even the daintiness of her handkerchief, the freshness of her linen collar and cuffs, the care she had given to her nails were indicative of self-respect rather than coquetry. She had admitted, with a laugh quite free from shame, that she was engaged in *la lucrative inconduite* and that she was one of those creatures who can be obtained "by the dozen," —to which Grover's honest retort was that she was a specimen apart.

Not the least unusual manifestation was her insistence on offering him a drink in return for his. On a sure instinct he accepted, and was glad he had done so when he saw the pretty little flare of pride in her eyes as she gave the order,—not imperiously, but gently, almost confidentially.

"You don't look French," Grover remarked.

"I'm Alsatian," said Marthe. "Can't you tell from my accent! On the street they call me the milkmaid! When they're not calling me cow!" she added with a ribald laugh.

"Are you married?" asked Grover, unable to resist at least one intrusive question.

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Marthe looked at him for a moment, on guard, then replied tactfully, "My man was a cook at a big hotel in Lucerne. We have not been together for years."

"Was he unkind to you?"

"He promised me the blue dome of heaven," said Marthe, then added with irresistible merriment, "and all he gave me was a little dark cloud. . . But it wasn't his fault. Men are like that. They can't help it. What do you expect!"

"I? Nothing."

"*Eh bien! Santé!*" And they drank to their friendship.

Her age was a puzzle. At moments she looked not more than eighteen, with her smooth skin and fine hair. At other moments, especially when she drooped forward on the table, she looked thirty-five. Once she left him and, a few moments later, came back into the room strangely refreshed. He had seen into enough back-rooms of Paris to know that she had been sniffing cocaine.

Across the room in the murky light he had been observing a white-haired old man with tired eyes and the bearing that is possible only to a man accustomed to homage. In answer to his inquiry Marthe mentioned the old man's name, whereupon Grover realized that he was looking at a great philosopher, a man whose dicta had been reverently cited to him by more than one of his professors. With the old man was a tall, sightly youth whose eyes were jocund, whose

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clothes were of the best, and who looked pleasantly brainless enough to be the complement of Kant himself. Instead of being awe-struck by the words of wisdom which must have been issuing from the mouth of the sage, the young man picked them up and tossed them back with a charming, perverse flippancy.

Youth, Grover was thinking, has the right to be rude; it's so indispensable. All the more right in that youth is too young to know how to drive a bargain. When its clothes are bought for it, it doesn't see that its soul is being taxed on the side.

"My best friend," Marthe was telling him, "is an old old man,—older than that one—a Vicomte. He comes here to see me three or four times a year. He wants nothing of me at all—he has never wanted anything—I have never seen him outside this room. He says it is my hair he comes to see. He makes me take off my hat so that he may stroke it. Everybody in the room giggles, but he doesn't notice. Then he weeps a little and gives me heaps of money, and goes away. And I know he will come back."

"Have you no girl friends?"

Marthe shrugged her shoulders, thereby dismissing her own sex.

"I have a friend who comes Fridays. It's her day off. She is an English Miss in a rich family. She hopes to reform me," and Marthe burst into a rippling laugh. She was not scornful of the good Miss's futile zeal, but genuinely appreciative of its humorous

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aspect, as well as affectionately tolerant of her friend's quixoticism.

"You are here often?"

"Every day. I never go to work before midnight."

"Then I shall certainly see you again," said Grover, getting up from the table.

"*Au plaisir, Monsieur,*" said Marthe, giving him her hand with a return of her impersonally polite manner.

The encounter had cheered him strangely, and as he made his way homeward he marvelled once more at the *ewige weibliche*. In all the women he had known and liked there was that unaccountable, deep, lovely goodness which, while often blind and occasionally complicated by opposing and destructive instincts, seemed to be at the source of all their actions. Why don't I apply a woman to myself, he chided himself querulously, in the slang of Marthe's cafe. He was tired of making excuses for not having a *bonne amie*. Mme. Choiseul was almost rude to him because of his lack of amorous complications. "*Voyons!*" she had one day protested, "it's not healthy to be so much alone. Take a little friend: you have only to make a sign and you can have your choice!"

All I need, he reflected, in supreme discontent, is a burning love affair. But life put so many obstacles in one's way. The ones you wanted you couldn't have; the ones you could have didn't tempt you.

In bed with his light turned off he tried to recapture the image of the girl seated on Noémi Janvier's piano,

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but it escaped him. Even the image is unattainable, he complained.

But just before he fell asleep it returned with striking clearness and suddenness, in the form of the expression of hardness he had noted when he first saw her and she had mistaken him for her brother. The softer, gentler, friendly expression refused to come back for him.

. . . .

For several days, at dusk, he returned to the dingy Café International. Marthe was always in her corner, always tidy and fresh and shy. She arrived between five and six each afternoon, after breakfast, and left promptly at midnight.

It was a great comfort to talk to Marthe, a great comfort to know one person to whom one could confess one's darkest secrets without losing caste. The society of these outcasts solaced him. If he did not share their weaknesses, he at least shared with them the sense of being a misfit, coming in as he often did after many hours of toil before the easel he had set up in his bedroom.

His friendship with Marthe was delicate, yet clearly defined. Its peculiar nature was soon comprehended and respected by the habitués of the cafe. It had never occurred to him to speak to Marthe otherwise than he would have spoken to a lady, and it soon became apparent that Marthe had determined to keep him on

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a pedestal. Not even when she had been far gone under the influence of drink or drugs had she overstepped the boundary he had unconsciously set. With the others she might exchange hilarious obscenities, but with him, except for licenses of vocabularly and topic appropriate to their setting, her behavior was blameless, her tact perfect. In the course of time it was no secret that Marthe had fallen wildly in love with her polite cavalier, but there was a tacit understanding that she was to be allowed to play her own game as she saw fit. To Mme. Annoni, the woman at the caisse, Marthe had made full confession. "It's better as it is," she had concluded, in tears. "I suffer, but what exquisite suffering! Promise never to let him know."

Mme. Annoni had promised, and promptly reported the confession.

One evening, after a day devoted to experimental painting in accordance with technical hints he had obtained from a master at the Beaux Arts to whom Casimir had recommended him, Grover arrived late at the cafe. Somewhat the worse for her favorite cherry brandies, of which he suspected her of having consumed more than her usual number out of disappointment at his absence, Marthe was on the point of leaving, and he begged her to remain a while longer.

"Why should I wait?" she laughed, a little hysterically. "What am I to you? Why don't you spend

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your time with women who have something you want?"

Grover shrugged his shoulders with much the same implication that had characterized her own disposal of his inquiry as to her women friends.

"It gets on my nerves," she protested, sitting at his side and calling for the waiter with a tinge of boisterousness which was unlike her.

"I'm sorry," said Grover wearily. "You needn't wait if you would rather go."

Marthe sat in silence, and when he turned to look at her he found her weeping. He took her hand in his and stroked it.

Marthe was impatient with herself. As quickly as she could she regained control, and asked him in such a matter of fact tone what he had been doing all day that he laughed.

"Painting bad pictures," he replied.

"Of a woman?"

"No. Of a camelia."

She was biting her lips, but suddenly threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, smiling brightly through her tears. *"Je t'aime, va!"* she cried, and snuggled close beside him, listening to the tick of his watch, caressing his hands in her old trustful manner, her foot beating a quick nervous tatoo in time to the wretched music that was emerging from the back of the room. This hysteria was a characteristic reaction from the fits of extreme depression to which she was

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subject. One of these days, Grover was thinking, she will break under one or the other of the two moods. To dwell upon the future in store for her was intolerable.

"Last night I had a priest," Marthe was inconsequentially telling him. "If you had only seen him cross himself!"

Grover failed to join in the outburst of laughter which this anecdote, overheard by their immediate neighbors, occasioned, and Marthe shook him, as if to rouse him out of his moodiness.

"I must go to work," she remonstrated. "It's late."

He paid for the drinks and walked out with her. At the corner Marthe stopped, in embarrassment. He assumed that they had reached her regular beat and that she was tactfully taking leave of him.

Being unusually restless he was unwilling to part from her. "Come a little way with me," he pleaded, and suddenly she became docile.

They walked for a long time in silence.

"You're in the moon," she remarked discontentedly.

As a matter of fact he might well have been on another planet so little did he feel himself in contact with his kind. The man in his shoes was a stranger to him, and an indifferent one. The little figure walking forlornly at his side moved him to pity. In a sense he felt responsible for her. A doom was over her which he could certainly not prevent, but which he felt he should at least try, in some manner, to mitigate.

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His moodiness had chastened her, killed the hilarity that had been in her manner earlier in the evening. He guessed that there were still tears for her to shed before the night was over. It was grossly unfair, he chided himself, to have created a difficult situation for her and then leave her to solve it. As they made their way along the crowded boulevards it was strange to realize that if he were to stop and suggest on the spot that they leave at once for South America she would agree as fatalistically as if he had suggested another cherry brandy. And here he was unreasonably detaining her when she might be forgetting her woes in the arms of some nameless passer-by.

At length they found themselves before a big theatre where a mass of bizarre figures were arriving for a fancy dress ball.

"Oh, que c'est joli!" cried Marthe with a mercurial change of mood. She was now like an enraptured child before a windowful of dolls. "Let's stop and watch them, *veux-tu?*"

They paused at the edge of a carpet spread from the doorway to the curb. Devils and cardinals, shepherdesses and South Sea Islanders scurried past, shivering in the night air.

"Voilà Colombine et Harlequin qui s'amènent," said Marthe in glee, and Grover smiled at the sight of a fat, fair-haired man squeezing himself out of a taxicab and fumbling absent-mindedly in his enormous tights for a pocket which wasn't there. Columbine, in a thin

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cloak, was capering about him and urging him to hurry. "Your money is inside your shirt," she reminded him.

Suddenly, her attention attracted by a remark of Marthe's, Columbine caught sight of Grover, and her eyes, from behind their black domino, scrutinized him a moment. Then she dove forward and withdrew some notes from the hand of her corpulent escort.

"There! For the stockings!" she said, placing the money in Grover's hand.

For a moment he stood dumb, not taking it in. Then as her heels flicked past and she vanished through the doors of the theatre, he knew, with an elated throb, that it was Olga.

"*Mais!*" he exclaimed, looking from the money in his hand to the girl at his side. He had fallen out of the moon with a thud that dazed him.

Marthe's steady eyes had seen more than his own. They were now saying for her what her lips would have been too proud to utter: So that's your type!

He heard a cold little voice. "I've come far enough with you. I must run away. *Bon soir!*" and she was off before he could stop her.

This desertion annoyed him. He was also annoyed at Olga, though tingling with a romantic excitement. Olga had come back to him. Perhaps she existed in reality after all. Perhaps—

But her ponderous friend?

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It made you self-conscious in the extreme to attempt to be true to a nice little talent, and week by week Grover's drawing was becoming worse, if anything. During this difficult interval, he argued, he might as well pick up all the technical tricks he could, and, weary of trying to express his immortal soul through messy renderings of what he could see from the window of his bedroom, he gave himself over to a course with the master at the Beaux Arts and afternoons at the life class in the rue de la Grande Chaumière. At least his pencil and brush strokes were becoming more professional; he had advanced to the point where he could place a line or a curve fairly accurately at the first shot, and his sketches no longer had the blurred, fuzzy, tentative and rubbed-out appearance they once had had.

His social energy was being economized too, for he dissipated less time in the cafes and studios. Léon, for whom he had eagerly searched after the encounter with his sister, was out of town; there was a report that he had gone to Cannes. As Grover had read a news item to the effect that Mme. Janvier had returned from America and was resting at her villa on the Riviera, there was an obvious deduction to be made.

One March afternoon he stood at the window of the *grande pièce* and gazed down at the little laundry, at the end of his resources. To remain indoors seemed futile, to go out more so. Hanging before his eyes was an old-fashioned translucent portrait on glass of

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a dark man with a patriarchal beard, the sole reminder of Mme. Choiseul's one moment of bliss. Madame had two egos; one of them endlessly aspired, the other took its twin by the hand and led it to disaster. For every will o' the wisp in her life there had been a substantial bog. As a little girl she had been obsessed with a desire to be able to blow her nose as mightily as the farmer who sat ahead of her in church, in her native Luxembourg, and with that lamentable object in view she had tried to enlarge her nose by filling it every day with cherry pits. One day, after she had established a record, one of the pits declined to come out. It had got lost under the bridge, but soon revealed its whereabouts by raising a lump like a radish, and the little girl had to be taken to the doctor to have the pit extracted, then to the curé to be admonished for her vanity, and all these trials had left her still unable to rival the farmer in church.

Her whole life had been like that. At the age of seventeen she had come to Paris and entered a milliner's shop from which she had been honorably rescued by the proprietor of a doubtful hotel, whom she married not because she loved him but because she was afraid he might kill her if she didn't. After fifteen years of oppression he died and left her a little money of which she was slowly but surely bereft by her men of affairs. She set up a pension of her own, but her pensionnaires neglected to pay their bills, finding it more to their purpose to borrow her money. She

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reached the age of forty, and her prospects were of the dreariest, when Prince Charming made a belated appearance in the form of an elderly government official of Madagascar who had come to Paris to take a vacation and see the Great Exposition. He had plenty of funds, a boyish heart, and a quite Madagascan intensity. Madame, who had never been able to resist prose, was not likely to resist the first breath of poetry to be infused into her troubled life, and she was only too happy to allow herself to be feted, to be taken to restaurants and theatres, not to mention the exposition and the new Eiffel Tower. They went on excursions to Ostend and Strasbourg, and ended by becoming engaged. Madame was in raptures. The fiancé was to return home and prepare a mansion, and she was to follow in two months—by freight, as Grover put it to himself.

But Paris, Madame, the Eiffel Tower, and especially the return sea voyage proved too much for the brave old gentleman, and he died incontinently upon his arrival at Mozambique. Madame was in the midst of settling her affairs and assembling a trousseau when she received the news. In desolation she retired with the remainder of her fortunes and furniture to the rue Truffaut,—that, reflected Grover, is when the big clock stopped forever,—and hung the translucent portrait of her dead gallant in the front window. He was a standard by whom Madame measured all humanity, chiefly her men of affairs, to their great disadvantage.

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This afternoon she had come out in red spots again and taken to her bed. A new maid, the tenth or twelfth since Grover's advent, was making sullen journeys from the kitchen to the bedroom with cold water and vinegar. Her manner let it be known that she thought her mistress's head was aching on purpose.

Through his own head, as he stood desperately at the window, idle, unrelated thoughts were wandering. Rhoda Marple wouldn't have let a stranger buy stockings for her; she would have waited for Father, or John, or Spike Daggett, or she would have had enough in her purse, or she would have bought a reel of silk and a needle and mended the tear, or rather, she wouldn't have torn the stocking at all because she wouldn't have been rushing across town alone to keep a squinty appointment in a studio. Was Olga a model? Probably not, for it had been late in the afternoon, and models functioned in the light of morning. Though what a joy to portray that cool, clear, white, firm flesh with its shadows of honey and amber.

Sur son teint plus blanc que le lis
On voit fleurir la rose.

As he hummed the tune he wondered whether he was being morbidly sentimental. Mme. Choiseul was right: it was unhealthy to be so much alone, unhealthy to keep conjuring up the picture of a girl who was no more to him than a flitting vision. Rather than remain in his present slough he ought to force himself to be

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sociable. He thought of Marthe, and he thought of Floss, and without enthusiasm cast the die in favor of the latter. The princess's friends were sometimes trying, but they provided food for thought. Floss kept open house for "interesting" people,—that is to say, people who were like the girls in Frances Marple's ditty, of whom one could dance and one could sing and one could play the *violing*. For Floss anything printed was literature; anything played was music; whatever interesting people fabricated was art,—and she adored art. If her guests were wicked, as well as interesting, no harm done, for Floss relished a faint odor of sin. If they were neither interesting nor wicked, but had clean faces and were acquainted with somebody, that sufficed. He envied Floss her easy enthusiasms.

When he arrived in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne he found the usual Sunday afternoon crush. By twos and threes Floss's lost souls came straggling in and her salon was a babel of dialects including many bad versions of French and English,—rather a pleasant babel till it struck on that flat, vacant ledge of mind laid bare by the nervous fatigue of too much observing, when the babel became as meaningless and disagreeable as an equivalent volume of rattling kitchenware. In one such moment, when he was sitting on a puffy sofa between a bilious poet, who was allowing himself for a monetary consideration to be divorced in favor of a senator, and an aging actress who was urging the poet

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to write her a tragedy, Grover looked up to see Floss beckoning to him from a table where she was refreshing herself. To speak with him privately she dismissed her complaisant prince, who crossed the room to greet the Marchesa's Spaniard. The Spaniard, Grover had learned, was a highly prosperous painter named Peñaverde, a name which awakened an echo in his mind but which he couldn't place.

"Don't stand too near the fireplace, darling," Floss called out after her husband, "You might melt and run in." This was in allusion to a favorite household jest which had it that the prince was made of wax and spent all his off hours as a lay figure in the window of a tailor shop in the rue Tronchet.

"Have a drink," she proposed to Grover, then surprised him by asking him what was the matter.

"Nothing that I know of. Why?"

Floss studied him with an impersonal partiality as she sipped tea. She seemed to be bringing something out from the private apartments of her mind which were usually as open to view as her house. "When you smile," she finally said, "it's like flashlight photographs—then you go all dark. I've noticed it often, honey, and I think it's too bad. Life's not worth it, you know; the thing to do is grab it up, dirt and all. Sometimes I think you wait for it to come in on a platter, all dainty and tasty."

"It's not entirely that," said Grover thoughtfully, and the sudden earnestness of their talk struck him as

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incongruous against the motley and specious disarray of the background: the ribald badinage, the hoarse laughter, the provocative glances, the cynical judgments, the overdressed and wornout bodies, the dyed heads,—even Floss's gilded fluff. "I think it's largely a matter of appetite; you see I'm not really hearty."

"I like you for being choosey, honey—but there isn't always ice-cream and truffles on the bill of fare, and it's more sensible to gulp down a bit of tripe and onions than go hungry."

"I'm not hungry," he laughed.

"Oh yes you are," she maintained. "I'm worried about you. . . Now wouldn't you think," she broke off, as she saw Mamie Mangum sink into the sofa he had abandoned, "that a floppy girl like that would know enough to wear floppy hats! But no, she goes on wearing those darn tight little things till she's most wore her eyebrows off."

Grover's gaze had wandered from Mamie to the door where a group of new arrivals was being welcomed by the prince. For weeks he had been gambling with himself on the chances of a third and definitive encounter with Olga Vaudreuil, and just as he had resigned himself to his losses, there she stood, beside a fat man whom he recognized as the burlesque harlequin. Something was happening within Grover which bore an analogy to Floss's description of his smile—a great flare followed by a great darkness. As though some overpoweringly fragrant flower had been thrust

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before him he felt a little nauseated. He would never have believed that the sight of one ordinary little person,—for after all she wasn't so extraordinary,—could fill him at the same time with such a wild uprush of hope and such an utter sense of hopelessness. It was like having your wings clipped within flying distance of heaven.

"There's Oscar Hellgren," said Floss, setting down her cup with a beam of pleasure.

"Who's he?" said Grover.

"The *sculptor!*" replied Floss, as though anybody ought to know. "He won the prize for a marvellous monument in Bordeaux—soldiers and horses and tanks and everything."

"Isn't that Léon Vaudreuil's sister with him?" asked Grover, to sound Floss.

"Never saw her before," said Floss, going toward the newcomers. "She must be the cutie they're all trying to get away from him."

Grover followed in her wake, but before he could contrive to renew his acquaintance with Olga, she and her Swedish escort were captured by Peñaverde, the painter, and in a moment he found himself in the middle of the big room alone, the most completely lost of all Floss's lost souls.

"You look like you'd been shot at and missed," said a voice, and he perceived Mamie approaching with languishing gait.

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"That's strange," he said trucullently. "I'm an easy enough target."

Mamie stood there, making horrid little pushing noises, and looking dreadfully arch. "You never say anything that anybody can understand," she complained.

"Do you want a drink?" he suggested. It was the least ambiguous remark that occurred to him, and he had to say something.

He felt as though he could do with another himself, and steered Mamie to the table. Impossible as Mamie was, she was at least a safe haven for the moment, and there was nobody else to turn to. All afternoon she had been practising new gestures before she forgot them and breaking inanely into other people's conversations with her utterly non-Gallic but painstakingly foreign French. If she only had a sense of humor she'd be gorgeous, he was thinking, pouring Mamie the mildest beverage he could find, in view of her coddled throat. The gold embroidery on her black satin dress was ravelling, the pollen on her sallow face had dusted off on her chest. You could hardly call it a bosom. thought Grover. How anything as long and narrow as Mamie could, on occasion, make such prodigious volumes of sound was, to Grover, as to everybody else, a mystery. She must be all lungs, like sea-weed, he concluded. Mamie disapproved of the old school of operatics that taught you to walk eight paces towards the footlights with your hand over your

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heart then stop and lift it sweepingly up and backward. She contended that gesture should be spontaneous. Hence she lifted her hands sweepingly up and backward whenever she was seized with the thought of doing so, and if you weren't careful she'd spill your drink.

"Don't you love Paris?" said Mamie.

"No," Grover replied, unwilling to agree with Mamie on any subject. "I detest it."

"What do you stay for, then?"

"Because I hate all the other places more."

"Oh, aren't you *difficile!*"

"Are you going to sing this afternoon?"

"Floss wants me to."

Grover doubted it but finished his drink in silence, contemplating a series of moves that would bring him into the vicinity of Olga.

"She invited Tamponi to hear me. He knows dozens of impresarios. Or is it ii, Highbrow?"

"Os will do."

"That's him over there by the piano talking to the girl in nasturtium velvet. Who *is* she?"

Nasturtium—that was it. He had been trying to find a name for the daring shade of the frock Olga wore so well. "I believe she's a friend of Hellgren's," he replied.

"Who's Hellgren?"

"The sculptor!" said Grover.

Floss had broken up the group near the piano and

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was bringing the Italian singer to meet Mignon Mangini. Guests were seeking comfortable seats in anticipation of uncomfortable music. Grover departed for an obscure corner. His second drink had found its mark, and he was now solacing himself with rich visions. The girl in nasturtium velvet might be beyond his reach, but even if he never spoke to her again she would remain as a symbolic summit in his career. He saw himself as an old man of seventy, *the* Grover Thanet, still painting pictures which were too subtle for the stupid public. There has been a great disappointment in his life, onlookers were whispering; but he never speaks about it.

Olga had tucked herself into one of the big sofas, and Peñaverde was telling her stories to which she responded with an occasional smile, the little folds on guard as ever.

Floss at length effected a hush. Mamie had bent one ankle and was working the muscles of her cheeks. This, Grover presumed, was to limber up her sinuses; he wasn't quite sure where her sinuses were, but he had heard Mamie talk about them, and about Emma Eames's. All he knew was that they resonated—like anything! The most professional touch of all was the spasmodic jerk by which Mamie locked her diaphragm, to ensure a reservoir of wind, and as she locked it her jaw became equally locked in an unearthly smile.

