

SOLO

Pierre Coalfleet



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SOLO

BY

PIERRE COALFLEET



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DEDICATED
TO THE
MEMORY OF THREE RARE WOMEN

BESSIE SHAW
RITA SHAW
HARRIETT SHAW

who at separate epochs played, like subtle moral virtuosi, on the mind of their young kinsman, and who, after enduring life with a beautiful morbid pride, passed quietly away before he had fully appreciated, much less acknowledged, his great spiritual debt.

December 15, 1922.

FOREWORD

WHEN the last *t* of your novel has been piously crossed, you experience a major bliss of authorship: the interval of intellectual torpor that succeeds the creative act. Months later, in a new mood, perhaps in a different land, you reread your story which has, in the interval, gone to school, graduated, and come home a book—with a jacket and a price. The experience is not unlike playing for the first time a piano transcription of a familiar symphony. It sounds thin; you miss a dozen orchestral colours, despite the exciting gain in clarity and the alien timbre.

Suddenly the thought comes to you: but the public may not suspect that it is symphonic! For them it will be a sonata—and an unwieldy one. And a major chagrin of authorship is that you can't sit on the arm of your reader's chair and score in for him the parts between the lines. In the heat of writing you had taken it for granted that he was hearing what you heard, for was he not merely thousands of yous! He, you assumed, knew your people beforehand; that they were "born on Sunday, christened on Monday, married on Tuesday" and so on to the Saturday burial, because long before your day writers of fiction had recorded all the possible externals. But in this new mood, as you read impersonally what you had so personally set down, you are no longer the composer, and you see how absurd it was to think of the public as thousands of yous, when it is only a thousandth of you, just as you are a thousandth of it.

Whereupon another revelation comes to you: your story is "modern." That is only another way of saying that it has tacitly eliminated factors common to all the novels you had been brought up on—novels you had assumed your readers had been brought up on. Readers who have read many novels may catch factors in your story that you failed to "cancel out," and they will think you old-fashioned. Readers who have read few novels may not recognize your two-thirds as their four-sixths! They may consequently doubt your final product and think you over-modern. Readers who have read no novels to speak of may think you mad and your hero madder. They may not even be aware that "heroes" were cancelled out years ago and that death is not necessarily a tragedy. They may see darkness where you saw dawn, futility where you saw hope, despair where you saw transfiguration. And you can't hum in for them the subsidiary voices; the best you can do is to attempt a preface to the new edition, and you abhor prefaces.

P. C.

New York, 1924.

SOLO

PART I

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I

I

LIFE as an endless *suite* of "variations on a given theme." This notion had filtered into the precocious imagination of Paul Minas, boy organist of the Baptist church in Hale's Turning, Nova Scotia, and dyed his mind as he played on and on through a favourite Bach prelude which luckily suited the mood of the "collection" interval. Solo performances rescued him from the chaos of the external world, bringing him into a mysterious intimacy with life itself. For the moment he *was* the melody. He felt the music as intrinsically as he felt the warmth in his body, yet his relation to it was romantically tinged with a dormant consciousness of the fact that Phœbe Meddar, seated in the pew with her mother and brother, was, perforce, listening.

The metaphor had not presented itself to him in words. His vocabulary, though fuller than that of Walter Dreer and Mark Laval, was a meagre wardrobe for the variety of rôles he was capable of performing. From a magnanimous prince to a starving poet, from Thaddeus of Warsaw to the Lazarillo de Tormes, he became metamorphosed with amazing facility. The notion of life as music had, without the agency of words, stolen into mind as he gave utterance. by means of manuals, pedals and

stops, to the voices which kept rising and falling, alternating and intermingling, intoning his theme in varying keys and modes, with varying degrees of passion, longing, doubt and conviction.