She had elected to try a Wagner aria on Signor Tamponi. As Grover listened, all he could think of

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was a freight-train in motion. Pulling out with slow, impressive, scraping puffs, gathering momentum until it was rattling heavily along, hoarsely shrieking as it approached the tunnel, rumbling sotto voce until it emerged into the light again, hurrying now toward the station, ascending grade and all, with a triumphant howl fortissimo, and at length pulling up with a long grinding hiss diminuendo. And if the train got switched on a wrong siding,—well, in modern opera it was the spirit that counted.

But Mamie's Ave Maria's, as she presently proved, were not essentially unlike her Ho-jo-to-ho's; the most noticeable difference was in the accompaniments. And some late callers that afternoon heard her screaming, *d'après* Victor Hugo and Reynaldo Hahn, that if her verses had wings they would fly night and day, which was easy to believe, but fearsome to contemplate.

The phenomenon was not that Mamie sang badly, that she sang even abominably; the phenomenon was that the people who heard her thought she sang well. They even encouraged her to sing, as who should fervently pray, In the name of Art, crucify us. And after hearing their applause and their compliments, Grover was forced to conclude that, as singers went, perhaps Mignon Mangini wasn't one of the worst. Heaven knew the best were hard to find.

In the redistribution that took place after the music, Grover found himself shackled to Mamie again, in a corner of the room whence all but he had fled. She

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had been twiddling the lapel of Signor Tamponi's coat, but that gentleman had departed, as had another gentleman whose fountain pen Mamie had coquettishly borrowed to write an address. The awful part of it was, he was beginning to feel sorry for Mamie.

"Where are we going to have dinner?" she asked.

Grover was unable to tell her. All he knew was that Floss had asked him to remain with a few others, apparently including Hellgren and Olga. Peñaverde and the Marchesa, too, showed no disposition to depart, and Floss had just ordered one of her Cossacks to bring cocktails for eight.

From the group at the fireplace a goodnatured shout went up. Apparently the princess had said something affectionately ribald to her husband.

"Come on," Mamie ordered, and as they rose to join the others she slid a long arm over his shoulder, making her horrid little pushing sounds in his ear. Olga, who noticed him only at inopportune moments, on the promptings of some demon of alertness within her, glanced up just in time to see Mamie's proprietary gesture.

. . . .

Floss's prince, who was a gourmet, had telephoned to an exclusive restaurant which resembled a smart little club. A garden sheltered it from the street, and within, the subdued lights and intimate proportions of the rooms gave one a sense of being far away from

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the city, instead of in the heart of it. Around two tables which had been joined together, Floss gathered her flock. Grover found himself between Mamie Mangum and the Marchesa, who, to his relief, turned her back on him and addressed herself to the prince. On Mamie's left sat Oscar Hellgren, bubbling with heavy Swedish humor, and next to Hellgren Floss, under a sweeping hat of tautly stretched blue silk that gave the lie complete to Illinois, beamed with pride at being sandwiched between a successful sculptor and a successful painter. Armando Peñaverde, with his sleek, spare face, white teeth, and black hair, was behaving towards his other neighbor, Olga, in a manner which Grover could characterize only as exceedingly Spanish. For two hours on end he had been saying witty things to her in a low voice, but from all that one could detect in Olga's candid yet sphinx-like face, he had made no appreciable headway. Now and again Olga would laugh freely enough at Peñaverde's sallies, whatever they were; but whenever they overshot the mark she would counter with a sharp riposte, always on her guard, always in complete control of herself. In the main she seemed unwillingly interested in the Spaniard. She's cold, thought Grover, and hard; but for the man who could succeed in warming and softening her!

The prince and the Marchesa were talking horses, a subject on which Grover's information was infinity, plus or minus, since,—and that was the only pictur-

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esque fact in all Algebra and you had to do problems for four years to get to it,—they were equal.

Although the good American cocktails had brought him out of his gloom and he was chatting glibly enough with Mamie, his mind was on anything but her ships and shoes and sealing-wax, her impressions of current plays and operas and singers. It was largely on the speculative ocean of what lay behind the pressed-in glints in the eyes of the girl in nasturtium velvet, and behind the broad, pressed-in smile on her odd white face. He could no more keep his mind off her than in a theatre he could keep his eyes off the stage, no matter what detracting things he might tell himself about the piece and the performance. Moreover he knew he would leave her presence with a similar sense of the dullness and drabness of the outside world.

If Olga weighed Sweden and Spain in the balance and found each a little wanting, as Grover dared to guess, how would she react to America? Of her reaction to Mamie Mangum she had made no secret: she had looked around once, in reply to an inane inquiry in Mamie's most foreign French, said "*Parfaitement, Mademoiselle,*" looked slowly past her, around the circle and back to the Spaniard, and both she and Mamie knew that there was not another inch of common ground for them on the face of the earth. Her reaction to her American hostess, on the other hand, was warm and crisp. Floss had leaned across Don

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Armando and said to Olga, "I wish I knew you well enough to ask where you got that pretty hat."

To which Olga, with a laugh and a gesture of placing herself at Floss's entire disposition, a gesture Mamie would have given an eye tooth to have been born with,—had replied, "It's I who made it, Madame, and if you would really like to know me better, let me come and make you one . . . only ever so slightly different!" she candidly supplemented, with a wry smile, and both Floss and Olga looked out upon acres of common ground.

And when Grover, delighted with this give and take, his eyes fixed on the silhouette of Olga's smart black hat against the greenish sky that showed through the high window behind her, had rapidly cut in, "One would say, Mademoiselle, that you even made the holly tree out there as well, for when you hold your head like that it makes a perfect pom-pom on the brim," she had looked at him coolly, and retorted, "I suppose you think, because you once bought me a pair of stockings, that you know me well enough to say any foolishness?"

"I wish I did," said Grover. "There are so many millions of nice foolishnesses to say."

"What's this about stockings?" inquired Floss, her blue eyes as big as saucers, and a half eaten caviare tartine poised in the air.

Grover was obliged, to his embarrassment, to tell the story, which seemed to give them all an immoderate amount of amusement, especially when Olga capped it

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by saying, to the company, "You have no idea how sweet and shy he was!"

This was more depressing to Grover than if she had been scornful. Why, he was furiously wondering, does every woman treat me as a minor!

The situation was just beginning to penetrate into the massive skull of the Swede. Over his heaped-up plate he leaned forward to look at Grover, apparently seeing him for the first time that day.

"So you are the young man we met on the sidewalk the night of the masquerade!"

Worse and worse, thought Grover, now thoroughly ill at ease. To him it seemed as though his most romantic secrets were being made public property and thereby forever damaged.

Olga rescued him from the necessity of relating the sequel to the torn stocking episode by remarking, with a *narquoise* implication, "He was with a very pretty blond girl."

"Grover Thanet!" exclaimed Floss. "The things I don't know about you! and never even suspected. Who was she?"

"Oh!" laughed Grover, now on his guard, "That was Marthe Lamielle," as who should say, that was Marthe Régnier, or Mary Garden, or Mistinguett. He had heard other people toss off a totally unknown name as though everybody would know who was meant, and he now had the satisfaction of seeing the expedient

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work, for Floss said "Oh!" and went on with her second tartine.

Poor little Marthe, thought Grover. What pain it would cause her to see him in this rich setting, within such an intimate distance of the girl who was so unmistakably his "type."

Wine had been poured and for the next hour the dinner grew toward an amalgamation of hilarities. Grover remained silent through most of it, except to laugh automatically with the rest, while the wine and the music pursued each other through his veins till he scarcely knew which was which. It was subdued American jazz, a kaleidoscope which caught up the soft sheen of the evening sky through the open windows, the earthy scent from the hedges suggestive of early spring, the agreeable appearance and flavor of nameless dishes, the colors of lights and gowns, all of which seemed to shade up to, or away from, nasturtium.

> You talk about your sweetie,
> Stop talkin' 'bout your sweetie,
> Let's talk about *my* sweetie now.

Floss was singing the words and beating time with a friendly smile over her shoulder to the violinist in the balcony.

"I want to dance," she suddenly announced.

The prince was a little shocked. In this temple where food was a cult and not a mere excuse for exercise, dancing was unheard of.

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"I don't care," said Floss, "I want to dance."

"Do ask him," urged the Marchesa, grasping at this opportunity to get back her Spaniard.

The prince had no choice but to summon the proprietor and make the request, which was obligingly granted.

"The floor has a heavy carpet," said the prince by way of final discouragement.

"I could dance on a wavy ocean tonight," declared Floss. "I'm feeling grand. All I need is a young and handsome partner. Come on, Grover. If they don't like it," she added, indicating the few strangers present, "they can go home. What do we care!"

The extra tables had been pushed back and the musicians took a new lease of life. The prince, gracefully accepting the inevitable, invited the Marchesa to dance, and in a moment only Mamie and Oscar Hellgren were left at the table. Mamie had got on terms with the sculptor and as she listened to his long cumbersome anecdotes she kept tying herself up in acrobatic knots in the hope, Grover guessed, that Hellgren would be filled with a desire to imprison her undulations, if not her voice and the ravelled gold embroidery, in marble.

"Whew!" exclaimed Floss, coming back to the table with renewed appetite. "Let's have some champagne."

When the music recommenced, Grover caught the eyes of Olga. Was it accidental, he wondered, or were the lids pressing out of sight a tiny glint of challenge?

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He asked her to dance, and Peñaverde darted a swift, Spanish glance in his direction. Go on back to Spain! Grover muttered to himself and caught Olga looking toward Hellgren, who seemed always to be mechanically conscious of her and as mechanically dependent on her as he was dependent on his garments. He half nodded to her as though authorizing her to amuse herself, and went on talking in a sluggish stream of Swedish French which was punctuated by the muffled, pushing sounds of Mamie's intense and eloquent nose.

Olga's smile, as she rose to join Grover, took the edge off the distasteful sign of submission to Hellgren's good pleasure.

The tune was of a bygone vintage,—he had danced with Rhoda to the selfsame rhythms,—but exhilarating. After a few tentative measures Olga adapted her steps to his. The contact of her slim, strong body, and the fact of yielding, in unison with her, to the dictates of the music, precipitated into a solid the tantalizing sensuous delights that had been suspended in solution all evening. And he danced with beating heart, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of clouding the solution again. Something that had been bottled up in him for years seemed to have become uncorked; through his veins the contents were being poured with divine extravagance and divinely intoxicating effect.

When the music ceased they came to a halt just under the balcony. Without looking at each other they continued to hold hands. Grover felt in his waistcoat

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pocket. There was a note there for an amount he didn't dare stop to calculate. Holding it up to the smiling violinist, he said, "Play it all over again, will you, without any cuts."

And still avoiding her eyes, he slid back into motion. Her hat brushed his cheek, and though it was only a structure of wire and silk the effect was electrical. He leaned closer and their cheeks touched, until he trembled and drew away. They had not spoken a word since he had asked her to dance. Although they were dancing in a public room among their friends, he had an overwhelming feeling that it was all illicit, and that gave a sharp tang to the moment.

Again the music came to an end, and their eyes met as they stood still. *"Grands dieux!"* he whispered, awed by the discovery, *"Je vous aime!"*

The fingers of which he was still possessed, pressed for a moment around his own, while the baffling lids and puckered lips made a concerted effort to deny the encouragement he read into the blue light in the narrowed gray eyes. Then the fingers relaxed, and the hand went lightly to his arm.

"Don't say foolish things," she replied and turned gaily toward the table where the others were noisily settling into their places.

He sat back in a tumult, alternately laved in soft waves upon which he abandoned himself with a deep sigh of yearning, only to be thrown high and dry on hard ribbed sands of dread, over which his feelings

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trickled away as though drawn by the whole irresistible trend of opposing fact.

When it was time to go, it was decided to dance once more, and he invited Floss. Just then she loomed before him as the only friend he possessed in the world.

"Well, honey, what kind of a time you been having?" she asked.

Again some bottle inside him poured its warm contents through his being. "It's been a mixed time," he confided, holding her more intimately near him. "A terrible mixed sort of time."

"Mixed, honey? Tell Flossie."

"Oh, it's not for telling. I only need a little sympathy. Could I come and see you tomorrow?" he asked, forming a swift resolution.

She had to think. In the morning she was going to shop, but he could go with her.

She drew back to look at him more closely. "You're not in love or anything, are you?"

"Yes, with you!" he laughed.

"God love him," she said, and gave him a hug.

. . . .

When he walked through the open doorway of Floss's palace next morning the first person he encountered was the girl whose image had tinged and flavored the March morning,—a morning on which all Paris seemed swept and garnished in the hope of a visit from spring.

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She was leaning forward, so that the trim lines of her straight green coat were for the moment off their guard. The coat, for all its trimness, had a negligé appearance. The little black hat swept over the cheek in a circle that left a glimpse of nose and ear. One white-gloved hand rested on her breast; the other, from which hung a silver bag, was caressing Floss's absurd, microscopic dog, a *griffon belge* named Miette,—Mi for short. Mi, crowded back into a corner of a throne-like chair, was sturdily resisting Olga's advances; was even uttering vainglorious threats through her fierce little whiskers.

Before Olga had noticed his entrance the princess appeared on the staircase, manicured, massaged, and pinched into a radiant glow.

"Well here we all are," she called out, coming rather carefully down the stairs, "drunk, dressed, and highly perfumed. How do I look, honey?"

"Grand!" said Grover.

"About ten years younger, don't I?" she asked.

"Than what?"

"Than what my passport says I am."

"It lies," Grover reassured her.

Floss rumpled his hair gratefully, and gave Olga a kiss.

Olga had greeted him as coolly as when she had entered the house yesterday, and he had an instant of disappointment. After all, there was nothing so unusual about her! Then, in reply to some compliment

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of Floss's she smiled in the peculiar manner that so stamped, yet so failed to reveal her individuality, and he heard, bubbling up within him, all the unwonted endearing words that had been confided to his pillow late last night, and early this morning.

Floss went to give orders and get information from the Cossacks, and presently called for him to bring a pencil. She had more items to add to her shopping list. When he came back Olga was examining her appearance in a tall mirror, with satisfaction but without vanity.

"It couldn't be improved," he assured her, timidly.

"Oh si!" she laconically contradicted. "A little touch of powder," and she proceeded to apply it, without, so far as Grover could detect, altering the ivory smoothness by the least appreciable degree.

Compliments, he reflected, were lost on her. In the manner of other Frenchwomen he had observed, she had long since assessed herself at a certain value, neither too great nor too small, and quite simply abided by it.

He was wondering what to say next when Floss returned and they went out to the car.

Grover had come with a vague intention of talking to Floss, even of confessing and asking counsel. Free as she was from amorous complications and yearnings of her own, Floss took enormous interest in the complications and yearnings of others, and at times was uncannily perspicacious. It was even possible that she

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had guessed his secret and that Olga's presence was less accidental than it seemed. Floss's patriotism alone might lead her to plot for him. At any rate if he had lost the opportunity for a heart-to-heart talk, he had gained an even more precious opportunity, and as he listened to Floss's weird and rapid polyglot chatter he felt that any confession he might make would be superfluous. Her instinct would serve him far better than any conspiracy he might induce her to enter.

It was pleasant to glide down the broad, sun-bathed stretch of the Champs Elysées seated between these two. Floss did most of the talking; Olga made quick replies. Grover's indolent function was to listen, and occasionally to replenish Floss's vocabulary.

They wandered from jewellers to dressmakers, from Caron's to Sherry's, from the theatres for tickets to Brentano's for American novels. They bought and had loaded into the car most of the articles on Floss's sprawling list and many articles that had been unforeseen. Everywhere the tradesmen made way, and came running up with chairs. For Olga and for Grover it was a continuous marvel,—the sensation of vicarious affluence gave them the first common ground they had had to walk on, on tip-toe, as it seemed to Grover. Secretly he made much of the ease with which Olga lived up to her role of companion. Poor Floss, for all the noble salutations she drew down on her gilded head, was only lumberingly alert to finesses of comportment that Olga could accomplish with the lifting of

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a finger. And oh, how he needed to make these discoveries; how he needed to justify the irresistible drift of his emotions by finding excellencies in the dubious sister of the dubious Léon. And the proof of her quality was that she made no move that caused Floss a moment's discomfort. Mamie Mangum would have toyed with bead-bags or tried on hats, in the hope that heaven, via Floss, would vouchsafe her one: not Olga; she was simply helping Floss come to decisions which to anyone but Floss would have been obvious.

"You let them see how badly you wanted that fur!" Olga reproved, as they emerged from one shop. "I could have got it for you for two thousand francs less."

Floss's radiance remained unclouded. Her face seemed to be saying, Well, what on earth could I have done with an extra two thousand francs? To which Olga's eyes replied, *Mon Dieu,* what it costs to be rich! and Grover reflected, *Richesse oblige.*

"Now," cried Floss, "to find Paul. *Allons enfants de la patrie!*"

"*Quoique le jour de gloire ne soit pas arrivé!*" supplemented Olga, and Grover adored her for the ironical implications. So much could be read into it by an imagination as busy as his own.

The prince, waxed and pommaded, was taking his apéritif at Fouquet's.

"Just one sip of mother's ruin," said Floss, getting out of the car, "and then we'll have lunch."

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"Where's our good and honest Hellgren?" asked the prince, when they were seated.

"He's making a horse out of plaster," Olga told him.

"A beautiful horse?" inquired the prince, with a twinkle.

"A big one."

"He *has* a gigantic talent," the prince agreed, and left it at that.

They had lunch in another quiet restaurant of the gourmet's choosing. "One would say we were a nice little family," he remarked, looking about him in contentment. "Papa, Maman, and their son who has just finished his militaire and the daughter—"

"Whom they can't seem to marry off," broke in Olga with a blithe ripple of laughter that jarred. Grover's eyes were on Floss who had flinched slightly at her husband's fun. Aha! thought Grover, Floss's tragedy,—and he had always suspected the presence of a tragedy,—had something to do with children, or the lack of them.

"A nice young man," she was saying, to conceal any hurt that might have peered through her beaming mask, "told me only this morning that I didn't look more than thirty, so how *could* they be my children!"

The prince patted her hand with punctilious affection. "It's true!" he agreed. "It's I who am the grandfather of the lot of you. . . No compliments, Mademoiselle!" he added with a hand raised in warn-

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ing as he saw one leaping to Olga's tongue. "*Restons là.*"

"Peñaverde has made me look so thin you won't recognize me," said Floss. "After lunch I'll take you all to see the portrait."

"*Bon!*" said the prince. "What do you think of him, Mademoiselle—you who frequent the arts."

"I only frequent the ateliers," said Olga. "I have no opinions on what they paint in them."

"*Raison de plus!*" insisted the prince.

"They say his work is very subtle," Olga parried, "but that it concedes too much to caricature. It's supposed to be a Spanish tendency; I don't know. As a man he annoys me; there's something sinister about him."

Grover glowed. It was more than a relief to know that she resented the Spaniard. His satisfaction with that made him slipshod in his heed of the tone in which she spoke, of the activity of the little folds about her eyes.

The prince was of the opinion that, if anything, the painter failed to allow his subtlety free enough scope. "He would do better work," he declared, "if he broke away from portraiture for a while. It's too easy for him to make money in Paris."

Grover was beginning to see hidden merits in Floss's anomalous husband who had cut off his moustache for a thin girl at the Marigny.

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Floss, for her part, was more than satisfied with Peñaverde.

Grover was silent. He did not remember having seen any examples of the man's work, though the name still echoed in his brain with an unaccountable familiarity.

When they arrived at Peñaverde's studio in a fashionable street not far from the Etoile, the painter was dazzlingly pleasant. He answered the knock himself, and in his stained smock, with his black eyes and white teeth, he was menacingly pictorial. All the more so for a background of deep rich reds and purples and bronzes, pale blues and greens picked out by the strong white sunlight which streamed in through the glass wall. To Grover he seemed pleased to see Floss per se, but excessively happy to see her per Olga. Nothing definite in his attitude warranted this conclusion, but Grover was sure of it, even when he had made a fair discount on the score of his own hypersensitiveness to everything that concerned Olga. He watched her anxiously for some sign of the resentment she had professed, and was glad to note that she met each of the painter's attentions with an ironic counter. But then, desolating thought, hadn't she treated him, Grover Thanet, ever since their first encounter in Noémi Janvier's flat, either with indifference or with faint irony!

"How did you chance to wear a lettuce-colored coat today, Mademoiselle?" Don Armando asked, "when

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that happens to be just the shade needed to relieve my deep colors here."

Olga's answer rang with truthfulness, but the little folds sent it off at a characteristic slant. "I wore it, Monsieur, A, because it was cold; B, because it's the only coat I possess."

Grover felt that if he had been a girl he would have bristled even more than Olga had bristled under the Spaniard's ingratiations. It wasn't so much the barbarously caricatured nude studies that one had caught sight of, in a half fallen stack against the table. It was something in the tail of Don Armando's eye: an uncomfortable trick of letting his glance linger a second after his smile had died down. Grover had a similar distrust in watching the movements of his hands. The fingers dragged a moment before relinquishing whatever object they had been holding.

They were admiring the portrait of Floss, and Grover was struck by the superlative skill with which the painter had, on some happy impulse,—possibly with a thought for the price he was going to charge for it,—singled out and delineated all the obviously likable features in his subject. True, he had pruned Floss, sheared off excrescences that made her verge on the blowsy, carelessly given her (Grover counted them in amazement but held his peace) only three fingers and a thumb on one hand, and had made her more elegantly slender than Floss in her most ambitious flights had ever dreamed of being. But this

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had been corrected by a characteristic attitude, and the whole absurdly beautiful effect was saved from any element of pretentiousness by the generous, frank, half tender, half vulgar smile that illuminated the features.

Grover congratulated Floss and the painter. The latter turned to Olga with a curious smile. "I suspect you of not liking it," he said.

"You are right, Monsieur."

"May one ask why?"

"Because you have painted the princess that all Paris knows,—the princess whom all the newspapers celebrate. At the Grand Salon Paris will recognize her and crow with delight. But if I had been the painter I would have painted the real princess or nothing. I would have put in less silk and gaiety and more of the good heart and good judgment that in real life make that particular smile possible. All you've done, the beauty shops and dressmakers could have done."

This intrepid girl, laconically putting her finger on what they all had failed to formulate!

Peñaverde was laughing blandly. *"Et vous, Monsieur?"* he inquired of the prince.

"I think it very clever. It's bound to make a sensation in Chicago!"

Another score, reflected Grover in triumph.

"Show us some more pictures," Floss was saying, a little disturbed by something they were all leaving unsaid.

Don Armando subtly made it apparent that he was

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not in the habit of displaying his wares before callers, but it seemed equally clear, at least to Grover, that Olga had put him on his mettle.

The canvasses he brought out for their inspection were of an undeniably high quality. If Grover had been rich enough, he would have been tempted by some of these wickedly funny old women and ungainly men, vagabonds and sinners, horrendously nude. They grew on him as drawing after drawing was placed on the easel. After the first shock of resentment at the making light of things which, if not exactly sacred, should at least have been private, one subscribed with gusto to the skilfully emphasized incongruities, the wounding humor. They furnished the sort of enjoyment one derived from the brutal pranks recounted in old Spanish stories like the Lazarillo de Tormes. They had the beauty of gargoyles, combined with an awesome veracity.