Each successive variation enounced the theme with accretions of character. With each recurrence, though undeniably the same entity, it was less naïve, more experienced. "Like the same person a year later," Paul might have stated it. He was far too engrossed in the sombre joy of performing to decipher whatever thoughts may have been flickering across the screen of consciousness, and it was only when a discreet "Psst!" smote his ear—thanks to Mr. Silva, the grizzled basso—that he emerged from his absorption. Then, with a surge of discomfiture, he realized he had played beyond the time limit. In the mirror above the manuals he saw that the ushers were standing with bowed heads, while the minister frowningly awaited his cue to murmur over the up-raised plates a formula of thanks and consecration. With a hastily improvised modulation Paul brought the interlude to an end.

His feelings were hurt, for he had been playing with an exalted faith in the divine purport of the music and resented the anticlimax. Moreover, he imagined Gritty Kestrell and Walter Dreer tittering, and blushed—felt his neck and ears getting all red for the congregation to see.

He had been disconcerted more by the intrusion upon his private engrossment in the music than by a fear that his pride in "being organist" might have made him appear to be prolonging the offertory merely to show off. For having kept the minister waiting, he felt little or no compunction. The minister was only a prosy man with unpleasant thumbs and bad manners. As for the ushers, Paul objected to their pompousness when they made their rounds with the mahogany, baize-lined plates. They

looked forward to that moment as the culminating point of the service, indeed of the whole week, for it gave them an opportunity of being conspicuous. This he guessed with an intuition sharpened by rivalry, for he himself looked forward to the same moment, for the same reason.

And he had an artist's horror of the noise made by pennies and dimes when the whole attention of the congregation should be focussed on the music with which he so fervently filled the interval. They chinked loudest of all when one reached the part that called for a hushed, "Æolian harp" effect. If he stopped to chide himself for an illicit desire to be conspicuous in the consciousness of Phœbe and Gritty and Walter—chiefly Phœbe, whose image was always before him during the tedious week-day hours of practice—he quickly came to his own defence with the reflection that, after all, he, a boy of eleven, perched on that bench, stretching down to pedals which had to be built up with pieces of board—*he* was obviously more important than four old men in shiny coats. Anybody could be an usher!

Those petty coins! He knew a naughty rhyme about them. Walter Dreer had whispered it to him in Sunday-school:

"Dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping,
Hear the pennies fall;
Every one for Jesus,
He will get them all!"

2

At dinner, in the kitchen of the big cold house, Paul hesitated to tell Aunt Verona of the contretemps during the offertory. Much as he venerated Aunt Verona,

much as he loved her in a repressed way, he was cautious with her. For, although Aunt Verona was kind and refrained from scolding or punishing, she had a habit, when he reported his lapses or when she caught him in a misdemeanour, of making remarks to herself. The remarks were often unintelligible, yet Paul dreaded them more than he would have dreaded a reprimand. They seemed to imply that some melody had gone off-key, that he had been guilty of a moral discord. And there was something haunting about her countenance when she was disappointed—all the more so in that her prescription of well-doing was never specifically set forth: one could only surmise its nature by means of the awful, muttering suspension of relations that followed any default. Yet despite its nonspecific quality, despite the fact that Aunt Verona never said "Do this" nor "Don't do that," as other grown-ups were for ever saying, there was something singularly consistent about her negative code. It became more intricate as you learned new facts, but it never contradicted itself. There were blind alleys in Aunt Verona's ethics, and she would often say, "Wait till you're a little older, child, then you'll see what I mean." But he was certain her prophecy would come true, for experience proved that the blank walls which had seemed to bar progress were in reality quite scalable fences beyond which lay inviting new fields. Growing up was largely a matter of discovering that Aunt Verona had been right about all the problems which had baffled one; consequently Paul paid blind homage to her wisdom and writhed whenever he was clumsy enough to bring a shadow across her face—whenever, as it were, he *flatted*.

He knew, of course, that Aunt Verona would ply him with questions about the morning service, and she was the one person in the world who was never bored when he talked about his experiments with new combinations of stops. If he told her in detail how Miss Todd had

sung her solo, he did so merely because that implied a right to explain at equal length how he had played his prelude and interlude and postlude, and Aunt Verona at times fairly gloated, though she usually concluded with some such comment as, "Ah, but wait till you've mastered the new octave studies. It doesn't do to be easily satisfied. Nothing's so deadly as that."

One idiosyncrasy of Aunt Verona's puzzled him more than all the others. Ever since he had been considered big enough to march off to church she had exacted that he should memorize the text of the sermon, which she promptly wrote down on a ragged piece of brown paper and stuffed into a drawer of a cabinet on the kitchen dresser. What she meant to do with the texts, or why she collected them, Paul could not, after considerable straining of mind, imagine. Often, on Sunday afternoons, he had caught her bursting into a thin laugh and repeating one or two words of the morning text, and this day was no exception, for as she went to the stove to get the coffee he heard her muttering, with a nameless sort of relish, "Toil not—to be sure . . . spin . . . Heaven protect my wits!"

Not for worlds would Paul have ventured to inquire why Aunt Verona persisted in this rite, yet he would no more have dared forget the text than neglect saying his prayers, for if he did he knew that one of those blank expressions would come into Aunt Verona's face and she would go off to the playroom and sit for hours looking out of the window at the cherry tree, whilst he suffered inconsolable miseries of guilt at having been careless enough to let the pattern of life go "crookedy," to play a false note, as it were. Once he had forgotten, and on the spur of the moment invented a substitute, an old Sunday-school "golden" text that had leapt to his tongue as a very present help, and she had unsuspectingly written it down and stuffed it into the drawer. That had

made him feel a cad all day. Even if she did nothing with the texts, it was a torture for him to know that there was one spurious text among all the genuine.

Every Sunday morning, immediately after breakfast, Aunt Verona took him to the playroom and gave him a final drill in the anthems and solos for the day, correcting him when he played too fast, and keeping a kind but uncannily vigilant eye on his fourth finger, which, for all the special exercises she had devised, persisted in being weaker than the others—a weakness which made for unsteady trills. Sometimes when he was practising alone she would call out from the kitchen in the middle of an *étude*, “Paul, Paul, go back two bars. You’ve left out an A-flat in the bass,” and he never ceased wondering how she could unerringly name the note.

He had known for a long while that Aunt Verona was unlike every other creature in Hale’s Turning, but he had taken her major oddities for granted. As he grew older he marvelled more and more. He wondered, for instance, why she never went to church, since she took such an interest in its affairs. He had been less offhand in his reports since the day, years ago, when, in reply to her query as to what the Sunday-school teacher had talked about, he had said, “Oh, about Jesus and God and all those!” For on that occasion Aunt Verona had laughed till she cried. He shrank from questioning her about herself, both because he was shy and because he knew she disliked personal questions, which she either evaded or dismissed with a peremptory “I’ll tell you some day.” In daylight she never ventured farther than the well, and as far back as Paul could remember there had been only three or four occasions, at dead of night, when she had passed through the gate into the street. These ominous sorties had been preceded by long fits of depression. Then Aunt Verona had gone to one of the unused rooms upstairs, put on a veil and some appall-

ingly old-fashioned clothes, installed him before the kitchen stove with a book and an apple, and stolen out for an hour or two.

He had suffered mental agony during her absences, for he had guessed that she had been at the doctor's and the association of the ideas of doctor and night-time awakened in his mind a tragic memory. He saw himself again as a boy of three in Aunt Verona's arms wriggling, imploring his mother not to go away. He saw his mother run back into the room, kneel to kiss him, the tears streaming down her cheeks, then wrench herself away, heedless of his din, to go to a fiendish place she called the "sanatorium." At that point the picture became blurred, for she had never come back.