Peñaverde took his guests to a smaller room, against the walls of which were turned numerous canvasses of all sizes. "These are old things," he said, "done in my salad days. Sometimes I think they are the best of all."

His running commentaries were directed chiefly toward Olga.

"Oh!" cried Floss, picking up a neglected portrait and holding it to the light. "That's *sweet!* Who is she?"

Peñaverde went to her side, and smiled as he saw

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which picture Floss had pounced on with such rapture. "I like that one too," he agreed.

"But who is it?" Floss insisted. "I'm sure I've seen her."

Peñaverde shrugged his shoulders, and turned toward the other canvasses.

"Who should it be?" he said. "A lady who once came for tea—and stayed for breakfast."

"You sinner!" laughed Floss and held up the painting for the others to see.

With a little rush of recognition which seemed, strangely, to come from a pent-up source, Grover shouted, "It's not true!"

They looked at him in consternation. Peñaverde alone still pleasantly smiled.

"I beg your pardon," Grover apologized. "I was taken by surprise. I know the woman."

It was only the hasty rudeness he regretted, not the essential contradiction. For all he could prove to the contrary that wistfully smiling girl portrayed in a muslin frock with a great bouquet of daisies on her lap *had* stayed for breakfast. But even if she had,—and the thought was so repellent as to make him feel sick,—Peñaverde had absolutely no right to dispose of her, privately, much less publicly, with a caddish remark and a cynical shrug, for the girl was not the sort of girl who made a practice of coming for tea and staying for breakfast. The girl was Sophie Scantleberry.

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For days Grover kept seeing the face of the Sophie he had known, the Sophie to whom he had read poems and talked amateur philosophy; the Sophie redolent of a sweet scent that baffled description; the Sophie he had loved and trusted and in the wonderment of awakening passion kissed. His instinctive antipathy toward Peñaverde and the resurrected pain had created an instantaneous desire to rescue her name from those lips, a desire to deny the possibility of this opportunist's easy assumption of rights in his own Sophie. For this man would no more have scrupled to abuse Sophie's confidence than he would, had there been enough to gain by it, have scrupled to make a wicked caricature of Floss. The unkind studies of those poor, defenceless old souls in his studio were evidence enough of his lack of conscience, if tangible evidence were needed.

Worst of all a doubt, never quite formulated in the past, kept growing in his mind. After the disastrous conclusion of his comradeship with Sophie something had retrospectively squinted a little, and he had idly wondered, vaguely suspected. And now this Armando —oh, Sophie, since it had to be unearthed, why should it have had to be this man, with his cold, glittering intensity, and his sinister after-glances! *Et tu,* Sophie, he said, like Caesar, were you a member of that world-wide league of people who play with cards up their sleeves! Which pillar next!

There was no doubting the truth of the Spaniard's

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implication. A man for whom the truth supplied so many tempting sources of humor had nothing to gain by dealing in petty untruths. Everything pointed to it, including the portrait in the house in Commonwealth Avenue which had brought a shadow across their last interview.

And just behind the image of Sophie, waiting to crowd it out and obsess his imagination, was the image of Olga. He kept arguing that a girl who was no more unusual than Olga had no right to uproot him, to fill his thoughts till he had no appetite for work, no vitality, no enthusiasm. Standing before the easel in his bedroom he thought alternately of Peñaverde's wizardly skill and of Casimir's unfathomable depths of sincerity, and he threw down his palette.

For a reason he could scarcely formulate he avoided Floss's noisy house. Every afternoon he felt drawn there, yet the journey half way accomplished he would turn and walk in another direction—aimlessly and for hours. The prospect of meeting Olga in the company of idle, chattering, shiny or shabby groups of wasters to whom love was no more symbolic than a game of poker, deterred him. Something vital, he recognized, had overtaken him. Perhaps the It that he had been half expecting for years. If he had only known how devastating to one's peace of mind this particular kind of exaltation could prove to be, he might have braced himself for it. But it was too late now; he was in the grip of a force as exhilarating, and as deadly, as the

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shiny white powder that was so popular in the circles he had lately been frequenting.

His love, if he could call it by that name,—and it was not at all the sort of thing one might have expected it to be,—blinded and paralyzed him. It pursued its dynamic course despite the most cogent obstacles one could raise in its path. Love makes fools sublime, he reflected, but by the same token reduces the intelligent to a state of imbecility.

The feature of the experience that made it most difficult to manage was the fact that love wove a magic cloak about the object of one's desires, lending it a strange and irresistible beauty. And whoever had said that a thing of beauty was a joy forever was an idiot, thought Grover,—unless by "joy" he meant excruciatingly pleasant apprehension of the object. It is tragic as well as grotesque, he reflected, that the thing which, once a year or so, reveals you to yourself in all your defenceless nudity is the tilt of some little nobody's nose. Being in love didn't at all blind him to the fact that Olga was a little nobody, for his mind and his heart were as independent of each other as ever. It simply blinded him to what was practical and feasible; on the other hand it gave extraordinary acuity to his imaginative sight: rendered it possible for him to see himself with dazzling distinctness on a faraway island with a glorified sister of Léon Vaudreuil forever at his side—or even nearer.

The tilt of a nose, his thoughts roamed on, not only

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reveals you to yourself, but drives you back again ruthlessly into yourself, where you know you belong but where you dread having to stay, eternally and eternally,—especially, just as you had begun to learn the technique of being objective. If there were only some one to tell you what life was all about. But there was nobody. Even the Geoffrey Saints had strict limitations. You had to find out for yourself, and it was like a frog climbing out of a well: for every inch forward, a slip backward, into the same old perplexities, forever and forever. His state of mind was not unlike that of a man who has hidden a twenty dollar bill for safe keeping. Needing it in an emergency he looks in the same old pitchers, and it's probably right there on a shelf, yet he can't for the life of him find it, and all he knows is that he's *worth* twenty dollars. All Grover knew for sure was that he was a man of balance, but where his damn equilibrium had gone, God alone could tell.

It's unfortunate, he was thinking, to be the sort of man whose depths can be stirred by the color of somebody's hair. For being stirred by the color of somebody's hair is like building on shifting sands, and it means that a good part of one's life is devoted to rebuilding,—with diminishing faith in the worth of the effort. Diminishing faith, but thank heaven,—and it was little enough by way of compensation,—increasing dexterity. He gloomily supposed that a wise man ended by devising a sort of cheap portable house that

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could be put up overnight to serve till the next tide swept in, and no great harm done.

Being in love was analogous to having malaria. Each recurrence would be somewhat less virulent; but each recurrence would leave you weaker than the last. Up to the time of Olga's advent, he had recovered from each attack with fair rapidity. As soon as the first symptom had appeared he had been in the habit of dosing heavily with logical formulae bequeathed to a weak-minded posterity by *the* Professor Thanet, and usually he had been through with the disease before it had been through with him. There was a question in his mind, however, as to whether it was worse to suffer from the disease than from the excessive preventions,—too much logic could be paralyzing. His friends and critics averred that he didn't fling himself into life hard enough, that he hadn't learned to lose his soul in order to find it. Well, this time they couldn't cavil. This time his preventions were having no curative effect whatever. The fever was raging as never before. The more he told himself that Olga was an ordinary little nobody, the more he saw her swathed in a magic cloak.

His efforts to paint were more sporadic than ever. To stand before his easel and wrestle with an angel who was positively devilish was a futile attitude, and he resorted to books. Long since released from academic trammels he was creeping back mentally into kennels that had once promised but austere hospitality.

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Bergson, after many polite but chilling encounters, had thrown him a bone to knaw at, and working through to its marrow he made astonishing discoveries about time and space. If the philosophers would only refrain from calling quite simple things by dreadful big names, he reflected, knowledge would be less elusive. He was learning that Bergson championed the existence of a free spirit against the attacks of those who insisted on a mechanical universe; and if the writers of philosophical handbooks had only been frank enough to say so, instead of saying that Bergson was the high priest of the critico-epistemological idealism, life at college would have been one degree less difficult. He now understood Rhoda's impatience at his "five-syllable views of life."

From hours of mental struggle with the theories of creative evolution he would walk far across the city to hours in Marthe's cafe. The fact that he was under a cloud, that his being was in the grip of uncontrollable forces, that his emotions were flowing away from him and bearing his soul on the tide, though never admitted by him, was not unknown to Marthe. She was not the woman to accuse him of being in love with another; but she was the woman to sense it, to suffer from the knowledge, yet to mask her suffering. In a devious way it increased their extraordinary, tacit friendship. It was as though at last, because each was being drastically taxed by life, there was a common ground upon which they could meet. They came to the cafe with

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little presents for each other: for Marthe a vanity case, a handkerchief, a bottle of perfume; for him cigarettes, a matchbox, a diverting toy. They sat and talked about their neighbors, about the trifling incidents of their own days, while Marthe nervously broke matches or tore little squares of paper in a heap on the table. Then often, without preparation, they were at the very heart of life, oddly in agreement about the true, the good, and the beautiful.

"There are only two kinds of people," said Marthe one evening, and Grover again marvelled at the directness of her sources of knowledge, "those who are honest and those who are not. The honest build; the others demolish. Both are necessary, for you can't have a Yes unless there is a No to prove it by. The strong people are those who are either utterly honest to the end, or utterly dishonest to the end. Honest people who stoop to dishonesty under pressure of circumstances, or dishonest people who can be cowed into honesty are the weaklings of the earth. To be honest is a career in itself; it's easy enough to tell the truth once you know it, but how many know it apropos of anything? If you are honest with yourself, life holds no terrors; if you lie to yourself you're doomed. What makes life such a burden for people like you and me is that we find so little echo in the world about us to the verities that ring so clearly within us. Only lies, or flippancies come back to us, and there's no

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rhyme, and we sink under the weight of unconfirmed truths."

"But salvation is possible," argued Grover. "For if you're honest with yourself you'll gradually come to recognize the true from the spurious, what to hold and what to reject, and from experience you will learn how to dominate your life, and thence, in some degree, life itself, and your surroundings and your would-be destroyers. Circumstances which were your rulers, you then use as your instruments."

Marthe gave him a smile, half tender, half bitter. "Yes, *you* can," she said, "because you are persistent, because you are strong enough to wait. Men can reclaim their bogs; women sink into them."

"But women have always leaned on a man's strength."

"The poor fools! Men, even the best of men, don't protect women; at most they protect their own rights in one woman. . . But one can't blame them. If a woman cries for help and the man stretches out his arm, she pulls him into her bog, sometimes without meaning to, sometimes deliberately. They're a heavy load."

"But what about the strong women who make great sacrifices for love?"

"They are strong as men are—selfishly. They make sacrifices because it's the only way to preserve the treasure in their heart. If they did not make the sacrifice the treasure would escape them, or lose its value.

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All strength is selfish. It differs from weakness only in being a wiser and more far-sighted kind of selfishness. The weak are weak because they don't understand; they are like children who think an orange is bigger than the moon."

"But you are strong, Marthe," Grover ventured, "yet your life, at least on the surface, resembles the life of all the weak girls who ever lived."

She broke into her gay rabelaisian laugh, a laugh that always touched Grover because far beneath it he saw a well of despair. "*I* know that the moon is bigger than an orange, and far more important. I know it would be wise to reject the orange and reach up toward the heavens. But unfortunately I like oranges; I like the taste and color and feel of them. The moon is so remote, and I am so impatient. If I have a soul, it's asleep, and my body's wide awake. . . You are different. You spend half your time in the moon. Haven't I often told you so?"

"It's a dreary planet," said Grover.

"It sheds a lovely light."

The voice of the woman at the caisse had risen to a sharp pitch above the buzz of chatter about them. She was scolding a bedraggled youth who had just attempted to swagger out of the cafe. "Haven't I told you you couldn't have credit for another sou till you paid what you owe?" she was crying.

"*Allo!*" Marthe called out. "*René!*" and the harassed youth advanced hopefully.

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"*Tenez!*" said Marthe, fishing in her bag for a twenty-franc note. "*Prends!*"

Grover noticed the weakness of the boy's wrist under the frayed sleeve. He had no need to ask Marthe why she had thrown away a sum which she could ill spare; he himself had too often done the same sort of thing.

"He has nothing," said Marthe, without a trace of condemnation, "not even an overcoat. And he never will have anything. He is as useless as any weed on the side of the road."

"Yet," said Grover cynically, complementing her thought, "he shares the bay tree's great privilege of existence."

"Oh, as to that," said Marthe, "there's something grand about a field of weeds; it's the totality that's inspiring."

As Grover made his way home that evening he pondered the truth of Marthe's observation. How often, in moments of depression and bewilderment, in moments when his own hopes seemed as futile as the aims of a grasshopper, had he not been saved by some sudden panorama of the stupendous totality of human endeavor. Even the most baneful weed could claim a legitimate share in the purpose of creation, for the weed, like the proudest cedar of Lebanon, drew strength and color from the same earth, aspired toward the same sun, died in the same patriotic cause, disintegrated quite as sublimely into the same chemicals, thereby providing nourishment for future expressions

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of the grand creative impulse. In its own measure the weed had a soul, however mean and wayward, and its attempt to survive, its attempt to get drinks and cocaine on money borrowed from a prostitute was, if not so noble as the struggle of a Goethe to put verities on the tongue of his Faust, at least as undeniably a part of the great *élan*. We poor foolish mortals are unhappy, Grover reflected, because we won't face the most apparent fact in all the world, which is that the woes or the joys of one individual are as nothing in the solar scheme. If we could for once stand far enough aloof from ourselves to catch a glimpse of the colossal wear and tear of creation, we would understand the grandeur of contributing even an infinitesimal quota; we would be filled with a zest for life that would override grief, decay, and death itself. He felt, as he walked through the blatant, garish boulevards, as though he were part of the rich soil of humanity,—a soil which drank in the rain, the sunshine, the nitres in the air, a putrid soil in which seeds were germinating, and the seeds would sprout and grow into a crop; the crop would perhaps feed the starving, perhaps lie neglected in the field to rot and provide nourishment for future crops. Whether the crop should prove utilizable or not was of little consequence; what was of consequence was the deep awareness of fertility, the knowledge that one was being used, however ruthlessly, in however small degree, by the colossal forces of creation.

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One might paint the worst pictures even seen; one might languish unto death for love of the most accidental girl in one's path; one might eat a bad oyster and die, or live a century in the enjoyment of a busy progency,—and it didn't make a particle of difference, provided one made an honest attempt to be productive. Dishonesty and infertility obstructed the course of the spheres; in conjunction they constituted the unpardonable sin.

The elation which these thoughts brought him proved to be but an anaesthetic; when he awoke next morning, into a minute division of the cosmos adorned with faded silk and dusty stucco, the petty, insistent pangs were on him again,—pangs which the sight and presence of only one of God's many minions could effectually soothe.

He was weary of trying to live down his passion. Today, he resolved, I will cease fighting it.

. . . .

Much as he disliked the approach to Olga through Floss's refuge for lost souls, much as he repudiated the thought of poaching on Oscar Hellgren's preserves, much as he disliked the whole flavor of the intrigue before him, Grover's resolution held firm. If you are honest with yourself, he amended Marthe's dictum, you can justify yourself in any course of procedure short of murdering your defenceless grandmother. To be honest with himself was to admit that Olga was a

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necessity; if she was a necessity to the sculptor, that was the sculptor's affair; let the Swede protect his rights as best he might. Unhappily the assault would have to be wary; but there was nothing in the code of the higher honesty that obliged you to refrain from telling or acting a lie before the world, when to do so was strictly a matter of self-preservation.

When he came into the tiny *grande pièce* he found Mme. Choiseul heaving and exclaiming over a brand new crime. A taxicab driver had robbed, raped, and fusilladed a young woman who had asked to be driven to the house of her mother; a scavenger had found her remains on the roadside. There's worse than me, thought Grover.

Madame's engrossment in this horror was blighted by the incorrigible breakfast milk, which was boiling over with the usual sardonic hiss. With the usual squawk of dismay she heaved herself out toward the kitchen, making commendable time in view of her years and her chronic acidity.

Grover picked up the paper she had relinquished, and as though the colossal forces of creation were condescending to him in acknowledgment of the honor he had done them the previous evening, they directed his attention to the columns reserved for mention of the arts. The public were invited to an exhibition of the sculptor Hellgren which included a model of the war monument recently commissioned by the city of Bordeaux.

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On this first day of the show, Hellgren himself might be present, and if so, one thing might lead to another—or be made to lead. In any case the exhibition rooms would serve as a reconnoitring ground.

The show was under the auspices of a dealer in the rue la Boétie, and when Grover arrived there, late in the afternoon, he found only a few visitors. Fashionable patrons of the arts, he supposed, had attended the private showing.

In an inner room, before the model of the monument, Hellgren himself stood, his bulk almost blotting from Grover's view the miniature forms of the "horses and tanks and everything," as Floss had described the Swede's heroic composition. With flourishes of his fat arms he was elucidating its allegories to a tall, slinking woman who, if Grover could believe his eyes, was Mignon Mangini of Idaho Falls.

It was disconcerting to find Mamie here, doubtless following up her advantage with the one man who had ever been seen to respond for more than five minutes at a stretch to her dogged undulations. In the same mystic tone in which she had once, her eyes half closed, told Grover that she was a fervent devotee of the Upanishads, of which he didn't believe her capable of quoting a single precept, she was now, as he approached the pair, murmuring her response to the ecstatic gesture of the wounded poilu at the head of the forlorn parade. "I know just what you meant," she said. "The victory of the Idea, the triumph of faith."

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As a matter of fact for once it was conceivable that Mamie knew what she was talking about, for, Grover reflected, if anybody had ever kept an idealistic banner aloft under terrific fire, it was the lanky self-made soprano who was,—there was no doubt of it,—"getting to sing in opera."

Hellgren seemed almost not to recognize him, but when Mamie greeted Grover by name, recognition dawned, and the sculptor pumped his arm with grateful pleasure. Grover was sorry for Hellgren in advance, sorry for him in principle, and at the same time half envious of such simple guilelessness. Mamie had twisted herself into an attitude which was meant to express embarrassment at being discovered in a situation which she hoped would be construed as clandestine. And Grover's compassion for Hellgren spread out and included in its embrace the would-be guileful Mamie,—poor Mamie who had to go to such lengths for a thrill which wasn't even a true one. And at heart so desperately harmless.

"I only saw the announcement of your show this morning," Grover explained. "I've wanted for a long while to see some of your things." It was the first shot in his campaign of perfidy. The second cost him an even sharper qualm, and anybody but Hellgren and Mamie, he felt sure, would have twigged. "This small model, of course, gives one a very inadequate idea; how far have you progressed on the finished piece?"

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Hellgren rose at once to the bait. *"Pas mal! pas mal!* You must come one day and see it."

"That would give me great pleasure," said Grover.

"Tiens!" cried the sculptor, seized with a happy thought, "Come this very afternoon. I was on the point of leaving when Mlle. Mangini came in. Let's have tea there, all three?"

Mamie's expression was calculated to let him see that Hellgren, the soul of tact, finesse, and chivalry, was inviting him into their clandestinities merely for the sake of her reputation.

Grover was a little unprepared for the prompt success of his machinations, and as they darted across Paris in one of the mad vehicles that seemed to bear a charmed life, Oscar's bulk taxing the springs to the utmost, he wondered if fate were playing her usual game: rainbow and bog.

Hellgren possessed the lease of an entire house, though a small one, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse. The income he was reputed to derive from iron mines in Lappland would account for the chaste marble entrance, the imported shrubberies in the court, the lovely old paintings and chests, a loveliness against which Hellgren appeared fantastic, but for which he alone was responsible. For all his bulk, Hellgren's taste was impeccable, though it ran to the massive and the mathematical. His popularity with the French, Grover reflected, had to do with his preoccupation with form. If Grover had been irritated by the angularities of the

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statues he had just seen in the rue La Boétie, he had come away with a sincere admiration for the solidity of their structure, the harmony and equilibrium of their intricate planes.

This, thought Grover, is the house to which Olga was hurrying the day she tore her stocking. Hellgren was preceding Mamie and himself up a narrow stairway toward a balcony from which they looked down and up and around into the biggest atelier Grover had ever seen. The little house they had entered was as deceptive as a theatre, so small from the outside, so resoundingly big within. When Hellgren spoke, in his loud Swedish French, the walls took up his phrases and flung them back to the slender balcony. Before them were great figures in marble and plaster, encased in scaffoldings. Beside them Hellgren's assistants looked like flies. Thick white dust coated everything, including the windows which stretched from floor to ceiling and across half the roof.

Of Olga there was no sign, and for the next half hour, as he wandered with Mamie through this disciplined quarry, uttering half sincere, half obligatory comments, thinking that if he stayed here long enough he would feel himself a plinth supporting on his own head the incalculable tons of Hellgren's inspirations, Grover wondered where Olga was, whether she would come, whether he might have to continue this fatiguing campaign for weeks and weeks before it bore any sign of fruit.

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Tea would help, he was thinking, half choked with the dust, and sick to death of Mamie's enthusiastic pushing sounds, when, without warning, there was a scamper of feet on the stairs, and an apparition on the balcony. Over the beautiful forged iron railing Olga was leaning, all smiles and capers, blowing kisses down to them,—Columbine returned. Harlequin on a creaking ladder. *Moi,* thought Grover, *je suis le triste Pierrot.*

She came running down into the studio, shook hands with Mamie and himself, then stepped up to kiss the sculptor who was restoring a damp cloth to a head of clay. She received Hellgren's caress with a frisk, and never had Grover watched tokens of domestic affection which he so abjectly failed to relish.

"Come down at once," Olga scolded, "and stop talking about your dreadful gravestones, or we'll have tea without you."

She took Mamie by the arm,—a most hospitable concession,—and Grover stood waiting for Hellgren to descend. Though the sculptor still abounded in theories, some of which he got off as they paused before figures blocking their progress, they eventually made their way up the stairs and into a small salon which was as French as the studio was Swedish.

Tucked into a chintz-covered chair which displayed a pattern of impressionistic grapes and apricots, pale shades which by contrast gave life to her own ivory, honey, and amethyst, and dressed in the simple fashion

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in which he had first seen her, Olga seemed as much at home as Mme. Casimir among her gold-legged chairs. Touching a match to the samovar and ranging the cups, Olga, like Mme. Casimir, was presiding over the table of a man whose creations were strange and even hostile to her; but unlike Mme. Casimir, and markedly so, Olga conveyed the impression of having flitted into this room by chance. Though there were little signs of her residence about the salon, though she fitted beautifully enough into these buff and lavender and gray surroundings, though the rich corduroy sheen of her hair threw back familiar gleams to the mirror in which Mamie was trying to make herself look as little as possible like a woman from Idaho, it would not have seemed strange if Olga had, at an appropriate moment, got up, put on her béret, kissed Oscar nonchalantly on the nose, said to him, in the slang of the streets, "*Adieu, je t'ai vu!*" and frisked off—where? Oh, to the fancy dress ball that Life, to any sister of Léon Vaudreuil, must, when all was said and done, consist of.