The terror bred in him by that dim tragedy had come stealing back like a ghost on the few occasions when Aunt Verona had gone out, steadfastly refusing to let him accompany her. He would rather have faced a legion of doctors with her than be left at the mercy of weird shadows, but nothing would have induced him to say "Yes" when Aunt Verona enjoined, in parting, "You won't be afraid, child, will you?" Ashamed of his fears, he sat with his book until the outer door closed, then retreated to a corner of the room, pressed his back against the protective wall and waited, tense and wide-eyed.

He wondered, too, why he should have to go on to Miss Todd's for choir rehearsal, when the choir might much more conveniently have come to Aunt Verona's. Miss Todd had only a tinny upright piano and her house was on the hill beyond the church, whereas Aunt Verona had a concert piano that had been brought on his father's ship all the way from Hamburg in Germany, the best piano in the whole province, and the harmonium which had belonged to his mother was almost as good as a pipe organ. Yet it was somehow unthinkable that the choir should come to Aunt Verona's house. For that matter

nobody came but Dr. Wilcove, Mr. Silva, the chore-man, and Becky States, the coloured washerwoman, who wore long glass earrings which she had abstracted from a broken lamp-shade in the parlour. Gritty Kestrell and Walter Dreer and Mark Laval didn't count, for they were children and never came indoors unless it was stormy. Paul was ill at ease when he brought them into the bare house, because it was so different from the noisy, cheerful interiors of other houses. Yet he secretly noted that when Aunt Verona sat them down to a table in the play-room and served them with milk and bread and butter and jam and cookies, there was a vague distinction about the occasion that subdued Gritty and reduced the elegant Walter to whispers—Walter whose mother made entrancing frosted walnut cakes!

If people knocked at the door Paul answered. Unless the caller were a tramp, a gipsy woman or a pedlar, it was his duty to say, "My aunt's not at home," though every one in Hale's Turning knew the contrary. At first, when he had protested against this fib, Aunt Verona had said, "Certain fibs have to be told, child, in the interest of truth as a whole. Little negatives are sometimes comprised in a positive total. You'll understand one day. Besides, in Milieux, where people are less literal-minded, it's simply a way of saying 'She doesn't wish to receive visitors to-day.'" She had seemed unusually serious and had sat looking out the playroom window, her eyes on some remote horizon of thought. Paul, drawing a picture of a locomotive on the blackboard, had kept as quiet as a mouse. Then, speaking to herself, Aunt Verona had blurted out, "God, what a labyrinth, labyrinth, labyrinth!"

Her cryptic manner and the strange word had abashed him, and he had put down his chalk preparing to steal away. With a start Aunt Verona had remembered his existence and fixed him with a stern eye, modified by

her extraordinary, serious smile. "You, child, must never say that. I can, but you mustn't. Promise."

He had promised readily enough and run out of doors. But at supper he couldn't resist asking a question which had been tormenting him. "Why mustn't I say 'labyrinth,' Aunt Verona?" he had finally ventured. Aunt Verona had been puzzled a long while, then broke into one of her rare, kind laughs. "It was the other word, child, that Aunt Verona wished you not to say—the first word."

"Oh, 'God?'"

"Yes . . . Except in your prayers."

From Aunt Verona's change of expression he had known he mustn't pursue the subject, and alone in bed he had got himself involved in an intricate piece of casuistry, trying to define the legitimate use and vain misuse of the name of the Deity. Intricate, because it had all to be negotiated without implying that Aunt Verona was a breaker of the commandments. The dire consequences of taking the name of the Lord in vain were minutely known to him. Hell was redder and hotter than the coals over which Aunt Verona baked onions when he had a cold, and it was obvious that one's own aunt would not go to such a place when she died. Besides, he took it for granted that Aunt Verona had been "saved." It was certainly lucky that his mother had been saved before she entered that fatal sanatorium!