"*Thé? Ou bien autre chose!*" she was asking him, with a cup held tentatively under the spiggot.

"*Autre chose,*" he laughed.

She peered down to the lower shelf of the table, taking stock of the bottles. "There's cognac and Swedish punch and grand marnier and—"

"Let it be cognac, with a dash of curaçao," Grover decided.

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"Oh, quelle horreur!" Olga commented, making a grimace as she poured the mixture into a glass with her strong white hands. Mamie was bewailing the trials of singers, whose delicate throats forbade indulgence in alcohol.

Olga, who was drinking tea, challenged this with an account of certain ladies whom she, with her own eyes, had seen so completely "zigzag" that they had to be almost carried home. Yet the very next night they would be on the job, howling their heads off as Manon or the tearful Charlotte. "You take things very seriously, Mademoiselle," she remarked. *"Du reste,"* she added, "it's a characteristic of Americans. *N'est-ce pas, Monsieur?"*

Grover could only admit, with a terrible conviction, that it was.

As he walked down the hill from Hellgren's house, —Mamie had had the good grace to rush home and dress for another engagement,—Grover warned himself sadly that he must not return to it. In Hellgren's babyish eyes, in his caresses, in his pathetic efforts to render himself agreeable, in his hospitable zeal, Grover had detected an undertone of fear, a purely subconscious fear. One incident in particular had revealed it. When they had all settled into easy talk, after the afternoon light had gone, leaving the salon in shadow, Olga, her mind pursuing her gaze over the rooftops of the city, had sighed, a conspicuous event, for usually she could be depended on to be more quietly alert to

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immediate surroundings than anyone in whose company she happened to be. Hellgren had observed the sigh, and his leathery lips had twitched as he anxiously reached forth a hand toward hers. At this she had caught herself together, and smiled for him, whereupon Grover had heaved a sigh of his own, which had probably gone undetected.

Shortly afterwards he had taken leave.

I can't go back, he was now repeating. It isn't fair.

. . . .

The sight of Olga, the fact of having been in her presence for two hours during which there had been established a friendly, if impersonal intimacy, stilled the restlessness that had possessed him for so many barren weeks, and he resumed his painting with something of the old zest. His skill, thanks to much irksome exercise, had improved sufficiently to justify confidence in his ability to progress. Though the canvas still infuriated him by declining to reflect what he saw, nevertheless his strokes were beginning to look more like the strokes of a real painter. Passing judgment on himself, he concluded that his chief asset was taste, his chief liability lack of "morale"—and that, when you came to think of it, was a pretty serious lack. Faith, hope and charity, he reflected, and the greatest of these is not charity, but faith. For what mountains would mere charity move!

As the season turned definitely into spring, bringing

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sunshine so strong that you didn't need your overcoat, he undertook expeditions into the country, sometimes in company with students of his own master, a set with whom he had no trouble in keeping on amiable terms but with whom he had no promptings to "mix." Indeed his lack of interest in these earnest and erratic souls caused him to marvel. Perhaps, he concluded, they are artists and I am not.

Fortified by the generosity of his own decision not to play the traitor, he was for several days, even for weeks, able to thrust his emotions aside,—or rather, he persuaded himself that he was transmuting his passion into channels which would irrigate more profitable areas. In other words, another dose of the Professor Thanet's logical formulae. Gradually, however, they surged back into the reservoir where they exerted such an intolerable pressure. Then some neglected ego within him invented arguments designed to break down his noble resolutions. Your fancied nobility, it whispered, is pure poppycock; what have heroics to do with love? Heroics belong in the realm of sentimentality, and a very old-fashioned brand at that. It's an age of speed, of quick returns on investment, of catch as catch can. If you propose to be noble, you'd better retire into a hermitage, and end your days in proud isolation. The best you can then hope for is to be stuffed and exhibited as the last known specimen of the *honnête homme*.

Most of all, this neglected and sarcastic ego kept

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telling him that in the lives of people like Olga and Hellgren and all the rest of the bohemian herd, gentlemanliness was not only a ludicrous garment but a positive hindrance to hygienic self-expression. They don't wear it, argued his daemon; why should you?

And the image came insistently back, keeping him awake by night, sending him off into blind alleys by day, tying him into knots, and driving him into the corner of town where Marthe and her bedraggled colleagues touched elbows in the mean light that filtered through orange cotton lampshades bedecked with purple crepe roses, drinking bad alcohol to reassure themselves of their right to exist.

On two or three occasions Marthe had been absent, and when she did appear she showed traces of the hysteria that had often made him fear for her. It was a singular fact that when he arrived in good spirits her own thermometer fell, and she would either whip herself into a state of despondency or break into mirthful obscenities. On the other hand if he were in low spirits, her solicitude never failed, and out of such moments would spring the tender, ripe, and stoical comments which were so much stronger than Marthe's own ability to guide herself by them. She was like a mariner who, at the bidding of orders which cannot be disputed, has uncomplainingly left port on a ship he knows to be unseaworthy.

For weeks he kept his resolve. True, he went oftener than before to Floss's, but that, he argued, was

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a legitimate compromise; even there he seldom caught sight of Olga. Then Floss went to Biarritz, and he was alone in all Paris, wasting precious hours at the Dôme, in the unacknowledged hope that Olga would walk past, on her way to or from the house a few streets distant.

Sooner or later every lost soul turned up at the Dôme,—that was both its attraction and its curse,—and one soggy afternoon in May, when the staleness of his work, combined with his inability to indulge in the refreshing vacations that seemed possible to everyone but his own improvident self had reduced him to a low ebb of vitality, as he dragged tired limbs and jangled nerves along the less sunny side of the Boulevard Raspail toward the inevitable cafe, he caught sight of Hellgren and Mamie Mangum, at a table on the terrasse.

"You're just the one," Mamie greeted him, "to complete the party. We're going up the river for dinner."

Without definitely accepting,—for he didn't yet know whether it was a party of three or four,—Grover praised the idea and sat down with them.

"Tomorrow I go to Bordeaux for a conference," Hellgren explained, and Grover's heart made a guilty leap. "We'll celebrate beforehand. When I come back there may be nothing to celebrate."

From this unwieldy attempt at humor Grover guessed that the bourgeois committee of Bordeaux were not seeing eye to eye with the impetuous Scan-

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dinavian. The difficulty had something to do with a suitable location for the monument. "I won't have my column lit up by the electric rays from an advertisement for beer," Hellgren had been heard to declare.

Not till they had finished their apéritif did Grover learn that they were to call for Olga, who knew nothing of the plan, which, so Grover now concluded, was of Mamie's devising. Secure in that guess, he could the more easily silence his own conscience; for if the party had a squinty air, the responsibility could be laid upon Mamie's shoulders: shoulders which could roll it off with a borrowed gesture. *Her* conscience would never stand in her way. If the Italian impresario to whom Tamponi had recommended her were to make sly advances before signing the half promised contract, the chances were that poor Mamie would leap at him; Paris wasn't half as demoralizing as she had expected it to be.

Olga came out of the salon and met them on the balcony overlooking the studio. She was in a soft white dress that made her look cool and slim. Her hair seemed thicker and richer than ever, and massed high on her head it revealed a pair of ears that seemed wasted on such a massive sculptor as Hellgren.

She greeted the proposal of an excursion with a squeal that had, for Grover, a hint of almost hysterical relief in it. This impression was corroborated by her manner toward Mamie, which was more cordial than Mamie had any right to expect; it was almost as though

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she were thankful for Mamie, incomprehensible to her though the lanky American girl in her yellow make-up and brick-colored draperies must certainly be.

Despite the crowds on the quay and on the boat, the trip up the river was pleasant. The intolerable brightness of the day gave place to a soft, beneficent twilight that promised to linger, as though it were already summertime, and there was a thrilling hush over the world as they walked up the path toward the inn.

They chose a table on a porch that hung over the river, and there was a general tendency to lean forward, elbows on the cloth, and forget every irritating fact in life, assume that angles were round, that the odds were in one's favor, and all the inevitables, evitable. There was contented and easy laughter to spare for inane remarks that normally, Grover felt, would have made exhaustive drains on patience. Why have I been so foolish, was the little cry of pent-up emotion within himself. Just see how safe it all is!

It was a question of what to drink. Hellgren's choice was beer, and Mamie followed his lead, explaining that her new coach didn't object to that beverage. Besides, thought Grover, she'd drink iodine if Hellgren did.

He and Olga in the same breath voted for white wine, and their eyes met. Some kite that he had been holding to earth till consciousness was numb from the ache slipped quickly away and went soaring over the treetops, the willows and the poplars, across the lemon-

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colored sky. His shoe accidentally,—then, God help him deliberately,—touched a surface which his prosaic self recognized as fine leather, but which his more rarefied self recognized as the anchorage of the kite string.

They ate and drank and laughed and talked. Not a thing worth saying was said, and the brunt of it all was sustained by Mamie and Hellgren. Olga and Grover contributed punctuation. It didn't matter what was said, thought Grover, so long as those two could be urged and prodded to fill up the gap created by their existence on earth. What did matter was that an orchestra in another part of the building,—downstairs in a bigger room,—was playing. What also mattered, enormously, desperately, was that he and Olga recognized,—he dared guess it,—and instinctively responded to some hysterical overtone in the high spirits of the other; and each challenged the other's waywardness by pouring more wine. Is it just spring, he wondered? Is it a sign of transition from some weary old order into a vertiginous new one? Or in God's name, what?

"If we went down and danced a little!" Grover proposed.

"*Oh, oui!*" Olga agreed, as though she had been impatiently awaiting the suggestion.

There couldn't have been a better excuse than the music for the mood they were so eager to throw themselves into, each for his own reason, possibly, but none the less eagerly for that. The rhythms had the effect

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of abolishing every inhibition, every faculty except sense, which was left free, tingling, communicable.

Let's talk about *my* sweetie now!

The vulgarity of it, but the grotesque patness! His partner wouldn't have known the meaning of the American words, even had he sung them aloud, and that added a piquancy to it all. Everything tonight added a piquancy.

Olga was not the same girl: she was a dryad running from his pursuit, yet pausing to let him catch up. Never would he have believed himself capable of holding Olga, of all women in the world, so intimately, of kissing her with such abandon. They said nothing, for words had been abolished along with the rest. She must have been terrifically surprised at his behavior, and her own! yet no faintest sign of surprise was there.

But it was time to go back, and retaining the glow in tightly clasped hands they mounted the stairs. At the door leading to the porch Grover was suddenly re-endowed with the necessary, superfluous circumspections of which the dance had momentarily debarrassed him. Glib words were at hand. Oscar was ready with his subconsciously fearful affectionateness, and Mamie rolled her white eyes at Grover in a regard of dawning suspicion—and envy, not malicious, merely pathetic.

During the remainder of the evening Olga resumed her impersonal manner, and not until Grover took leave of them all at his disembarking point did she again

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acknowledge what their proximity had meant. Even then it was only by a warm return pressure of his hand, and a smouldering hint of blue in her gray eyes, —a hint which the little guardian folds quickly attempted to deny.

Hellgren was going away, and it was caddish to steal that advantage, but he no longer cared. He seized a private moment to invite Olga to lunch.

In a matter of fact tone she suggested that he lunch at the house instead. "After lunch," she added, "I'm going out to Enghien to visit my aunt."

What's her damn aunt got to do with it, he wondered, but even that hypothetical lady couldn't damp the raging flame.

. . . .

When he arrived next morning Olga was slicing cabbages and green peppers into a sulphur-colored salad bowl and mixing the contents with a red spoon. His offer to make the dressing was accepted, and she let him find his own materials in the cupboard.

While she broke eggs for the omelette he was allowed to light the gas and cut the bread. Then the bell rang, and the concierge came up to say that M. Peñaverde was calling.

"*Oh, miséricorde!*" Olga wailed, and reached for two extra eggs.

Grover, in silence, lit a cigarette.

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"We're in the kitchen," she called out, when the visitor's step was heard, and Don Armando entered.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, with his nasal Spanish accent, and nothing in his expression indicated whether or not he was displeased to see Grover. "When the prime minister is away, *on se fiche de la république, quoi!*"

"*Oh, non!*" Olga laconically retorted, "*on fait la cuisine.* You arrive too late to help make lunch, but you may help eat it. It will be good."

"That I am certain of. But unfortunately I can't stay."

Grover offered Don Armando a cigarette, which the Spaniard politely declined in favor of his own brand of Russian cigarettes, with long paper mouthpieces.

"I merely called," he explained, "to ask if you wouldn't come to the theatre with me this evening, and have supper with some friends."

"*Je regrette, Monsieur.* I have promised my aunt."

"I seem to have arrived too late for everything," said Don Armando.

The omelette was sizzling, the two unnecessary eggs having been thriftily replaced. "*Mais, Monsieur,*" Olga ignored the implications of his remark, "If everyone were always on time, all the charm of accident would be lost."

Grover, hoping she was thinking of their own first accidental meeting, when Léon had arrived too late,

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if at all, gave himself the benefit of the doubt and smiled inwardly.

When the omelette was browned, Olga transferred it deftly to a platter under the grill and accompanied Peñaverde to the balcony.

On her return her movements were even more brisk, and they were soon seated at a small table in the band-box salon.

"Why are all these stupid men enraged to have me pose for them?" she half soliloquized, with an anger that was very real, though Grover felt it to be directed at an object which hadn't been defined. She broke off a neat slice of bread which she began to make fun of, calling it severe and English.

"The answer is easy," Grover replied. The painter's visit had brought ghosts into the room and created an uncomfortable hiatus.

Now that she was at rest, a reflective mood was overtaking her. "Though it's bad enough," she was saying, almost as though he were not present, "to be obliged to sit in this stuffy house and boil coffee while my Swede splits blocks of marble. Ah, those statues —they stupify me; they will be the death of me. That one of the woman holding in her hand the scales of justice! *Grands dieux!* . . . What do you say about it, Prince? *Hein,* the prince there, who sits and thinks."

"I'm thinking, 'poor Oscar'!"

"*Pas si pauvre que ça, va!* He'll look a long while

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before he finds another who will make clothes for herself year in and year out so that he can economize and fill the place with rocks and chisels for his enervating noises. Perhaps he thinks one gives up one's youth as freely as if one had two or three more in the cupboard—*bah, merci alors!* . . . And the prince there, who thinks so much that he doesn't eat his salad—*dites, Prince!*"

"He thinks things he doesn't dare say."

"Meanwhile one looks at the coffee. You are coming into the kitchen, Prince?"

"Why do you call me Prince?" asked Grover, lighting a cigarette and boldly offering it to her. As nonchalantly as though it hadn't touched his lips she accepted, and they waited for the coffee to percolate. The air was heavy with clouds of emotional rain.

"Because you are charming," she said with a smile that no one, Grover thought, would be justified in misconstruing as an overture.

"And on that fatal day, when you suddenly take it into your head to desert the camp—"

She interrupted. "I didn't say it!"

"But if you do! And if a prince were waiting outside—had been waiting and waiting?"

The coffee was ready to pour. "What a conspiracy!" she laughed. "Anyone would say I was not fond of Oscar. But I am."

"And the noises? And the monotony?"

She motioned him to his seat at the table again.

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"Ah that's it!" she sighed. "The monotony. Though for that matter I could be happy in a cabin in the country with a cow and a pig and a few chickens. Here chick, chick, chick! That makes far more sense than all their cackle in the studios."

"But not alone!"

She scarcely heard him; she was admiring the idyll she had conjured up. "Ah, what happiness!"

"With me?" he insisted, his voice almost failing.

"Drink your coffee, Prince. Princes don't live in cabins; they live in palaces and don't think of the rent, —palaces that don't even exist—air palaces."

"Couldn't you live in an air palace?"

She burst into a merry laugh, which the little folds this time made no attempt to derail. "I'm the most practical girl in Paris," she declared.

"And the most seductive," he retorted passionately, "and unhappy—which isn't as it should be. You see what a mistake it is to be so practical. There's something to be said for air palaces. They're beautiful." Her taunt still hurt him, and whipped the flame higher. Suddenly, with a sensation of dizziness, he heard words coming to his lips which he couldn't check, however irrevocably they might alter his old inherited world.

"Would you marry me?" he asked.

Her merriment, her nonchalance faded. Into her face came a look of hardness that reminded him of the sphinx he had first seen perched upon Léon's piano. Then the hardness melted into an expression of tender-

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ness that he had never seen her wear. "What a nice prince!" she was saying in quiet tones that sent a dull pain through him, for it was an answer to his question, and an answer in the negative.

He remained silent, for there were no words for the surging emotions that crowded up into his throat.

Olga was shaking her head, a little pensively. "You don't know me," she said, and her tone had turned almost sharp.

"What does that matter?" he cried, half scornfully. "If one is in love, and has been for months, isn't that enough?"

She shook her head again. "No, not enough—all the more, if one is really in love. If love weren't there it wouldn't so much matter."

"Don't talk nonsense!" he cried, pushing his chair from the table in a wild need to plead his cause with some language more potent than words.

She warded him off with her hand. She was drawing herself out of a revery which seemed to include him, without centering around him.

"No," she said, as if finding an answer to her own thoughts, "It's as stupid to think impractical things as it is to do them. Life is bargaining."

"It's unbearable to hear you talk like that," cried Grover, almost at breaking point. Then he returned to the charge armed with logic. "*Mettons que c'est un troc*—even on that basis you can't have more to gain by staying on here. You've been here two years;

you've paid all you owe, and more, to Oscar. Don't you owe something to yourself?"

It was taking much for granted to assume that if she paid what she owed to herself it would be to him that she would turn, but he must take that for granted; he must assume it from her very willingness to listen, from the memory of last night!

She looked at him with steady eyes, while the lips puckered into a whimsical smile which seemed to him to say, Though many men, and strange ones too, have besieged me, you're the most strangely argumentative of the lot. Others plead with their bodies; your body is mute and your words are badly representing it. Before his eyes she had grown into a mature woman facing facts honestly, though, as he felt, from a wrong angle; and now she was the dissembling girl of twenty again.

"Come and dry the crockery while I wash it," she said, springing up from her chair, and reaching for his hand to lead him off. "Then we'll go to Enghien together."

There's not a woman on earth, he was bitterly reflecting, but loves to dance on a moral precipice. Not a woman on earth but would, in evading the main issue, hold out a hope to be caught at. It would be kinder, he was thinking, if she would turn me out to die of my malady. Yet like all men he was desperately glad of the sop she had flung to him. What might one

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not convince her of, with a whole afternoon at one's disposal!

The journey in the suburban train was uncomfortable, and they both had a mind for silence. The aunt lived in a cheaply over-ornamented villa on the shore of the lake near the casino, and Grover took the boat and rowed through waters clogged with reeds while Olga went inside to rummage. She had brought an empty portmanteau in which to take back some articles that belonged to her.

Something squinted. First of all, how could Olga and Léon have an aunt who was obviously a Jewess?

The explanation was forthcoming after dinner, when they waited at the station for their train. The so-called aunt was merely the woman with whom Olga's father had spent his last years on earth. This woman had been kinder than her mother, an ex-music-hall artiste who was now at large in the south, when last heard of. The most astonishing part of the revelation was that Olga could apparently be left unmoved by all the implied sordidness in such a state of affairs. With Olga's taste, with all the qualities that set her apart and enshrined her, it was hard to reconcile the lack of shame for such gracelessness in the very structure of one's family. He dropped it into the limbo of subjects on which it is unprofitable to dwell.

It was eleven o'clock when they reached the house on Montparnasse. Olga had said nothing in contradiction to what she had said during lunch, but her

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manner all day, quiet and abstracted, bore witness to a great deal of cogitation. There was no telling to what conclusions her thoughts might have led. Grover was calling down the aid of all the aphorisms about women he had ever heard: that women had been known to change their minds, that their No was not to be taken as final. It had been a strange day, full of poignant moments, and now it was at an end,—for whatever private conclusions Olga had reached, his instinct told him that rashness would only hinder his cause. Other men might succeed by methods which would only be foreign to him.

At the door she turned and faced him, holding out her hand for her portmanteau with a noncommital smile.

"May I come to see you tomorrow?" he asked.

"Not tomorrow."

"The day after? . . . If you like we can go up the river and dine—and dance."

Her smile turned indulgent, a little wry. "Yes, that's what we'll do."

The concierge had opened the door and was handing her a note that had been left for her.

"*Bonsoir, Prince!*" she called back to him.

. . . .

Lacking a safe margin for the dinner party, he was obliged to borrow a hundred francs from Mme. Choiseul, thus enrolling himself on the long and

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mournful list of her debtors. She made not the slightest demur, however,—even suggested that two hundred might be more convenient to him, but Grover declined. As usual he was waiting for a cheque from Boston.

Olga was still in her brooding mood when he called for her. "Ah, it's the prince," she said.

"Oscar will return at five-thirty," she announced when he was seated in the salon. "I've just received a telegram."

Grover stared sightlessly through the window as he might have stared through the window of the Marple nursery in the days when Emma Kittendorf used to snatch Rhoda away for her nap, leaving him alone with the toys that were useless so long as Rhoda wasn't there to share his enjoyment in them. The thought of Rhoda was prompted by a letter he had received from Lucerne stating that she was on her way to Paris. And he had a feverish desire to arm himself against Rhoda with the knowledge that Olga would succumb.

"That cancels our dinner on the river," he said, in a tone that implied the cancellation of so much else.

Olga had to lay in stores for her Scandinavian's big breakfasts, and together they set out for market. Then it was time to go to the train to meet Hellgren.

Not once had she mentioned Peñaverde, though he had undoubtedly called, for in the ashtray on the mantel of the salon there were two hollow paper ends of the Russian cigarettes he invariably smoked. Doubtless she refrained from speaking of his visit because

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of its distastefulness, and that Grover could well understand.

She insisted that he accompany her to the Gare d'Orsay, and they arrived in time to see Hellgren come through the gate, clad in a baggy linen suit, mopping his forehead, eagerly smiling. Olga had made a visible effort and was yielding to his fat, proprietory embrace. His greeting for Grover was as friendly as ever.

They drove home and left the luggage with the concierge, proceeding to a restaurant of the quartier for dinner. Grover accompanied them to the house again, since both insisted, and because he suspected that Olga dreaded being left alone with her lover. Then he regretted having done so, for Olga seemed to have developed some fiendish desire to make him wince by bestowing caresses and attentions on Hellgren, while the latter beamed like a human sun on an acre of conjugal felicity.

Hellgren was tired; consequently to his simple way of reasoning, Grover must be tired, and when the latter rose to take leave, though it was only ten o'clock, his host offered him a bedroom for the night, even begged him to remain. For one of the grotesque features of the situation was that Grover, by his forced concentration on Hellgren's sculptures at the time of his first visit, had aroused a fervent partiality in the sculptor's bosom. In his bitterness Grover reflected that even Olga couldn't have conceived a more exquisite form

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of torture than that opened up by her lover's well-meant suggestion.

Olga accompanied him across the little balcony and down the stairs to the outer door, and there, for the first time, and to Grover's joy and dismay, held out her hand and said to him, almost shyly, with tender eyes,—a delicious new phase of her,—"I love you, *Prince!*"

He caught her up and held her, while in the distance a burst of contented Scandinavian whistling echoed from wall to wall of the great atelier. At that they clung to each other more tightly. Then she wished to be released.

THE next morning he telephoned, but Olga was not at home. The concierge believed she had gone to visit her aunt, who was ill. Grover left a message and asked the concierge to call him upon Mlle. Vaudreuil's return.

It was Sunday, and the two nondescript men who also had lodgings in Mme. Choiseul's apartment were reading newspapers in the *grande pièce,* luxuriating in their weekly day of rest and ruining what little comfort the room might hold for Grover. He decided to walk

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in the sun-splashed streets before the promenaders made their appearance.

Never had the magic of Paris been more potent, never had he walked its streets with such a Shelley-like sensation of being borne on clouds. The only fly in his ointment was the contretemps caused by the illness of Olga's inconvenient pseudo-aunt.

For Hellgren he was genuinely sorry, but no court of love could hold him, Grover Thanet, responsible for the fact that Hellgren was no longer loved, if ever he had been. But—intrusive thought—if Olga had never loved Oscar, how could she have allied herself with him? Women sometimes let themselves in for that sort of thing, he supposed, without knowing the meaning of a real love that was destined to overtake them. It was a game in which Hellgren had played, and for two years running, won; now it was another's turn. Despite which consoling sophistry one could scarcely use Hellgren's blindness and hospitality as a screen for covert glances and whisperings. That sort of clandestine operations,—so much in vogue,—revolted him. His relation with Olga must be different, even if they had to wait until a feasible plan could be evolved, until they could establish their very own privacy. A fairly substantial cheque was on its way across the Atlantic: enough to let them escape. He must look up some modest retreat—for a honeymoon!

The thing to do was to hold grimly to the helm till some harbor hove into view. Women were ingenious

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in such emergencies. Meanwhile his cloud floated him toward the Parc Monceau which was proudly displaying its fashionable spring foliage, in all shades of green from canary to bottle. He passed through the great iron grille and strolled down the path toward a penny chair which gave him a view of the group of lovely, mellow, crumbling Corinthian pillars mirrored in the surface of the lake. Lonely, haphazard souls strolled by him at intervals, mostly decent and anaemic men and women, each with a bunion or a limp, or a hat that belied the face under it. Life *is* hard, Grover commiserated, and not many can bear the weight of it without cracking or developing excrescences.

One girl, standing near the edge of the water and throwing crumbs to the birds, was a beautiful exception to prove the rule. Her back was turned, but in its slimness and smartness one could take an impersonal joy. When one woman belongs to you, he reflected in contentment, it's as though the beauty of all other women were paying tribute to her. Only your French women had the clue to real chic; aside from their taste there was an indefinable style in their manner of standing, of walking. She had turned into a path, her gaze idly directed toward a statue, when, with a gasp, he rose to catch a closer glimpse of her.

Rhoda!

And not French at all!

With a thrill that tore through him he hurried after her. She had halted before the clinging marble figures

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of Marguerite and Juliette who paid homage to the suave Gounod, and with an unwonted trepidation, almost giddiness, Grover softly approached and laid a hand on her shoulder.

Without fuss she drew away, and turned to face the intruder, then with a comical stare that transformed her from an elegant young *mondaine* to a flushed, excited, bright-eyed girl, she relaxed and he kissed her, "park and all" as Rhoda expressed it, straightening her hat after the assault.

There were quick, confused explanations. Hadn't he got her letter? She had sent a *pneumatique* inviting him to lunch with her and the Pearns.

Grover had not received it.

"Didn't you spend the night at home?" she asked, teasingly.

He was almost frightened at the realization that he almost hadn't! and he gave her an ambiguous smile. There *had* been nights, a few, that he had spent away from the rue Truffaut, and Rhoda was doubtless seeing at a glance that he was no longer the innocent little boy,—yet her knowledge of that, strangely, blessedly, didn't dim the steady affectionateness of her regard. He hadn't thought to look for any mail that morning; Mme. Choiseul had taken to her bed with a recurrence of blotches, which might account for his failure to receive the note.

"As a matter of fact I almost didn't write it," Rhoda added.

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"Why not?"

In his mind a panic-stricken voice was whispering: Remember what she did to you and Sophie; don't let her do it to you and Olga!

She was still smiling, though there was evidence of wounded pride in her eyes. "Do you know how many letters I've written you in the last few months that you've rudely ignored?"

"Quite a few, I bet," Grover admitted.

"All but two," she reproached him. "And both signed hastily yours. You must be the busiest man in Paris."

She explained that they had arrived last night, and this morning Aunty Pearn had made a bee-line for the American church. "We've dragged the God of our Fathers and Philip Brooks right across the Sahara and half way up the Matterhorn. The air of this town smells too deliciously pagan for words. Won't you take me to some haunts of iniquity before we sail?"

They had sauntered out of the park, and from the boulevard one could look up to the windows of Noémi Janvier's flat. He checked an impulse to point it out; for, epoch-making as it was, it wasn't worth telling—to Rhoda. And with that admission he saw that forever there must be little reserves between himself and Rhoda Marple. It was not that she couldn't be made to understand—anything; but there were so many significant trifles in life that must be seized on the wing, that lost their point in the process of explanation.

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So with the haunts of iniquity: there were plenty to which he might take her, but very few from which she would obtain the flavor she vaguely sought. He pictured a meeting between Rhoda and Marthe Lamielle and for the first time realized to the full how far from New England he had travelled.

There were scores of questions to be asked and answered, but after a little the process became almost mechanical to Grover, and his thoughts were sinking beneath Rhoda's wavelets, trying to find the direction of his own current, for it was impossible to keep the course merely by the landmarks. Her talk of regimental balls in Cairo, Easter in Rome, tennis at Mürren was strange in the ears of a young painter aglow with hopes of a future in the company of a girl whom he was illicitly stealing away from her illicit alliance with a sculptor and whose aunt's Fathers had had no God to speak of. At any moment Rhoda might turn to him and say, with the old air of reproach, Oh, Grover, don't tell me your mind is already on the ocean with your ships again. A rush of fondness for Rhoda and all the associations she brought back with her came into his veins, and he passed her hand through his arm and folded her fingers into his as they strolled up the hill toward the Etoile.

There they found an old-fashioned victoria and drove to the Hotel du Rhin, where the Pearns greeted Grover with an affectionate stiffness that touched and charmed him, and they all sat down to a good and

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expensive lunch, a little intimidated by the malaise which only Paris can throw into the heart of true Bostonians.

And he had to improvise polite answers to their polite questions about himself and his painting. Couldn't they see some of his work? Grover thought of the unfinished sketch of a tomato salad on the easel in his shabby bedroom, and again knew to the full how far he had gone on the road of his destiny. Though none of his paintings were ready to be shown to these poor old dears, each stood for some milestone or other in the direction of self-development, and though his thoughts and emotions were equally not for their viewing, they were the thoughts and emotions of a man years and years older than the boy who had tried to parry their innocent questions, only twelve months ago, anent his plans for the future. Now he had to parry more than ever, for their eyes made inquiries which their lips were far too well-trained to utter. How do you spend your days and your nights? the eyes were asking. Have you successfully avoided the snares and pitfalls of this notorious city? Isn't it lonely for you? Or have you found some nice, refined, Christian companions?

All but Rhoda's. Rhoda's eyes, more melting than in the past, were saying, I know it; I know it; and I can bear to hear all about her in a moment, but let's prolong the illusion of the old days a little,—then, when you're ready.

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As sisterly as ever, Rhoda showed fewer signs of the old tendency to challenge and tease. Whereas she had once almost scoffed at his artistic leanings, his romantic notions, she now seemed to accept them without question. During his vacations from college she had taunted him with not being interested in "anything of less than five syllables;" now she seemed almost eager to hear his vocabulary. In fact she was the very first person who had ever looked at him with the trace of awe that the sight of a live artist is wont to arouse in the breast of a virgin, and there was something extremely ironic to him in that fact.

"I'm sure you know an awful lot of riff-raff," she said. "I'd love to meet some of them."

"If you condemn them before you even see them," he retorted, "you haven't much chance."

"I'll be as tough as I can," Rhoda assured him, pulling her hat over one eye to the horror of Miss Pearn, whose face nevertheless was a network of smiles that reminded Grover of the wrinkles on Mme. Choiseul's cold boiled milk.

Grover shook his head. "They'd see through the pose at a glance; riff-raff being very perspicacious—and, though you might not believe it, not at all tough."

"What are they then?"

"Like me, I suppose."

"Oh, that would be *too* nice," said Rhoda. "I couldn't bear it."

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"Have I changed much?" he asked her later in the day, unable to hold in his curiosity.

The answer he half expected was that he had grown worldly-wise and rakish. The answer he got proved a shock to his vanity, for after a steady, testing regard, Rhoda told him he had changed in a way that made her want to mother him.

"You've lost your carefree smile," she said. "In its place you've got two little lines, and a sort of shadow, and the look of a man facing something grim. It's as if you were worried about something and don't know what."

You look so sad, honey,—Floss's plaint echoed in his brain. He had put it down to Floss's own excessive cheeriness that emphasized the contrast for her, but if it was apparent to Rhoda too, there must be just cause, and it oppressed him. For deep within himself he had wondered if he was a failure; and if you *were* a failure or were going to be, surely you would have the look of a man facing something grim! He longed to ask if his cheek still went the nice old way, but if he did, God alone knew what rivulets of mutual affection that would let loose, and with Olga curled up in his heart, and Rhoda, for all her bantering ways, so desperately sensitive without showing it, they might both go all to pieces right in the middle of Paris and never get properly put together again. The hardest problem in life, he reflected, is to know what to hold back and what not to.

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After he had left her that evening, with the prospect of an appointment next day which he hoped to heaven wouldn't conflict with a telephone message from Montparnasse, he spent hours blowing smoke toward his ceiling and trying to disentangle his two personalities. For there were parts of him still alive, far more alive than he had suspected, that belonged to New England, and parts that belonged to Paris—and never the twain shall meet, he groaned.

. . . .

Again he telephoned to the house on Montparnasse, but the concierge informed him that Mlle. Vaudreuil was still away. In desperation he asked to speak to M. Hellgren but was told that the sculptor had been summoned to Bordeaux again and would not return for several days. Again he left his message and repeated his wish to be notified upon Olga's arrival.

She might, he thought reproachfully, at least have written a few lines to tide him over the interval. But he had often noticed that to most people the act of writing was by no means as glib and facile as it was to himself. And just to give himself the satisfaction of not leaving his situation with Olga entirely in statu quo he wrote a short note, addressing it in care of the aunt at Enghien. Having done that, and having pictured her reception of it with a vividness that made its reception a reality in his own mind, he had the illusion that their plan was progressing, and that gave

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him courage for the next encounter with Rhoda, whom he was to accompany on shopping and sightseeing rounds.

The Paris in which he appeared with Rhoda was the Paris reserved for travellers,—the smart shops, the fashionable theatres and restaurants, the Louvre,—and to satisfy her curiosity in regard to haunts of iniquity he took her to garish and expensive cabarets that he had never set foot in. There they saw many people from Hollywood. It hurt him that Rhoda should carry away images of him in settings so utterly unrepresentative of his life, but the alternative of taking her to his own haunts and presenting her to Marthe or the Casimirs or the ribald intellectuals was still riskier, for if he did that, heaven knew what distorted images Rhoda would carry away from it all. In the immortal phrase of his countrymen you had to be educated up to Bohemia before you could apprehend its essence, and though Rhoda was quick at the uptake she wasn't sufficiently in key with the phases of life that interested him to respond intuitively—the only kind of response that counted. If Floss had only been in town it would have been simple, for in Floss's peach-bloom salon Rhoda could have watched the daily parade of lost souls without being in any way committed, and gone home secure in the knowledge that she had seen more famous and infamous riff-raff at close quarters than any nice girl from Boston had ever been vouchsafed on the strength of an eight-day visit.

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As it was, the glitter and impetus of Paris enchanted her, and Grover kept thinking up diversions which would postpone the inevitable "long quiet talk." He was afraid that if the opportunity arose he would tell Rhoda many things that were better left unsaid. And every day he spent with her was rendered the more exhausting by the strain caused by Olga's silence. No reply to his letter; nothing but the echo of workmen's hammers and chisels in Hellgren's house.

But under all the excitement to which Paris lifted Rhoda, there lay a sombre mood of which Grover caught occasional glimpses. If he had changed in the manner that Rhoda alleged, it was equally true that some analogous change had taken place in her. Some of the old crispness and sparkle had gone; in its place was a stillness, a meditative watchfulness which threatened to turn into melting looks and discouraged gestures.

"It's a great pity you have to leave so soon," said Grover as they sat at dinner on the eve of her departure. They had driven to the restaurant in the Place du Tertre to which Léon Vaudreuil had introduced him, and as it was late they had the room to themselves, except for a few people who couldn't possibly matter to anybody.

"I'd love to stay longer," she replied, and Grover wondered if secretly she weren't a little relieved to be sailing, "but I've been gone for months, and Father isn't at all well. When I'm at home there are little

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things to do which he isn't conscious of. The servants don't see them. I don't quite know what it is I do do, or what it is I'll ever do,—but whatever it is, he misses it, though of course he would never complain."

"It's you he needs," said Grover, "and that's easily understood."

"Perhaps." In her tone was deprecation of the value of anything *she* might radiate, also a hint of chagrin that no one but her father should make demands upon it. It was as though Rhoda's old magnetism were in danger of growing weak for lack of suitable objects on which to exercise it. As Grover looked at her he fancied he could see qualities in her which he had seen in typical old maids of New England: delicately tinted flowers that had been passed by for more gorgeous blooms, retaining their fragrance and grace and fastidiousness, lovely but pathetic. They ended by going to lectures in nice old pairs, subscribing to movements, waiting for a war to break out. As he had long ago confessed to Rhoda, he had rather a penchant for them.

"Oh *I* need you too," he assured her, with a sudden deep sincerity. "Perhaps more than I know."

Her steady regard was on him, and her eyes were braced against another hurt.

"But don't you see, Rhoda dear, I need the other things too—things you call pagan?"

Tears were rolling down her cheeks, and he had the panicky feeling that tears always aroused in him.

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"Oh, I'm not ashamed of them," she said through her grotesque little swallows and smiles. "They're only drops of water life squeezes out of you when you get too full—of feelings."

As he searched for comforting phrases Grover knew once again what ill-fitting garments words can be for the intricate emotions they foolishly attempt to clothe, and he quenched back the five-syllable things that rose to his lips, and stroked Rhoda's hand instead.

At the Gare St. Lazare next morning he found her a little pallid, but smiling. Standing with the Pearns amid a heap of supremely respectable luggage, Rhoda caught sight of him and came forward leading a young poodle.

"Look what Morty gave me!" she cried, proudly exhibiting the bewildered puppy. "I've always wanted a French poodle, and this is him!"

"Wait till he strikes Aldergrove. God help him when the airedales and chesapeakes sniff him and his French ways."

"They'll sniff you and your French ways too, if you're not careful. You'd better come back before they forget you."

"Oh!" he laughed, to conceal the depth of his feeling, "So long as *you* don't forget!"

"Well," said Rhoda, and the gates were opening and it would soon be time to say good-bye, "It's awful hard to remember somebody who never writes to you."

He promised to do better, and turned away from

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the train with a feeling compounded of sadness and relief.

Walking rapidly toward a telephone booth, he called Hellgren's number, but there was no reply.

. . . .

As the days went by his mind began conjuring up other aphorisms. If their No was never final, what about their Yes? When Olga had, on her own initiative, told him she loved him, it had never occurred to him that there could be the slightest ambiguity in the admission. Even now, after eight days of silence, he was prepared to swear by all that was sacred that she had meant it. It was the transparent sincerity of her tone rather than the words themselves that had sent him away in such elation and borne him up during this maddening interval. He was also prepared to swear that Olga had good reasons for not making a sign,—reasons that would prove simple once there was an opportunity for her to explain them. That Olga, after her last admission to him, should feel ill at ease in Oscar's house was what he could best understand in all the world, yet surely she must realize what a gone feeling it gave him to be left without news, without the reassurances that a newly born love must have to thrive upon.

He had revolved the wisdom of going out to Enghien, but apart from the fact that Rhoda's presence in Paris had made that plan difficult of execution, he

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had a delicate scruple about intruding on Olga's privacy. Her recent air of abstraction implied that she was working out a problem; very likely she was still working it out,—no one knew better than he how long it takes to dig the tiniest scrap of truth from out the depths of oneself.

To silence his bootless thoughts he returned to his unfinished sketch of a tomato salad. The salad had long since been thrown out, having deteriorated into a condition unsuitable for posing, particularly in one's bedroom,—and he had only his memory to draw upon. Thus, he reflected, does one struggle up the long ladder to fame: while one wonders what the devil has happened to one's best girl, one probes into the recesses of a troubled memory to recapture the peculiar way in which a lettuce leaf curls round a slice of Bermuda onion.

There was a frantic yapping at the door of his bedroom, and he opened it to discover Mouche and Mme. Choiseul, with a *petit bleu* for him which had just been left by the *facteur*.

With a tight throat he tore it open, but it was not from Olga. It was from Mamie Mangum. Would he call in at her apartment this afternoon? There was something she wished to talk over with him.

What on earth could Mamie have to discuss with him? Hellgren? Surely Mamie couldn't be so fatuous as to misconstrue the man's plain decency to her!

But he lost no time in obeying the summons. Mamie

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lived in an ugly street near the Conservatoire, within earshot of a hundred pianos. He found her in a studio littered with music, stretched upon a low divan in a dusty robe of purple, on her lap an Italian libretto of Thaïs, in which she was to make her first appearance in Naples. One half the room was as bare as a stage; the other half as cluttered as a Turkish bazar.

"Where is Olga?" she asked him as soon as he was seated in the chair to which she had motioned him.

The question sank into him like a rock.

"How should I know!" he temporized.

"I thought you might."

"They told me she was at her aunt's."

"Well she's not."

Grover felt numb, sitting in this cross between a workshop and a harem and staring at a strangely curt, strangely angry Mamie who might or might not know many things that were vital to him.

"What makes *you* so concerned about her?"

To his astonishment he saw tears in Mamie's eyes. He was so accustomed to her histrionics that he had lost sight of the fact that she might have a real feeiing or two.

"My heart is broken," said Mamie.

To Grover it seemed merely that her vanity was a little bent, but he held his peace.

"My love was real," she went on.

"Who for?"

"Oh, don't be so dumb!"

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"Oscar?"

Mamie nodded, and dried her tears.

"Well, don't you still?"

Again she nodded. Not a single gesture, Grover noted, impressed.

"What's it got to do with Olga?"

"She's gone, and he's nearly crazy."

"I thought he was in Bordeaux."

"He's back."

"Have you seen him?"

Mamie sat up on the divan, staring at him with a return of her tragic technique. "I met him by chance in the Bois. He was in a terrible state."

"What did he say?"

"Only what I've told you . . . I did what I could to comfort him."

Again the tears came into Mamie's eyes.

"But he wouldn't be comforted," Grover prompted, picturing Mamie's overtures.

"He said dreadful things. I'll hear them all my life. And broke away."

Grover was walking about the room, chafing at the fate that obliged him to learn these things at the hands of Mamie Mangum. His own course was clear, but he must find out what else Mamie knew.

"Did Hellgren mention any name?"

"No. Neither did I." She looked at him a moment as if claiming credit for at least that discretion. "But

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I couldn't help thinking of you. And I was scared stiff."

"Why?"

Mamie crossed the room and began to touch herself up with yellow powder, reminding Grover of the days when children used to hold buttercups under each other's noses and chins to see if they liked butter. "You don't understand Oscar as I do," she said. "How could you! He feels more deeply than ordinary men. I couldn't think of you being felled by a hunk of marble and not warn you, could I!"

He had only one aim now, and that was to get to a telephone where he could talk in private. He picked up his hat and stick.

As he was leaving he had for Mamie, in the midst of his own bleak preoccupations, a final volt of compassion.

"Don't be too cast down," he admonished, and added in a tone which was not quite as ironical as it sounded, "You have your art, you know."

Mamie gave him an ineffable look, and from the landing he heard her playing the accompaniment to her favorite aria: *Dis-mois que je suis belle*—

Apparently it hadn't occurred to Mamie that if he were not responsible for Olga's absence, he might be experiencing emotions which if they were not so tempestuous as those of the bereaved lover might be at the least wildly disquieting.

He found a telephone booth and searched the *Bottin*

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for the name of Olga's aunt. There was a delay of twenty minutes before a connection with Enghien could be established, and he sat at a sloppy table drinking cold coffee and cognac.

Despite his straining nerves, the voice was difficult to catch. Olga was not there, it was informing him. She had gone to San Sebastian.

When had she left?

On Wednesday.

Then, he reflected, with mounting hope, she had surely received his note.

"Could you let me have the address?" he asked. "I wish to send an important telegram."

"Hold the line a moment," came the voice. Then she read the words—even spelt them out, and with a weak *"Merci, Madame,"* Grover let the receiver fall into its hook.

In the mirror behind the bar he caught sight of a face which looked like the face of a man seeing something grim. Then he crumpled up the paper on which he had begun to write the address, for he certainly had no message to send in care of the "Casa Peñaverde."

A few moments later he was plunging along the pavement of an unfamiliar street, weakly chanting the old troubled, meaningless refrain: Why did he die? Why did he die?

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On the arrival of the "fairly substantial" cheque, Grover paid Mme. Choiseul the hundred francs he owed her and packed his bags. He bought a ticket for Genoa, and from that point wandered southward through a series of little pink towns with mountains at their back doors and the sea fairly splashing up on their piazzas. The piazzas were studded with cheap marble Columbi, all pointing to America; but in his heart he almost wished that the Santa Maria had been wrecked.

His paint tubes and pencils and all the paraphernalia of his avocation had been left behind. They had become abhorrent to him. Abhorrent too was the very thought of a studio, of artists and art talk, "relations" and "values". He had long since found out "why Cézanne was so good," and he didn't care a straw.

Swimming in the calm blue sea, stretched on hubbly volcanic rocks while the sun baked him, he stared toward a horizon beyond which Rhoda was steaming her way home, her mind packed full of misapprehensions. The knowledge that an important lie, that two important lies were floating undenied on the sea, floating away beyond recall (for *he* would never have the courage to deny them) completed his misery. One of the lies was that he was a painter. The other was that he was deep in the joys of a pagan love affair. For a year he had boasted of his freedom, and all the vainglorious clatter was but the rattling of his chains.

All about him were robust young Italians, shouting

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and splashing. Italians, he had always supposed, were devoted to art. Now he knew better: they were devoted to motorboats and tennis and jazz, with a devotion as whole-souled as that of the young Marples and Daggetts and Sipes of the North Shore. And how unutterably wise of them!