Mark Laval, who attended Mass in the heathenish church across the river where the French-Canadian lumberjacks lived, had told him that only Catholics got to heaven, and Paul had run home terrified at the thought that his mother might be baking like an onion, till Mr. Silva, who was chopping wood in the yard, had reassured him. Mr. Silva—whom the people of Hale's Turning called "Mr. Silver" unaware that Silva meant "woods"—said that the Catholics invented such stories in the hope

of converting you, and that night Paul had dreamt he was running for dear life down an endless corridor pursued by priests in black robes who were breathing hard and trying to lasso him with objects like bicycle tyres. He had stumbled and wakened just in time, but hadn't dared go to Aunt Verona's door and ask her to let him crawl into her bed, for he was a big boy of seven.

3

Mr. Silva was continually throwing off remarks which were as unusual in their way as were the objects he whittled out of pieces of board. When the sap was running in the alders he could make better whistles and slingshots than Mark Laval. Mark was clever with his blunt fingers, but you couldn't be sure that his whistles would blow or that the bark wouldn't split, whereas Mr. Silva was infallible.

One day when Paul came in from school to practise, Mr. Silva was replacing the heavy lid of the piano; the *piano à queue*, as Aunt Verona had called it on one of their French-speaking days, and the phrase had made Paul giggle.

On a newly-tuned instrument old pieces revived, like wilting flowers when put into water, and Paul played with extra zest. Mr. Silva lingered in the room, and Paul guessed that Aunt Verona suffered him to remain because his ideas stimulated her, as did those of the tramps and gipsies. Paul shared her contempt for the general mentality of the village and her respect for the Portuguese Jack of all trades whom the village dismissed as "odd." He had asked Aunt Verona why Mr. Silva was contented to do chores for a living rather than return to Oporto where there were palm trees or go to Halifax where there were hundreds of pianos to tune, but it had been difficult to get all his questions formulated in German, which Aunt Verona made him speak on Mondays and

Wednesdays, and she had merely replied, "*Ohne Zweifel, weil er gefunden hat, dass er hier glücklicher ist, als irgendwo anders.*"

After Paul had tested the piano, he turned to Mr. Silva, who was standing in the doorway fingering his cap and beaming with a sort of wistful pleasure. "Ah," said the old man, "music is the universal language. If every one had an aunt like yours to teach them, there would be no more wars. The nations would take the yoke of Beethoven and Bach upon them and learn of them. When you grow up you will write noble music too, and people of all countries will play it, spreading love and truth throughout the world."

From Mr. Silva's speech Paul drew two overwhelming deductions. First, people *wrote* music! He had assumed that all music, the world's fixed *répertoire*, was comprised in the volumes and sheets which were kept in a trunk upstairs and brought forth one at a time, to be mastered in succession—a series which had commenced when he was five years old with "The Merry Peasant" and which was to culminate in a certain redoubtable Liszt Sonata for the satisfactory performance of which, when he had grown up to its measure, Aunt Verona was pledged to hand over to him the watch which the Queen of Holland had given his father for rescuing nineteen Dutch sailors from a burning ship. It had never occurred to him that Beethoven and Bach had once been boys, then grown up and made music out of their heads.

The second deduction was that German and Dutch and Spanish and perhaps even Chinese boys liked music too—the very pieces Canadian boys liked! He had, without stopping to think about it, assumed that music was English, like spelling and geography. He had always realized that one would have to talk German to a German boy, and one wouldn't have anything to say to a Chinese boy—except "Muckahighlo," which Mr. Silva

said was swearing—but now he realized that, no matter “what nation of a boy” he might meet, he could always, in a sense, get on terms with the stranger by playing the piano. This rich thought coloured his hours of practice for many days. The following Sunday in church he pretended that the congregation was composed of delegates from every nation under the sun, quite without means of making themselves understood to one another until the moment when he climbed on his bench and old Silas out in the vestry turned on the water power that pumped the organ. And, before the choir straggled in, he gave himself the illusion that the congregation were sighing in relief and listening eagerly, that their minds, concentrated on the œcumenical strains of the voluntary—especially chosen for the occasion and sweetly condescending in spirit—were flowing into a single stream of intelligence, that the world was being flooded with good tidings. Phœbe Meddar—whose mother’s hat was the only sign of the enchanted family that came within range of the organ mirror—was a delegate from Alcantara, a princess who knew not a word of any human language, but to whose ears every vibration of sound in the gilded pipes revealed sweet secrets. Walter Dreer was a swash-buckling Don, secretly in love with the Princess, but unable to declare himself inasmuch as he couldn’t even play “I love coffee, I love tea” on the black notes.