A young lady from Genoa, who lived at a shady hotel with means of support only too visible, rolled her dark eyes at him one evening on the street at Rapallo and walked toward a summer cafe which was built on a platform over the sea, and he followed her to her table as though he were the most accomplished *flaneur* in Europe. Together they drove in a carriage down the winding coast road to view the festa being celebrated in a neighboring village. Priests and children and fishermen paraded past them, all in robes of white and red, bearing the image of an agonizing saint and a silver Christ on the cross, while the band at the head of the procession blared out an ancient march of Sousa and Grover drew into his nostrils a pungent odor compounded of incense and a provocative scent of Bertelli's. The sky was ablaze with rockets shot off to the glory of God, and Grover kissed his new acquaintance straight on the mouth, as they drove back to the shady hotel, and when they awoke it was time for the morning swim. And I don't care if I drown, he said from the depths of his soul.

Tiring of one village he would journey on to another, trying new dishes, sending colored postcards to

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Marthe and Mme. Choiseul, restlessly seeking distractions. Swimming helped to take the edge off his thoughts, and little glasses of cognac, and evening drives in the soft, cool airs that came in over the sea. He found himself in a town called Levanto and remained there partly out of weariness, partly because its isolation and miniature proportions appealed to him. The only distraction it offered was the child-like friendliness of the inhabitants, and he played at being an Italian, with the furtive aid of a dictionary. One night, bored even with that expedient, he took out of his bag a book which he had saved from his collection at Harvard, always meaning to read it, always postponing the task, for it looked long and weighty. It was Keyserling's Travel Diary, and when he had started to read, there was no possible stopping. For a week he immersed himself in the wise, worldly subtleties of this chameleon-like intelligence, and when he was through he felt that he had passed an important landmark in his understanding of himself. For what the Baltic sage had most of all revealed to him was the fact that he, Grover Thanet, was a conservative and an aristocrat beyond redemption, for better for worse. This was both disconcerting and comforting: disconcerting because, if that were the case, how account for the creative urges he had fondly supposed himself a victim to; weren't all artists radicals? Comforting, because at least it was a definite fact about himself, and for months he had had only the moral

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support of theories about himself which, one by one, had yielded to the obstructive facts of life. I and rubber crutches, he reflected.

Keyserling set in train a whole new category of speculations which blessedly crowded back the dreary thoughts he had brought with him from France. He found himself jotting down exciting little phrases on scraps of paper. One morning he leaped out of bed and wrote a poem, the first since the days when all his verses had begun, "Roses are red, violets are blue." On analysis it sounded like a bad Shakespearian sonnet and he tore it up, but he was obliged to admit that a new germination was taking place within him.

A few nights later he dreamed that he was a book, walking along a high windy cliff, down to a cobalt sea. The pages fluttered wildly, and he was afraid the letters would fall out of the words, which would have been a dreadful calamity, for he wished to let the letters dry in their words, like seeds in pods, for future planting.

Excited by his dream, he sat self-consciously before a pad of blank paper which he had run out of the hotel to buy. "Once in my antique youth," he began—but the poem got no further; it turned into a letter to Geoffrey Saint.

"I must finally confess," he wrote, "that I'm a Philistine. Nor am I ashamed of it now, though a few months ago I would have felt it a debasing admission. My justification is this, that while the doggedly

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artistic souls are forcing their growth in a hothouse of theories and producing monstrous crimson flowers that get into horticultural exhibitions, the world doesn't really depend on them for its agricultural progress. Hardy perennials go their own sturdy way. It's at least debatable whether even the great artists lead civilization in the way it must go. Very likely they are merely on the edge of the procession, like the clowns that caper about the sidelines of the circus, affording diverting and perspective-giving contrast to the grave and solid elephants and lions. Artists are useful, in that their subconscious is more sensitively attuned, more articulately responsive to the current which animates them, as it animates all humanity. They are the flecks of foam on the crests of the wave of civilization; by watching the lacey white patches you can determine the direction of the winds. It is naive to assume that the foam *leads* the wave."

As he reread the letter, he hoped that Geoffrey wouldn't take him too literally. For, he reflected, I'm not so hardy, however damn perennial I may be,— nor yet am I grave and solid. If I'm not exactly an artist, perhaps I'm by way of being a philosopher; you can be *that,* and be conservative and aristocratic.

"What I'm driving at," he added in a postscript, "is that I'm going back to get a job."

The idea hadn't even occurred to him until he hastily scribbled down the fact, then he recognized it as an inspiration.

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He packed his bags again and bought a ticket for Paris, simply because there seemed no other city for the son of the Professor Thanet to go to. All my things are there, he excused himself, and I guess my soul is still flying about the *ville lumière,* with whatever wings it's got left.

The endless tunnels, the heat and the dust, the discomfort of trying to wedge oneself between German tourists who were ever so grave and solid, and forever slowly nibbling at cheese or cakes or grapes out of paper bags that crackled and never got empty, but were merely filed for future reference!

At Ventimiglia there was the usual paralyzing wait for the customs inspection, and an inadequate supply of porters. As usual he was one of the last to be waited on, and as he came away from the shed, trying to remember the respective pockets for his keys and his money and his ticket and his passport he found himself stemming the tide of an influx of passengers from a train bound in the opposite direction.

Keeping an eye on his particular porter, and jostling his way through, he came face to face with a woman, the sight of whom caused him to stop dead in his tracks. In the next moment she had noticed him too, and also stopped dead, with a comic precision. Then he fought his way toward her, for it was Sophie Scantleberry, and the tall ruddy man beside her was her husband.

They exchanged what hurried remarks they could

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crowd into the few moments at their disposal. The Scantleberries were on their way to join a yachting party bound for Greece.

Grover's eyes fell on the open passport in Sophie's hand.

She hid the photograph from view with an odd smile. "I don't mind their making me look ugly," she said with a nervous acerbity that masked heaven knew what recollections, "but I do hate them to make me look common!"

Grover's train was ready to leave and he had to hurry away.

A gay, mournful tune was running through his head: Let's talk about *my* sweetie now—

. . . .

When he alighted from his cab in the rue Truffaut the laundress, mending shirts in the sunshine, as though loath to sit indoors while even the illusion of summer remained, looked up with her bright hard smile. Mme. Choiseul wept for pleasure, and Mouche conscientiously smelt him, withholding a verdict.

In a sense it was like arriving in a new city, for he had been envisaging a new life for himself, and what was adventure but the act of verifying your imaginative charts! Paris was to discover, all over again.

With his bags unpacked and his belongings set to rights again in the shabby old room, he arrived at an anti-climax. Sinking into the familiar chairs was to

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sink into the familiar thoughts, and there was the little terra cotta Voltaire, grinning more cynically than ever. Olga was here too, peering at him from every corner, now the Columbine, now the sphinx, then the practical girl cracking eggs for an omelette, or the shy girl at the foot of Hellgren's stairs, but eventually the stony-faced young woman perched on Janvier's piano. That first impression of her was the one he always ended by confronting. If one only had the sense, he reflected, always to abide by first impressions!

Aside from the question of moral salvation, there was now a material necessity for finding a job, for his funds, like his clothes, were at an unprecedentedly low ebb, and he needed, as he expressed it to himself, at least one of everything. At Levanto the project had seemed as simple and logical as any episode in an Alger book of pluck and luck; here, in the old prison, it seemed a forlorn hope. For of all the men in Paris whose acquaintance he could claim, what one of them could give him so much as a hint? The only face that kept recurring in his thoughts, smilingly, was that of a young American in the bank where he went to cash his cheques; and grasping at the hope held out by this smile before all his good intentions should go into the making of a new pavement for hell, he picked up his hat and walked out of the house.

A new fear had now got hold of him. Though, as heaven so well knew, he would never be a painter,— neither a Casimir nor, and the thought yielded a bitter

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sort of satisfaction, a Peñaverde,—ten to one he looked far too aesthetic to suit even the most tolerant employer. He had never entered an office without feeling the inappropriateness of his background. And now he would know for sure whether the pool he had dipped into had dyed him.

All he had in common with the genial American cashier was Harvard,—they dimly recalled having seen each other there,—but that was enough to secure him fifteen minutes conversation in private. In the end the cashier invited him to call at the apartment he shared with three other Americans, one of whom "might have an idea." One idea, thought Grover, ought not to be too severe a tax on the pooled brains of four.

He stopped at the barber's to have the chief badge of his bohemianism shorn to a more pragmatic scale, and after dining alone made his way to the address of his countrymen.

He was directed to an apartment that reminded him of a dormitory. One of the bachelors was playing the piano, and another was taking a shower-bath, their combined din being pierced by a third young man's loud elucidation of the latest international loan. Grover's friend was smoking a pipe with his feet on the mantel and a copy of the Saturday Evening Post on his knees. It was just like the Y. M. C. A.

Grover saw the role he would have to play,—he had done it often enough in the Harvard Union,—and

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before an hour had elapsed he had produced enough signs of being neither a genius nor a moron to set at rest any doubts that his aura might have roused in the four average breasts.

The outcome of the visit was a letter to an attache at the American embassy, where his accomplishments and credentials seemed to carry weight. Here there was no frantic stress laid on hundred-per-centism; personal quality was rather the criterion. The interview was pleasant and resulted in a half promise. Certain officials must be consulted, the budget of an overworked department looked into,—in short they would let him know.

For several days he waited, encouraged by the smooth progress of his first intrusion into the arena of public affairs, marvelling that a mere way of talking should open doors which he had always supposed it difficult to force, yet at the same time a little depressed at the prospect of sacrificing his precious independences to the deadly machine kept going by the countless pale young men and women who had glanced up at him from the desks to which fate had chained them.

Then came a courteous letter offering him a post as assistant to a dogmatic old gentleman who seemed to have spent his life as a monkey-wrench in the well-oiled machine of diplomacy. When Grover reported for service, he found a desk cleared for him before a smoking fireplace, where he was handed a stack of galley proofs, in English and French, setting forth an

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appallingly detailed record of infractions of international law. Every fish that had ever been caught in an alien net seemed to be down on the list. And I'm one of the millions of them, he was thinking, as he realized that it had become, forever, his conservative and aristocratic duty to pepper these soggy reports with semicolons and circumflex accents. This, he reflected, is what you get for not being an artist; this constitutes the dignity of labor—oh, Mr. Carlyle!

But when he had outgrown the feeling of intrusion with which he had at first entered the hive, he experienced a sensation which was in many ways agreeable. For a great weight rolled away when one was reduced to the simple necessity of fulfilling mechanical orders, with all the responsibilities of the day left to superior officers.

But by Christmas time the routine had grown irksome, the statistics tedious in the extreme, the relaxation intolerable. In intervals between his monotonous tasks, he caught himself listening again, as of old, to the whispered clamors within himself, desperately trying to find the locus of a simmering and effervescing that could only, there was no doubting it, be attributable to a creative mutiny. A year ago a similar interior rumble had filled him with eager elation; now it filled him with dread. Bit by bit he was forced to the acknowledgment that he had again played himself false. The avalanche that had occurred within him at the discovery of Olga's betrayal had carried away,

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along with the emotional debris, a number of the faiths that were allied to his faith in her. Simply because she whom he had enshrined had proved false, he had distrusted all the other pedestals. His disgust with the studios had grown into a repugnance for paint, and that, as a matter of fact, was perhaps as well, for even the indulgent Casimir had never credited him with more than a nice little talent, which was certainly not enough to warrant a life of torture in its cultivation.

But a nice little talent in one field was not necessarily the final verdict; in other fields he might find unguessed resources. The mere fact that he was an incorrigible romantic bore witness to the play of great imaginative energy. If this energy could only be canalized, what hydraulic power might it not be capable of? At long last it occurred to him that he had behaved like a coward.

It was even possible, he argued, though his painfully convalescing heart rejected the imputation, that, like poor Mamie, his vanity had been the chief victim of the spring disaster. With half cruel levity he had tossed Mamie her "art"; and now, without levity, but with a trace of the cruelty with which he so often excoriated himself, he offered himself the same bitter prescription. You set out to save your soul, and you won't be satisfied till you do. But you'll never save it by putting commas in a list of fish that were pinched off the coast of Nova Scotia in the year 1884.

Yet his distaste for painting was rooted. No effort

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of will could induce him to open his boxes again, and the historic portfolio lay prone and inert in a dusty corner of his bedroom.

Ever since the night he had dreamed he was a book the idea of literature had gnawed at him; but the field of letters was so vasty that any vision he could evoke of himself threading a path through it was rather terrifying,—a tiny figure receding among the trees. He had seen so many books ranged on the stacks of the Harvard library that it seemed a positive mis-service to the world to increase the plethora. Besides, he had nothing to say that wasn't best expressed in a sigh.

Yet there were moments when, for sheer peace of mind, he was obliged to get rid of his clamorous thoughts on paper. Paragraphs and pages would eventuate, which though they fairly indited themselves,—despite desperate halts while the thought untangled,—proved upon analysis to be nothing but what Walter Bagehot or George Santayana had once said in a single sentence. And there you are, he scornfully told himself: your memory plays tricks on you, and if you were to write a whole novel you'd probably end by discovering that it was merely Bleak House all over again, or Joseph Vance, or Niels Lyhne.

For all which, he was engaged on a story which, to his surprise, and gradually to his excitement, gave promise of growing into a novel. He scarcely realized this himself until one afternoon in January, when he

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was walking absent-mindedly along the Avenue de l'Opéra and encountered Floss, whom he had not seen for many months. With a genuinely grieved air she complained of his defection, beaming fondly and forgivingly in the end.

"What you been doing, honey?" she inquired.

And just for something to say, he had wearily replied, "Oh, writing a novel about how tragic life is!"

Which was the first acknowledgment of the fact that he had made even to himself, for no matter how zealous he might be in his introspections, the truth about the most obvious of his acts usually popped out from some subconscious source.

But he did not accept Floss's urgent invitations. Only by slow and careful construction, brick on brick, could he hope now to build up his intellectual freedom and his right to dissipate his energies at the bidding of a curiosity that led one straight into some bog or other.

The encounter with Floss, however, made him vaguely restless, bringing back, as it did, the vivid recollection of sights, sounds, and flavors that had so complicated, yet undeniably so enriched his experience. The restlessness culminated in a sudden desire to revisit Marthe. He had not seen her since a spring evening shortly before Rhoda's appearance in Paris, though she had often been in his mind. In fact, when he reviewed his life in this kaleidoscope of a city, it seemed that Marthe, poor drab whose closeness to the earth had

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taught her some of its profoundest secrets, was the steadiest light of them all. She asked nothing and took nothing, yet had never failed him. And we are all constituted so selfishly, he reflected, that we must have at least one person who never fails. Usually it's a mother; sometimes it's a dog.

He arrived at the cafe at the hour of dusk. Familiar faces were there; two or three voices greeted him politely. But Marthe was absent, and after he had taken a seat in her old corner and given his order, Mme. Annoni, climbing down from the caisse, advanced with an air of mystery to talk to him.

"Have you heard?" she asked, and Grover's heart grew cold with dread.

Marthe was in an insane asylum.

"For several weeks," Madame explained, "we noticed something strange. She would be weeping one day and laughing drunk the next. Then one night she came running in, in her stocking feet. *Figurez-vous, Monsieur*—correct in every detail, hat—coat—and stocking feet! And screaming, and laughing, and waving her arms—and a crowd of people outside the door. When the *agents* arrived she was playing a violin that she had snatched from the top of the piano—scraping it horribly, without sense, and as earnestly as though she were giving a recital in the Salle Gaveau."

Grover was weak with sorrow and pity and loneliness.

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"One of the last times she was here," Mme. Annoni went on, as if any further detail were needed to fix the dark dye of the tragedy, "she showed us your post-card from Italy. If you only knew how proud she was. I read it to her."

Incongruous new thought—Marthe couldn't even read!

"And only last week her old vicomte came back," added Mme. Annoni. "He was struck all of a heap when I told him." She shook her head with a great sigh. "Ah, she was no ordinary girl, that one!"

Looking with cold eyes upon Mme. Annoni's display of compassion, Grover recalled occasions on which the lady's relentlessness had fastened itself on Marthe as indiscriminately as it had singled out many another poor wretch who was temporarily unable to pay for his sinister cheer. On the whole Marthe had been a good customer, one of the best; she had been virtually a part of the goodwill of the business, and had attracted clients of distinction, including a romantic old vicomte; moreover she had had the grace to make a spectacular ending, thereby providing rich food for the plebeian imagination of her outcast friends. Mme. Annoni might well sigh.

He learned that Marthe had passed through the first violent stage of her malady. The English Miss, a dull but faithful soul whose acquaintance Grover had made on one of the Friday nights that she had reserved for Marthe, had offered to be responsible for the patient,

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but her offer could not be accepted by the State. As there was no husband, or relative, Marthe could not be released.

"Could I help?" asked Grover, rather helplessly wondering whether the guarantee of a yearly sum would suffice.

Mme. Annoni was of the opinion that it was a hopeless situation. But she gave him the address of the institution.

On the Wednesday afternoon set aside for visitors, Grover obtained leave from his office and undertook the lugubrious journey. Outside the fortifications there was a long delay in transferring to a second tramway, and he stood shivering in the snow, armed with a mournfully festive basket of chocolate and fruits.

There were many buildings and it was not easy to find the right one, for every door seemed locked, and his knockings brought no response. Eventually he found his goal and an alert-eyed Sister piloted him through a long bare corridor from which he could see into bedrooms occupied by staring, furtive creatures. One woman brushed back her hair and ran from the sight of him with a scream of terror; another peered silently through the doorless opening, craning first her neck and then half her body, swinging back and forth like an ape. A third, a gray-haired old witch with dead eyes and an unearthly grin, skipped ahead of them like a little girl, twirling an imaginary rope.

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The Sister, guessing the horror he felt at the thought that Marthe should be housed with such obvious lunatics, offered him some slight reassurance as she ushered him into an apartment that looked like a schoolroom. "Lamielle," she said, startling him with the official appellation for poor Marthe, "should really be in another section, for she is quite herself again, but they are so crowded there isn't room."

"Will she remain lucid?" asked Grover, half dreading that his voice would echo in these precincts and come back to him in a form as hideous as the meaningless sounds he had been hearing.

The Sister shook her head and turned away, closing the door and leaving him to stare at a lithochrome of Saint Geneviève coming to the rescue of a beleaguered Paris.

After a long wait during which he hadn't the courage to sit down, he heard footsteps and a voice,—strong, pleasant, commanding,—then something that sounded like a scuffle. When the door opened he saw a strange, almost dumpy little figure shrinking behind the white apron of a tall old woman who was evidently the head nurse. Dressed in a blue mother-hubbard that looked as though it might have been made of mattress ticking, with her thin brown hair drawn tightly back,—where were the soft golden curls?—and her mouth almost empty of teeth,—had she bashed them all out in a frenzy?—Marthe let herself be coaxed and pushed into the room, to the accompaniment of re-

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assuring words from the old woman, who, as a final argument, said to her, "Just see what a pretty basket your kind friend has brought you!"

She might have been speaking to a bashful child, and in truth Marthe looked at the same time like a little girl and a little old woman. Her age, which had always baffled him, was no longer a secret. Marthe was not a day under forty.

Her confidence was gaining strength and she came a few steps forward. He noticed that the white collar and cuffs of her uniform were in some way which he couldn't define a little more attractive than those of the other inmates he had seen. The tidiness and freshness that had always characterized her had survived the ordeal, whatever else had been engulfed and forever swept away.

He took Marthe's hand and they sat down on the bench by a window which overlooked an acre of barren ground, wet and cold with half melted snow. The old woman had retired, leaving the door ajar.

As if in a dream, for he was too numb for feeling, Grover made talk and gradually drew Marthe into it. She asked questions in a voice that had only an echo of the old resonance,—questions about Mme. Annoni and her friends at the cafe, and Italy.

"It's so pretty there," she commented. "Far prettier than France." She was taking at their face value the wild colorings of his postcards.

"They won't let me leave," she informed him, with

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a stoical sadness that opened a window on all the unutterable despair of life.

"But they are good to you?" he suggested. From the manner of the two Sisters it was clear that Lamielle was a favorite.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's dull. All day. Every day. We get up at six! . . . Sometimes they let us work. We take turns. This morning I peeled the potatoes—look!"

Her soft white fingers were stained and scarred, and she was smiling with a hint of her old gaiety, a travesty of it—the poor empty mouth!

He told her that her old friend, the vicomte, had called at the cafe, and her eyes glistened.

"*Le pauvre diable!*" she said.

When he offered her the basket she drew back, all her childlike embarrassment returning. The head nurse came into the room again as a reminder that their time was up, and suddenly Marthe reached into the basket and began plying her with the contents.

"*Tenez! Tenez!*" she urged.

But the old Sister protested gently. "They are all for you, my dear, and you shall have some of them each day. I will keep them in a safe place." Turning to Grover she explained. "Miss Barrett brought her some presents for her birthday, and she had given them all away before we knew it. She's a naughty child."

Though this was said in banter it brought a hurt look into Marthe's eyes, and she again sought protec-

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tion in the old woman's apron, hiding her face from Grover's sight.

But when she saw it was time to say good-bye, she came running forward, and clung to him. They both accompanied him to the door, and the nurse allowed Marthe to stand on the stoop.

Once more she clung to him, kissing him good-bye despairingly, as though it might be forever.

"Will you come again?" she finally asked, her voice trembling with the dread of a refusal.

He promised, and at length broke away.

He kept turning back, to see her standing there, in front of the old nurse, her arm raised high as she waved to him, like a child, the tears streaming down her face. Marthe, who had proclaimed that all women were selfish! The elusive, virginal quality that had first attracted him to her shone through and enveloped her broken body in a protective halo.

At the end of the lane he turned for a final farewell. Her handkerchief still fluttered, though the shapeless mother-hubbard was almost indiscernible through the fast falling snow.

As he waited for the tram Grover wondered what the quixotic vicomte would say if he were to discover that for all these years he had been stroking a wig!

He half guessed that the old man would understand, for, reflected Grover, life is not what it seems, and it's only romantics who really penetrate the appearance. It seemed to him that the old vicomte, making his

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pilgrimages to the dingy cafe to pay homage to an optical illusion, was a type of all the poets and all the artists, of all the souls whose mission it is to transform the bogs of life into elysian fields for the feet of those who by keeping the faith have earned the right to walk in them.

"Though Mondays come at well-ascertained intervals," he wrote to Geoffrey, "they always take me by surprise." And the explanation was that, while he had schooled himself to the rigors of his daily schedule, his week-ends, bringing as they did a surcease from the breaches of international law, were becoming more and more precious. A new spring was stealing into the city, nature was creeping over the cold pavements and up into the farthermost tips of the trees, and here he was two years older than he had been on another spring day when, walking across Boston Common with Rhoda Marple, he had heard little tunes from the Rondes de Printemps scuttle through his mind and come out on his lips in the form of an unbreathed ejaculation: If this were only Paris!

In the last few weeks his story had taken him firmly by the throat. Not that it was getting itself written;

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but it was nibbling incessantly at his consciousness, waking him up in the middle of the night, sending him off into reveries in the midst of his diplomatic labors, and, as soon as a week-end came around, driving him away to Rouen or Versailles or any one of a dozen refuges that his increased income had made possible. He would set out with a handbag and many sheets of white paper,—the old portfolio having again come into its own (it won't be denied a future, thought Grover), —but the moment he was installed in his hotel the story flew back to town, leaving him alone to divert himself as best he might.

It was to be an ironic story, yet it kept turning solemn, which made for the utmost confusion. Moreover, just as in the old days he had got words when he was trying to create pictures and his colors all ran into a muddy puddle, so now he got pictures whenever his mind groped for a recalcitrant phrase. His tragic episodes, when he reread his script, bordered perillously on the comic, and his attempts at humor were dire. Talent, he concluded in discouragement, isn't even half the battle; unless you define talent as the ability to cultivate talent. The injustice of it all was the fact that he hadn't even wanted to write the foolish story; the story was rather trying to write him! It had foisted itself on him, and he felt that that being the case, and he doing his very best to oblige it, it might at least pose for him without wriggling. To keep it smoothly running, to fit one part noiselessly into the

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other, was beyond his technical resource. An essay or a poem accommodated you by going in whatever direction you chose; but a novel had its own ideas of direction, and refused to let you know what they were; to find out you had to listen for hours, with your ear on your heart.

Even the parts that sounded professional were signally lacking in spontaneity, whereas any masterpiece must, to his notion of it, have the ring of an *impromptu fait à loisir*. His poor dear story was all leisure, and very little impromptu. The best he could honestly claim for it was that it was a safety valve. What he *hoped* for it he scarcely dared to admit.

"I'm becoming so literary," he added, in his letter to Geoffrey, "that I require a pencil at the table, along with my knife and fork." But he did not add, as he might have done, that the wayward pencil was as like as not to use up its energy for the morning in a caricature of the bearded man at the next table.

If this were only Aldergrove! he caught himself sighing one Sunday afternoon as he lolled on a bank beside the historic Marne. In his pocket was an unexpected letter from Rhoda Marple, breaking a long silence. Rhoda had grown weary of her social rounds, and had gone into her father's office,—it was almost as though she had independently come to a conclusion analogous to his own.

"A few years ago," her letter had run, "every girl used to talk about a career. Nowadays they talk about

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jobs, and it's far more honest. I decided I needed a job, so I took one. Not at the very bottom 'to learn the business,' because I think that's all bunk. There's no reason why you can't learn a business from the top, if you're that kind of person. I've made Father see it, which reverses all his notions of life, a very dangerous experience at his age, poor darling. Anyhow he's given me two raises already."

Rhoda's letter and especially what lay between the written lines,—the most important part of any letter! —blinded him to the fresh green beauty of the banks of the Marne. All he saw was the fresh green of Aldergrove, the deep red of the peonies and the crisp salty foam like the whites of eggs evaporating on the shore.

On his return to Paris he instinctively wandered into cafes that he had long avoided, as though by a return to bohemianism he could prove to himself that the existence of a conventional New Englander would bore him to death. But in the old haunts the old pain returned, bringing a conviction that he was almost structurally detached from the aims of the young moderns, even young moderns whose productions he deeply admired. I can't afford it yet, he told himself, —by which he meant that he might jeopardize his crystallization into the conservative, aristocratic identity that Keyserling had inadvertently done him the service of pointing out to him.

At the same time, the reaction to Rhoda's letter,

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plus the hour in Léon Vaudreuil's old rendezvous, made him chafe more than ever at the restrictions of his job. That his efforts had been honest was proved by the fact that he, too, had been given a "raise"—not two, like Rhoda, and not a large one, but at least a token of merit.

He had outgrown the old sharp torments, though he had also outgrown the old sharp ecstasies, the thrills of surprise, the daily shocks of interest as he unwrapped little packages of life and found the contents utterly different from what he had been led to guess by the shape of the bundle. In their place was a steadier, less wavy undulation, representing a mean of contentment sinking now and again to sombre meditation, rising now and again to a glow that he could only describe to himself as mental health. For a time his moods were shadowed by the fate of Marthe. He had returned to the asylum one day only to be denied admission. Marthe had relapsed—this time beyond hope.

Early to bed and early to rise—what a milk and water fate, he was thinking. Yet he stuck to his job, perhaps with the idea of proving to himself that he had the endurance, though tempting visions came to him of peaceful spring and summer days by the sea, in Normandy or on the riviera, writing, writing, spinning the story out of himself like an indefatigable spider. Late to bed and late to rise makes a man—heaven knows what, but at least he could promise him-

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self to be consistently late at both ends, and the shade of Benjamin Franklin, who had loved his France as much as Grover was learning to love it, despite its concealed weapons, would wink a condoning eye.

But three weeks of vacation were awaiting him, and he spent them at Biarritz in August, and repaired promptly to the villa which Floss maintained at that resort. Despite the ugly proximity to San Sebastian,—a fact he had quite overlooked when accepting the invitation,—he saw no sign of Olga and her Spaniard, no sign of the Spaniard's abandoned Marchesa; indeed Floss seemed to have culled a fresh bouquet of noxious human blooms, and her cool, breezy drawing-rooms were alive with riff-raff: actresses with scratchy, alcoholic voices; well-tailored gigolos with their eyes on the main chance; counts and marquises who had come by their titles in ways that nobody was sufficiently interested to challenge; cinema stars who walked out in the hope of waylaying the King of Spain; and lewd old men who had nothing left but their eyes and their pocketbooks.

Grover gave the story a rest and spent a good part of his vacation in a luxurious coma. It surprised him to find that now, incapable of being disturbed in his notions of how life should behave, he moved in the half world with an ease that had never been possible in the days when he had been on the watch for miracles; and this assurance served as a handle by which he was drawn into conversations and excursions, made

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the recipient of compliments and confidences, given glimpses of situations at which formerly he had only hazarded guesses. In short, he found that many of Floss's lost souls were well worth a reasonable amount of attention on the part of a man whose brow had once been so high that his eyes were on the level of clouds while his feet tripped over the dung-heaps. At their worst their schemes were diverting; at their best they threw off spectacular showers of sparks from the flames that consumed them. Moreover their wit, their slang, their acrimony, their jollity added condiments that the life of a minor diplomatist was badly in need of.

"Don't you ever get tired of them, Floss?" he asked, as he was taking leave.

"Oh, now and then I clear 'em all out and take a trip somewheres," said the princess. "But I like rotters —always have."

In the train he pondered Floss's admission. He could understand it, for he had a weakness for rotters himself. Max Bruff and Marthe, Léon and Olga, whose ghost still walked,—each was a rotter after his fashion, and each had occupied a large space in his mind or his heart.

. . . .

By the end of the summer he had forced his way through the story to a conclusion which annoyed him by being a virtual contradiction of his whole thesis.

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Only by trial and error, he reflected, can one find out what one truly thinks: you match your characters and situations and theories much as Mme. Choiseul matches bits of velvet and silk, and it's only when you've erected them into a monstrous burlesque that you see what you should have done to make it stylish. Even Goethe, he was thinking, would have spared Werther's life in a revised version.

The story would have to be rewritten, but at least he now had a clue to it.

Mme. Choiseul and her hats and blotches and daily misadventures with the milk had been getting on his nerves. More than once he had contemplated moving into a small flat. One reason I have no friends, the thought one day struck him, is that I have no home. He had run into Mamie Mangum and she had asked him to tea, and it occurred to him that it would be pleasant to have an apartment,—not like Mamie's, heaven forbid!—and to invite people for tea—or whatever, he added guiltily to himself.

Mamie had shown him a notice in an American musical weekly which recounted in phrases almost dithyrambic her triumphs in Naples and Rome. Grover couldn't repress a suspicion that Mamie had paid for the notices with money her father had earned on the sale of sheep and steers, but the fact remained that she was proving her right to exist. She was now working like a Trojan for a debut in Brussels, and being before his eyes a fantastic illustration of the

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truth he had recently discovered: that talent is largely a matter of knowing how to apply your gift.

He had asked her about Hellgren, and she had shrugged her shoulders.

"I haven't seen him for ages. They say he's turned into a perfect anchorite. Oh, I must show you the picture of my wop lover," and Mamie searched through her photographs for the portrait of the baritone who had sung Athanaël to her Thaïs.

"You do like 'em fat!" was Grover's comment. She snatched the photograph away from him and told him he had no soul.

"I wish to heck I hadn't," said Grover.

Two babes in the woods of Europe, he reflected, pathetic products of Idaho and Massachusetts craving the fulfillment of a romantic hunger for a nectar and ambrosia that don't exist this side of Olympus, staying the pangs with pretty poor substitutes—his doxy at Rapallo, Mamie's greasy monk. And even at that, Mamie was probably maligning the man.

. . . .

He had been nearly a year in his position, as he realized one morning when he came into the office to find a fire lighted in the grate, the first inescapable proof of autumn. Though he had been entrusted with more interesting responsibilities, there was still a good deal of proof-reading to be done and he was settling

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down to the morning's galleys when the portier summoned him to the telephone, a most unusual occurrence.

If he had been given a hundred guesses he wouldn't have hit on the voice which awaited him at the other end of the line. It was Mr. Marple. Would Grover dine with him that evening?

A characteristically American procedure—short, and cordial enough, but so business-like—out of the blue, into the blue, for Mr. Marple offered no explanation of his presence alone in the city, and as Grover recalled it, he loved his home and hated to travel.

When he found him at the hotel, Grover was shocked to see him so aged. The two year interval had seemed to effect the ravages of a decade. Mr. Marple was leaving the next day for Germany, where he was to try a cure.

"Why didn't Rhoda come with you?" asked Grover.

Mr. Marple smiled a little wryly. "Well, the truth is, the firm couldn't spare us both. You'd be surprised how she's taken hold. She's my right-hand man."

Grover *was* surprised, and a little disconcerted. He didn't want Rhoda to be an Amazon.

For the first time he was taking the old man in as an individual, rather than an institution of his childhood. It was curious to realize that he scarcely knew his own godfather.

After dinner they went up to Mr. Marple's private sitting-room, and while lighting a cigarette Grover's

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attention was drawn to a stack of folders setting forth facts about "Marple's Rubber Roofing."

"What the deuce *is* rubber roofing?" he asked, and Mr. Marple, lowering himself wearily into his chair, answered the question in words calculated not to bore a young artist who looked askance at commerce and industry.

Grover, touched at this delicacy, was reminded of the days when he had rather highhandedly rejected the older man's tentative offer to take him into business. It occurred to Grover, rather late in the day, that this man, whose ancestors had helped mould the history of his State, was no mere manufacturer: the books in his library, the professors who came to dinner, his membership in committees for the improvement of practically everything!

Surprised by Grover's show of interest, Mr. Marple talked at some length. He had taken advantage of his short stay in Paris to secure French patents for an improved process. He had even had to disguise his tracks like a man in a detective story to outwit a competitor, and the strain had taxed him.

Grover had been glancing through the advertising folders on the table. His impressionistic brain had caught the sense of the propaganda, and he was impatient, for Mr. Marple's sake, at their stilted presentation of it.

"What they need," he said, "is a dash of pictorial fantasy and a literary caress."

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Mr. Marple smiled indulgently,—a paternal version of Rhoda.

"Roofing is a pretty prosaic proposition," he reminded his godson.

"All the more reason for presenting it poetically," argued Grover, warming to his theme. "A roof's a roof, which nobody can deny. But it's also the thing that shelters a home and keeps it cozy. This—" he flipped his fingers across the uninspired illustration, "is only the top of a house!"

Despite his air of indulgence, the older man was impressed. Though belonging to a cautious generation, his success had been largely due to his willingness to listen to new ideas: witness the leeway he had given to his own daughter, and Grover knew how radical *she* could be when roused.

"I don't know a thing about rubber roofing, despite all you've just told me," said Grover, "but I'll bet a hat I could turn out a more convincing folder than any of these—words *and* pictures."

"I'll take you up on that," said Mr. Marple. "Try your hand."

Grover laughed. "Now I'm getting cold feet," he said. But he took the folders away with him and promised to have some exhibits to show Mr. Marple on his return from Germany, several weeks hence.

He left the hotel curiously sad. There was a look in the old man's eyes—the look that had been in his

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mother's eyes when she had spoken cryptically about "getting on."

And in his own room, as he undressed beside the easel that stood uselessly, its career ended, in a corner, he thought of the transformed Rhoda, her father's right hand man, going after contracts, receiving hard-headed architects and talking them into a cocked hat, dictating thirty letters every morning, short, pointed letters, and tapping her pencil on a mahogany desk-top as she thought of polite ways to jack up a slacking salesman, Rhoda commuting between Aldergrove and Boston with a copy of the Atlantic Monthly under her arm, which she would read not because she enjoyed it but because, being to her fingertips Bostonian, it was her mental duty to do so. Would she ever look pensively through her office window toward the dome of the State House and wonder what new paganisms he was wallowing in? Whenever he thought of Rhoda his mouth was filled with the bitter taste of the misapprehension she had carried away with her. For he had not been able to resist telling her, pent-up as he had been, something of his passion for Olga. And he had colored it in iridiscent tints; he had made a far prettier verbal picture of his love for the French girl than ever he had been able to contrive on canvas. That picture existed now only in Rhoda's mind; and there was no way of effacing it. It was just one of the damned blunders that life was forever leading you into. If his affair with Olga had only led to a con-

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summation of some sort, no matter how disastrous or how short-lived, there would be at least some justification for the picture; but the whole irony of it was that there was not even for him the memory of that: nothing but an unfulfilled promise.

Next morning the sight of the folders was irksome to him, and for several days his mind showed a perverse inclination to occupy itself with the novel. In the revised version life was not to be quite so tragic; indeed it was to be a tolerably livable sort of thing, with actually enjoyable moments.

. . . .

Brooding over the false picture in Rhoda's mind encouraged the banished image of Olga to come back, and it was now the friendly Olga, the Olga who had yielded to him in the dance, rather than the stony-faced girl. And one evening, as though the return of the image had been a premonition,—and he had observed that almost no surprising event in life is without some subtle form of premonitory preparation,—he came face to face with her.

In a sense he had asked for it, for, walking home from a theatre near the *grands boulevards,* he had obeyed an impulse to look in at the cafe in the rue Caumartin, from which he could hear sounds of restrained revelry as he passed the door.

In a corner sat Léon Vaudreuil with Olga and a florid woman whom he did not at first recognize for

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the shock of seeing Olga, but who, as he proceeded into the room (it was the only thing to do), revealed herself to his staggering faculties as the sublime Kundry, the awesome Elektra. Noémi Janvier, squeezed into a shining black gown, her coarse pink skin dulled with powder, her hemp-like crimson hair showing under a cloth of silver head-dress, was staring up at him, a drop of pomegranate syrup glistening on her chin.

Léon, whom he had not seen for more than a year, greeted him as casually as though they had parted the day before, and Olga was looking at him with steady, veiled eyes, and almost a wistful, and as if forgiving! smile. When women have done you an injury, he had noticed, they always wear a look of injury when you next see them, as if to forestall you.

The accidental encounter with so much of his imaginative past acted as a steadier. It was as though he had suddenly been pushed upon a brilliantly lighted stage, with an audience beneath him before whom he should have to caper briskly or appear ludicrous.

"Monsieur Thanet is from Boston, *chère amie,*" Léon explained, and Mme. Janvier's greenish, calculating, disorderly eyes acknowledged that over and above the monotonously colorful bazar of life, that remnant of fact, in conjunction with the young man's person, was of mild interest.

"Vous êtes bien un Cabot ou un Lowell?" she inquired negligently, in a tone that was not quite insolent and not quite polite.

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"Neither," Grover replied, suddenly deciding that if his quondam goddess should happen to be in the least interested in ascertaining just who and what he was, she could find out for herself. He was presented to the fourth member of the party, a stolid, heavy-eyed, heavy-nosed Hebraic man of fifty-odd whom they all *tutoyé'd,*—a M. Nussbaum.

Noémi's eyes roved over the room, pausing a moment on each group in dissatisfaction. It was as though the tempo of life were too slow for her, the rhythms too sluggish, the tones too thin. Her expression was as eloquent as if she had said, *Mon Dieu,* is there no end to the overwhelming insipidness of everything!

"*Dites—Carlotta!*" she suddenly called out, as the gray-haired Marchesa appeared at the door, all energy and flame.

They fell upon each other like long lost sisters, and Grover stole a glance at Olga, to see what eyes she had for Peñaverde's old confidante. All he saw was a polite sphinx sitting a little too upright, that she might not have to endure the flabbly proximity of Noémi's new impresario, as Grover guessed M. Nussbaum to be.

With the advent of the Marchesa, Noémi's spirits had risen and she was talking with animation about her plans and her new house at Maisons Lafitte, dominating her corner and vivifying her neighbors

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as surely and easily as she vivified her co-artists on the stage.

"You must see my house," she was saying to the Marchesa, and struck with a thought that pleased her, she suggested that they all drive out to it, immediately.

As they were rising to leave, Grover attempted to excuse himself, but Mme. Janvier, her enthusiasm embracing even the most inconsequential member of the group, swept him into her plan with a gesture that took obedience for granted. Léon also insisted, in a manner which seemed to imply that he, in return for services rendered, exacted this show of courtesy from one of the few friends who did him credit. It was obvious that Léon knew nothing of his situation with Olga. If he had known, he would only have shrugged it off his shoulders.

As for Olga, she turned to him with a smile, still tinged with forgiveness, and contrived to let him help her with her coat. If only, her eyes said for her, to protect me against this ogre of a Nussbaum to whom I am obliged to be polite.

With cynical feelings in his heart he followed the others into one of the two motors at the door. Whether by accident or design, he found himself seated next to Olga, and as they sped out of Paris in the dark he was filled with panic, for this contact was wakening a savage within him; his old passion was not only being whipped into flames, but was burning out of him the old romantic respect for the divinity

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of its object. And worst of all Olga was doing nothing whatever to check it. If anything, though one's nerves and senses were in no condition to be trusted, she leaned nearer in response to his uncontrollable encroachment.

They drove through a park and drew up at the door of a small chateau. Léon had been commissioned to telephone in advance to Noémi's sister, a pinched and bony woman in tweeds to whom everybody, including the servants, seemed to give orders, and there were lights and fires and a well laden buffet to receive them.

When Noémi had taken them through the house they gathered in the salon, and though it was three in the morning she yielded to the plea of the Marchesa, seconded by M. Nussbaum, for music. Playing her own accompaniments, she sang at haphazard a number of songs, including one of the most rapturously applauded items in her concert repertoire, Debussy's La Chevelure. It was hard to believe that the woman who had been talking and laughing so obstreperously in a voice that was raucous and mannish could produce the dull gold thread of sound that rose and fell and lost itself in the vague, sighing tissue of subtle harmonies. Carlotta's eyes, fixed on the singer as she sat in the soft circle of light shed by the piano lamp, fascinated and magnetized, welled with tears, and when the song was done Grover, still nursing a litter of cynical feelings, wondered whether the Mar-

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chesa's own gray locks were the particular chevelure in question: they were very beautiful.

And he marvelled that Noémi with her dauntless eyes and blood-red hair, her big mouth and lascivious arms, Noémi who had seized her opportunities with unerring promptitude, whose contours were magnificently tigerish, whose regrets were heavily scented, whose poetic resignations were in terms of hundred-thousand-dollar compromises with talking machine companies, could, for all that, so etherealize herself as to sing this song, and a dozen others, with a subconscious regard for its frail charm surpassing that of any artist living.

In his youth she had played a role in his life for which he must be forever grateful. But like the Queen Bee, she had fulfilled her mission, so far as his own hive of ideas was concerned, his own awakening to the romantic promises of life. His ventures into art were the honeycomb, and, even yet, what prodigies of honey might not flow into the cells! The music and the sight of Olga Vaudreuil, who also had dissolved under the spell cast by the great artist, had stirred in him wisps and tag-ends of infinitudes that had long lain dormant. Life begins tomorrow—the old illusion was back, with the old force of conviction.

As a finale Noémi was singing the popular love-song of two seasons back, the ditty with the haunting twist in its rhythm, and he recalled the mood it had evoked in him when he had first heard it on the lips of an

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unseen beater of carpets, alone in a tiny heart of Paris, wondering what it was like. How many of his vague expectations of it had had their opportunity of fulfillment, and left him still wondering!

"Mais non, voyons!" laughed Noémi when the Marchesa made a move to depart. "Your car is in the garage and your chauffeur asleep. You're all going to stay—naturally."

When Grover was left in his bedroom he became aware that, by accident or design, again he couldn't be sure which and didn't care, Olga was occupying the room next to him. The savage, which Debussy and Noémi had for a time routed, was again in ambush. With a directness that would have taken his breath away, had he merely imagined the scene, instead of enacting it, he gently opened the door between them.

"Ah, it's the *Prince!*" came a cool voice from under a silken canopy.

THE suggestions he had discussed with Mr. Marple proved, like so much else in Grover's life, far more easy to enunciate than to demonstrate. For many days he had evaded the issue, but as the time drew near for Mr. Marple's return he forced himself to a study of

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the proposed layout. Not that he was over-sanguine of his ability to produce an advertisement of any practical value, but simply that he must honor the gentlemanly understanding with himself and his promise to the old man. Of such little punctilios should the life of a good man be made up.

Once started on the process of rewriting the copy, he found it unexpectedly engrossing. For once he was not struggling to bring forth an entirely original conception; his task was to find felicitous clothing for an ill-dressed idea; and his taste in clothing had always been sure.

The first paragraphs he wrote sounded in his own ears a little too playful, but the moment he ceased to be playful he detected a false earnestness in the style which repelled him. As it was only an experiment in any case he decided it best to let his pen wander where it would, and when he had finished two sample pages he was purring with contentment at the result. Any man whose roof was leaking, he reasoned, would be less than human if this copy didn't take his fancy.

To reinforce the propaganda he drew a series of sketches in the same playful vein, filling in the masses with his resurrected water colors. All this one needs, he reflected, as he cocked his eye at the last sketch, is some of the dicky birds that Casimir rescued from the wreck of my hopes,—and he drew in a telephone wire at the side of the house, from which a choir of little winged Thanets chirped paeans of praise in favor

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of Marple's Rubber Roofing. And the last touch had hardly been added when he received a telegram from Cologne, making an appointment for dinner two days later.

Many a time had Grover stepped into the rue Truffaut with the old portfolio under his arm, but never had he held it there with such pleasure in its contents. Even the wilted, dark-eyed girls in the laundry seemed to be taking hope from the new jauntiness in his step.

It was almost like having a father of your own, he was thinking, as he walked into the hotel and gave his name at the desk.

A solemn look crossed the face of the clerk, who consulted a colleague in a whisper, then came back. Would Monsieur be good enough to step into the manager's office?

The manager was even more solemn. "It pains me exceedingly to inform you, Monsieur, that M. Marple died an hour after his arrival at the hotel. We have just composed a cable to send to America. Perhaps you will be good enough to confirm the address."

For two days Grover devoted himself to his grim task. Through it all he was borne up by the thought that, in some slight measure, he was rendering Rhoda a service, the first in their long association, which no one else could so fittingly perform. It swept over him, that Rhoda's unforgettable kindness to him at the time of his own bereavement, and the kindness of her poor father, was now tacitly calling for its sequel.

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Rhoda had cabled her approval of the arrangements he had suggested, and her final message, for all the curtness of its telegraphic style, let him see that she was comforted by his offer to accompany the body to America. In an interval between his hurried arrangements for sailing he had time to wonder whether there might not be a trace of duplicity in his offer; but even so, he argued, it was a benevolent duplicity, and there was nothing to be ashamed of in the feeling of homesickness that had once or twice overtaken him. Even the most rip-roaring bohemian who had ever lived must at moments have had a desire to revisit the scenes of his youth.

But it was a homecoming unlike any he had ever dreamt of: Rhoda standing on the chilly dock, her face white and grave. And the tall young man beside her must be the odd thing that young John had grown into—doubtless excused from St. Basil's.

Together they travelled to Boston, on a train filled with shouting people who were bound for an intercollegiate football game, and the whole pattern of life seemed more than ever a meaningless design. One young man whose head stuck grotesquely out of a racoon coat was betting wildly on the chances of Yale, and if the winning of Yale were to bring about a milennium in which all life's most earnest strivings would receive the crown of success, he couldn't have been more deeply concerned. Young John watched the enthusiasts with a subdued absorption, as though

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embarrassed by the continual reminder of the Thing which held in check his normal interest in football.

Rhoda was steady and clear-eyed; she had had ten days in which to adjust herself to the new order, and while it was a heavy weight to support, her shoulders were braced to it,—not a gesture or word or action but bore witness to her strength of will and her talent for meeting facts on their own ground. Grover had never seen Rhoda thus reduced to her essentials; always in his past relations with her there had been a margin for banter or a tendency to dart away into some side-path if the road they were treading became dangerous or dull.

"Do you realize," he said to her, when they had changed trains and were coming within sight of the village in which they had been born, "that we are now both grown up, irretrievably?"

"That," agreed Rhoda, "is almost the worst part of all. To know that you've only yourself to look to—for everything. . . It's so much harder for a girl. And a spoiled girl," she added.

"Good Lord, Rhoda!" he protested, "If you call *your*self spoiled!"

"Horrid people live in your old house," she informed him, as they drove past his gateway and he looked with a fearful eagerness through the screen of trees. "They have seven children—saucy little brats. Heaven knows where they all sleep."

. . . .

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For a fortnight Grover experienced a sort of sombre happiness in picking up the threads of his abandoned life. It was diverting and educative to visit the houses that had oppressed him as a youth and to contrast his present reaction with the earlier. There was much that he had outgrown forever, but also surprisingly much that he could still do with. People are the same the world over, he concluded, on discovering rebel tendencies in the bosom of such rooted New Englanders as the Daggetts and Sipes. What had really annoyed him about Americans, as he viewed them from his artistic perch, was not their want of human understanding, but their ignorance and their bland indifference to aspects of life that happened to engross *him*. If one were willing to make allowance for that enormous gap, and in his present mood he was willing, there were many points at which one could meet them.

Despite which he knew, as he stood before the white-pillared town hall of Aldergrove, he knew from the look in the eyes of his fellow-citizens, that his silhouette against that dignified old edifice was incongruously alien. He had left more than his trunks behind him when he had sailed for America; he had left a part of him which he still felt to be the major part.

Rhoda, able as ever to read him by signs, had come home from her office one evening and found him at the piano, playing in a manner which prompted her to say, when she had laid aside her hat and installed

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herself before the tea-kettle, "So you're on your ocean again!"

She had said it with a smile, but in a tone which vividly recalled the evenings at the Café International when Marthe had gently chided him for being in the moon.

"What am I to do about it?" he asked, joining her at the table, "for I suppose it's true."

"Far be it from me to make suggestions," she said. "I've learned a lot of lessons."

Though the words were ambiguous, Grover had a clear sense of their drift. The truth of the matter was that Rhoda had long since begun to take him at his word—at his five-syllable words! During the last strenuous year, acquiring the philosophy of a woman of business, she had accepted the conception of a Grover Thanet whose new maturity was bound up with the gratifications of creative accomplishment, who had repudiated New England and who was establishing his identity in the world of art. And this conception was all the more firmly planted in her mind for the fact that he had never told her that he had abjured painting, nor that he had himself been working in an office as long, or longer than she. As yet it was too early to tell her about his literary hopes, for he didn't dare tempt Providence again. Instead he wrote feverishly, in secret, while she was away from home.

The fact that he had nothing but an alien silhouette to show for his years of soul-searching was a con-

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tinuous torture to him in this house built on the foundations of conscientious endeavor. He was obliged to maintain a pose, and it went against his grain to pose before Rhoda, who was the soul of candor. It wouldn't have been so difficult if Rhoda had merely tacitly accepted his hypothetical status as a painter of promise and a master pagan; but she backed him up in the role, introducing him with transparent pride, though Grover suspected that it had cost her a good deal to admit to her friends what changes had taken place in him. Perhaps, he reflected, she had taken his rejections of her more to heart than anyone had realized; perhaps her only means of reconciling herself to her disappointment was in the exaggeration of his remoteness from all that made up her own life. On the other hand, perhaps grief and business cares were rendering her indifferent: that would account for the impersonality of the kindness she showed him, the hundred and one casual attentions that a good hostess and a generous friend never lose sight of.

Something had happened to Rhoda. Either deliberately or inadvertently she had blinded herself. Except where her business was concerned; for business had crystallized her, pared, sheared, and whittled. Even her physical contours were finer, and hardened as though in a glazing oven.

"Why don't you run into town for a day or two?" she suggested one morning as he stood at the window watching the rain on the snow.

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The suggestion irritated him, because behind it he suspected a polite fear on Rhoda's part that he was chafing at the lack of some pagan joy or other that he might, on the quiet, recapture at a stage door. How make Rhoda understand, without offending her by venturing on such topics, that nothing on earth tempted him so little as that thought!

She had never referred, even by a hint, to the love affair he had half confessed to her, in vague iridiscent phrases. Yet it was always there between them, on the breakfast table, at dinner, when he played the piano, when they walked along the wintry beach with half a dozen dogs at their feet. In Rhoda's mind was doubtless the image of a gay abode of love, something excessively French, like the illustrations in La Vie Parisienne,—young Mr. Thanet all tangled up on a divan with a nymph who smelt of chypre and had corduroy colored hair. For "corduroy," Grover reflected, with his morbidly accurate intuition, would have stuck; to her dying day Rhoda would not forget that touch. And he bitterly thought of the morning at Maisons Lafitte when he had returned to sit on the edge of the bed technically allotted to him in Noémi Janvier's tolerant house, spent and cold, the savage appeased and contemptuous. Into Noémi's house he had brought a flame that had been fanned during a long year, with which to consume his last romantic illusion. Olga, like his other hopes and aspirations, had gone stale through waiting. For as he had sat

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on the edge of his own bed, in the bleak morning, he stared straight at the fact that the girl he had enshrined was merely a bad copy of his image of her; that she had changed from poetry to prose and didn't scan any more. The magic cloak was gone. And if he were to give in to a deep yearning to tell all these things to Rhoda—then forever and forever the magic cloak which had seemed to shroud him in *her* eyes would be gone. And life just wasn't worth living if all the magic went.

Business, though it had crystallized Rhoda, had at any rate not robbed her of her femininity; in some ways she was more feminine than ever, as he was more masculine. It's merely the effect of being grown up, he guessed. In one emergency she broke her custom and discussed the affairs of the office with him. With the death of her father a reorganization of the firm was a foregone conclusion, and as his will had left a controlling interest in her hands, her judgment was being taxed to the utmost. There were rivalries, enmities, and traps. One man who knew secrets of great value was threatening to keep them to himself unless his unreasonable terms were granted. At that point Rhoda had bent under the strain of her responsibility and laid the situation before Grover. In a flash he brushed aside the technical complications and judged the case from the moral and psychological point of view.

"Give him a categorical offer," he advised, "and if

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he refuses, turn him out, secrets and all. For if you keep him on *his* terms he will always be a centre of disaffection, and as for the secrets, there aren't any that can't be rediscovered or invented anew, especially under the aegis of such an ingenious and energetic young woman as yourself." Faith, hope, and charity, he again reflected, and the greatest was assuredly faith—and Rhoda had it in abundance, lucky Rhoda.

This was support in a direction parallel with Rhoda's own endeavors since her connection with the firm, and also a tribute from a source from which she had too often in the past drawn only criticism. What do girls know anyway! The childish taunt had often been echoed.

"Do you really think I'm any good?" she asked, with an air of helplessness that was far from habitual.

"You know perfectly well that I've been in a continuous state of flabbergastion at what I've seen you doing," he replied. "Even before I read the interview."

This was an allusion to an article in a trade journal celebrating the phenomenal rise of young Miss Marple to the presidency of one of the leading manufacturing companies in the State. Frances, home for the Christmas holidays, had found it in Rhoda's bedroom and come running downstairs two steps at a time crying, "Look! Look! That's *my* big sister!"

It had been agreed that Grover couldn't think of leaving before the New Year. As a matter of fact his

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return to Paris had been postponed several times, for reasons which were never entirely definite but which everyone, including himself, accepted without question —indeed with enthusiasm.

. . . .

"What on earth are those?" asked Rhoda one Sunday morning when he had remained in bed with a cold and she had come in to see that he had had a suitable breakfast.

She was pointing to a heap of papers that he had neglected to replace in his portfolio, and for a moment he thought she was referring to the novel about how tragic life was, and was groping frantically in his mind for an alibi, when he raised himself on his pillow and saw that she was holding the sketches he had made for her father.

"What darling little birds!" she laughed, and then, as she glanced through the other sketches, her astonishment grew.

Grover had meant to show them to her but had postponed the occasion, to avoid the inevitable pain for her, and had ended by overlooking their existence. He explained how they had come into being.

Rhoda forgot her interest in his breakfast, and while he balanced the heavy tray on his thighs she lost herself in the playful propaganda he had written with a pen to which he had given carte blanche.

No one had ever looked at his portraits and land-

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scapes with the spontaneous pleasure with which Rhoda was studying these drawings. No one had ever read any words of his with the whimsical delight with which Rhoda scanned his persuasive arguments.

Her enthusiasm became electric. It set her to pacing the room and gesturing in a manner that would have given Mamie Mangum pointers for a dozen roles.

"It's brimming over with ideas," she cried. "However did you—"

She leaned forward over the breakfast tray and hugged him.

"It's worth thousands of dollars to us," she exclaimed with a new gust of amazement.

"I'll take it in cash," he said laconically, as the dark shadow of Paris stole into the cheerful room.

"By Jove and you'll get it," she promised.

He did get it, shortly after the New Year, and it gave him courage to re-enter his bank. He had got into the way of journeying into Boston with Rhoda and had looked up a few old acquaintances. Most of his classmates he soon rejected as hopeless marriers. Scarcely one but had at least one foot in the matrimonial grave. Eric Peperell was selling stocks and bonds and was by way of being engaged to a girl named Lila Squarebriggs.

"I should think she'd marry anybody to change *that* name," Grover commented. "Why victimize a good fellow like Eric!"

"Lila's a nice girl," Rhoda defended.

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Grover gave her a sidelong glance, for he suspected Lila of being what Sophie had once called a *pis aller*. "I used to think Eric was sweet on you," he ventured. "He always had a sort of gone look in his eye when your name came on the carpet."

"He was—a little," she admitted.

"Only a little?"

"Well, quite a lot."

"I don't see how you kept from jumping at him."

"I'm married to my job," she said succinctly.

And for some reason, rather drearily, that led to the question of his return to France.

"There's only one thing I'm waiting for now," he informed her.

"What is that?"

"A letter from Geoffrey Saint."

He couldn't explain to her that he had dispatched to Geoffrey the manuscript of a novel, a revised version of a recalcitrant story on which he had been working for goodness knew how long, and if he had told her, he wouldn't have been able to add that his nervous system was laboring under the strain of a possible adverse criticism. To himself he had admitted that if he were to fall down in this attempt, there would be nothing left. All his faith in himself would then seem to him as empty as the boyishly vaunting phrases he had come across only a few days since when, in pulling out a book from a shelf in the library, he had found between the leaves one of his old letters to

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Rhoda, and, with flaming cheeks, forced his way through the naive, bombastic contents. Contents which Rhoda had no doubt taken quite literally! One sentence in particular reduced him to the lowest degree of shame: When I *do* return to America, it will only be after I have proved to myself, and to the public, that I'm Somebody.

Despite Geoffrey's faithful promptitude, it seemed weeks before the manuscript came back. Grover went up to his own room to open it and to read the accompanying letter.

He was in his room for hours,—not reading the letter, for that had soon been perused; but thinking, and blowing smoke toward the ceiling, and wishing the world had a back door that he could sneak out of.

For it was the same old story. Though Geoffrey was kind—oh, so kind! which made it damnably worse, he allowed him only a nice little talent again.

"Put it away for two or three years and forget about it," Geoffrey counselled. "Then, if you reread it impersonally, I think you will see what I mean."

"Affectionately yours," Geoffrey concluded.

Affectionately hell, echoed Grover in his misery, wondering whether Rhoda's estimate of Geoffrey Saint might not have a shade of truth in it. "That man," she had once remarked, "is an incorrigible old prisstail —I don't see why you hang on his opinions the way you do."

At dinner he rallied his courage. Folly Daggett and

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her husband, a dull, safe young man, were present, also Alcie Pender and a dashing Brazilian for whom, Rhoda had told him, Alcie was thinking of divorcing Dick Briarcliffe—already. Massachusetts trying to be France, Grover reflected, with a thought for the greater ease with which such transfers were effected in Biarritz.

"I bet a yelping doughnut you never go back," Folly challenged him.

"You've lost," he replied. "For I'm sailing next week."

Rhoda subdued her surprise, but Grover felt that she could see straight through him to his innermost weakness, though she might have no factual clue.

"You got your letter?" she inquired, and to her guests it might seem that the letter had come from the most important art committee in Paris, impatient of his delay.

He nodded his head, and parried Folly's questions as to what boat he was sailing on and what prospects there were of a send-off party.

When they had all gone, and there was nobody in the house but himself and Rhoda and her self-effacing Aunt Sarita who spent most of her evenings in the rooms to which Rhoda had once unsuspectingly—or suspectingly?—offered Sophie Scantleberry the keys, Rhoda came to him in the old sisterly way.

"I suppose it's no use to argue," she inquired.

He shook his head. "I *must* go," he said, not in

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the ecstatic tone in which he had said it some two years before, but as though it were the grimmest of duties.

Rhoda sighed, as his mother had been wont to sigh on occasions when she felt the force of his stubbornness but was too fond of him to offend the pride which prompted his folly.

In the last few days, and tonight particularly, he had caught in Rhoda's regard a new light. It was as though she detected him in a role, without being able to challenge it at any point,—not that she would be cruel enough to do so, even if the clue had been in her hands. The old, girlish Rhoda might have been thoughtless enough to tweak him in a sensitive area, but not this womanly Rhoda.

"I have so many things to do there," he added, rather lamely.

They said good-night, having arranged that he would accompany her to the city in the morning, to look up sailings.

. . . .

Late in the afternoon he called at Rhoda's office. For some minutes he was kept waiting in the reception room, and when he entered he found her in a state of wrath which transformed her. Jeanne, Marshall of France, thought Grover, with the battle in full swing.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing!" she said. "I've just had to fire a

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darn good man who got too big for his damn boots, that's all."

"It's enough," he sympathized.

"Enough!" she echoed, dropping into her chair and reaching for a cigarette. "It's the limit! No sooner do you get things running smoothly than somebody goes and upsets your applecart—each apple so carefully placed. And all to do over again."

Grover sat in commiserating silence.

"Did you find out about boats?" she asked.

"Got my ticket."

Rhoda was flicking off the ash of her cigarette with a nervous vigor not entirely called for.

"Life's an awful fake," she remarked.

He looked at her in amazement. "Good Lord, Rhoda! Don't *you* say that. You're the only person left who, I always supposed, thought life—real and earnest and the grave is not its goal!"

"It's just one long fake, I tell you! When you're a little girl you dress yourself up in your mother's clothes and try to act like a lady; and when you're a lady and are trying to act like a decent man and a nasty big brute comes in and tries to double-cross you and not only that—"

"You mean—make love?"

She flicked her ash, then crushed the fire out of her cigarette. "And of course it would have to be the one man I was counting on."

"What for?"

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"Oh, I don't know. He had brains and—well, taste. He was the first to catch the possibilities of your little ideas. Business is business, but nowadays you have to disguise it. They want a light touch. The sort of thing *you* do so well—like the way your little birds have their heads cocked."

And the way my cheek used to go from the corner of my eye to my chin and probably doesn't any more and never will again, Grover was ruminating, stroking it absent-mindedly.

He looked up at her with a timid surmise. "I couldn't be of any use to you, could I? What's it all about?"

Rhoda was out of her chair now, pacing the floor. We've missed our train, he thought, as he heard Rhoda's secretary close the outer door. Suddenly she stopped before him, and looked at him with a steady regard, just daring to be hopeful.

"Would you?" she asked, a little breathlessly.

"Would I what?"

"Be a sort of adviser for a few months, to—to tide us over? . . . Fred Shadrock was advertising manager, but I've decided to be that myself from now on."

"Like Mussolini," Grover remarked, to key down the tension.

"What we need," Rhoda went on, thinking her way through, "is a man who's not too close to the wheels—who can stand off and squint his eyes and see what's

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needed. Experience isn't as important as common sense, which almost nobody's got, and imagination, which just almost doesn't exist. The rest of us can do the controlling of the imagination and the laying on of dampers. Of course—"

Then Rhoda stopped in her tracks. She burst out laughing, a little hysterically, and reached for another cigarette.

"Fancy us two!" she cried. "Talking like this . . . me with my eye on the roofs of the cockeyed world, and you there, half-way to France. . . Let's go out and have some tea. I'm starving."

The Prince there, Grover was musing, who sits and thinks—his air palace blown galley-west.

He rose unsteadily to his feet. If he died of the shame, he must relieve his conscience before Rhoda. After it was all said he could sail away, and spend the rest of his brief days drinking *anis del oso*.

She sat down again, and it was his turn to walk the room. In a turbulent stream he poured it all out—Casimir's verdict, the desperate tomato salads, Olga, Italy, the job, the novel, Geoffrey's letter, Noémi, Olga again. He didn't spare himself nor Rhoda. Indeed, beneath all his eloquence, he wondered if he might perhaps be overstating the case. Getting it all said half suggested solutions!

But he went on and on, long after the charwomen in the outer office had performed their evening tasks

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and left them alone, strangely quiet in this towering temple of commerce.

The lights outside were reflecting themselves in cold puddles of water on the Common, and he was on his knees, his head in Rhoda's comforting lap. Once or twice there was a warm splash on the back of his hand. It seemed to him that after this night there would be nothing left for him that he could face without flinching—not even the dingiest cafe in Paris.

"Until you found someone," he heard himself grotesquely saying, and for the life of him he couldn't pin the remark to anything that had gone before.

She was stroking his hair. "I'll never find anyone," she said, "If I wait forever. There just isn't any substitute. It's silly to say it, but it's true."

He looked up, and saw her eyes moist and shining in the murky light. "But when you've found the right man for the job?"

"About that time," she said, "you'll have finished a new novel in five syllables."

"Oh, do you think so?"

"I'm afraid I think so," she ruefully confessed.

"Meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile you'll be doing one-syllable things for us."

"Do you think we ought to get married, or anything?"

"I do," whispered Rhoda, and the whisper turned

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into a devastating sob. "I just can't bear it any longer."

"What will Sophie say!"

And to his eternal amazement Rhoda uttered a single word, one of the coarsest in the language, and most expressive.

. . . .

A few weeks later Grover composed a careful reply to Geoffrey's letter. As he chewed the pen he pictured Geoffrey securely stationed upon his rostrum at an important western university, Doctor Saint every inch of him, handing down pronouncements that it would take the brighter of his students years and years to discover the fallacy of!

"I cannot but feel," wrote Grover, "that you have failed a little to catch the purport of my book." He paused, wondering with a wild flare of hope whether his novel, like Racicot's music and Casimir's painting, might not have some deep-hidden significance, too deep even for himself! "Not that I think it would be published as it stands; but after all, dear old Geoffrey, there are views—but let's not go into that." He was about to add, "and a new spirit in the land," but it might be as well not to go into that either, for young men in every generation had imagined themselves discovering a new spirit which was without doubt the same old one.

"For the time being I've drained Paris dry. It may

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age you to learn that your quondam tutee is married—it may even kill you: it ought to kill *somebody;* I know it would of *me,* a year ago! But I thought it all out, and even though a hot wave of matrimony sometimes sweeps over me and threatens to swamp the coracle my soul believed itself destined to set sail in—

"What I'm trying to say, Geoffrey, is that at best life's only a series of consolation prizes, and you're a fool if you reject even them! Or is that cynicism?

"Whatever it is, it sounds a little disparaging toward Rhoda, and that's a pity, for everybody knows she'd be a grand first prize if that's what you were trying to win.

"Casimir put his finger on it when he ignored my arty allegories and pinned his faith on my cats. He knew what I now suspect: that I'm only expected to be somebody who's not too big for his boots. I hate being him—but Rhoda, who just looked over my shoulder and kissed me on the ear said I be him quite satisfactorily—so you *see*!

"It's just like at the bank. I'm forever spending the cheque that won't be deposited till next quarter. And that's what I did with my future; I overdrew my account a little, and have to wait to catch up. Meanwhile? Meanwhile I know this: that while accepting as gratefully as may be whatever the moment vouchsafes, I shall always secretly, passionately be yearning for the unknown. I was born with a will o' the wisp complex—when I fell in love I adored a phantom girl;

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the faith that animates me and projects me toward bridges I can't cross till I come to them is a faith that centres around a phantom *Me*; whatever knowledge I possess is derived from a phantom past; my hopes are fixed on a phantom future. Phantoms is all I can ever be *sure* of, for which and all Thy other blessings—

"It's like Alice's jam: poetry yesterday, poetry tomorrow, but only prose today. The thing to do, I suppose, is to take hold of life and *make* the damn thing scan, inexorable gods notwithstanding. Indeed I have a suspicion that the gods are a fairly exorable crew if you meet them on their own terms. Having been created by man in his image, they're rather worldly—that's all."

When he had finished the letter and reread it, in the solitude of his room, a wave, not of matrimony, but of remorse or grief or something in the same general category which eluded his powers of definition, a wave that simmered and hissed a little ominously, surged up in him, and he added a postscript in a calligraphy so hurried and inky he feared Geoffrey might not be able to decipher it—literally or figuratively.

"I've just caught my poor old subconscious at it again, chanting more plaintively than ever, Why did he die? Why did he die? And oh, Geoffrey, would you say it's because I killed him?"

Why did he die? *It sounded like a title!*

THE END

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