For days, as he sailed boats in the river with Mark Laval or whittled arrows and swords in the shop where Gritty Kestrell’s father made coffins, he kept coming back to Mr. Silva’s notion of music reaching out over the world as a healing and teaching influence. One afternoon, as he sat swinging on the gate in front of Aunt Verona’s empty house, where tiger lilies grew rank among the long grass, he dreamed that Queen Victoria had sent for him and after touching his shoulder with a shining Excalibur, commanded him to go out to South Africa and play

the *Moonlight Sonata* to the angry Boers—on a vast organ with pipes that stretched like a golden bridge to heaven.

4

Paul and Gritty sometimes played “ship” among the impressive boxes which Gritty’s mother forbade her to mention by name. Once Gritty had occasion to write the word, and she spelt it “coughin.” In a small show-room were even more mysterious boxes, shiny and trimmed with metal. They had arrived ready-made from Halifax, wrapped in blue tissue paper which Gritty and Paul tore off and soaked in their school bottles, for it was a point of taste at school to have “coloured water” with which to wash one’s slate, just as it was a point of respectability to have a slice of cake and an apple to top off one’s sandwich luncheons on stormy days.

On his fifth birthday Paul had commenced school, for, although it was a Thursday and the middle of a term, Aunt Verona had had no choice but to fulfil a promise that he should be allowed to attend “when he got five.” As Aunt Verona never appeared in public, it had fallen to the lot of Mr. Silva to escort Paul to Miss Ranston with an explanatory note.

His clean face and jaunty person were offensive to the big boys who played leap-frog in the angle of the school steps, and on the second day their sense of injury expressed itself in a concerted attack. He found himself enclosed in a ring of howling red Indians. Before his eyes were dancing legs and visions of lifelong humiliation; but he was armed with presence of mind and an umbrella. Deliberately he selected the ringleader and administered a jab with the umbrella point which in the confusion went to his assailant’s eye and pierced it.

“Serves you right,” Paul piped, as the others, scared at the sight of blood, fell back. That is what he said,

and mounted the high steps, intact as a god, clutching his umbrella. Out of the enemy's reach he collapsed, and in sickness and horror clung to the caressing Miss Ranston, explaining to her what he had disdained to explain to the beastly others, that he had aimed at Bean-Oh's stomach, but some one had pushed his elbow.

He had, however, described a charmed circle about himself, even though his victim, who squinted ever after, was a torturing reminder of his first experience of meaningless hostility, his first battle for freedom.

His next epoch-making exploit, two years later, was to become enamoured of a little girl whose surname began, romantically, with the same letter as his own, and who consequently stood next him in the Friday afternoon spelling matches. To that little girl, Leila Meddar, there clung a most ethereal odour of coco-nut cookies. Night after night Paul lay awake composing dialogues designed for every conceivable contingency whereby they might find themselves together—they two and nobody else. He hoarded bits of tissue paper and rummaged in Aunt Verona's attic for choice rags, that Leila might one day have the prettiest bottle of coloured water in the class. He spent afternoons in the fields looking for new "secrets," a word which in the code of the undertaker's daughter and himself signified "flowering mosses." Whenever the time was ripe, Leila should be brought to see and admire them. To no living soul—not even to Gritty, who was a tomboy and a fairly safe confidante—did he breathe a hint of his ardours.

One Monday he was appointed monitor for the boys, and Leila Meddar, in automatic accordance with a romantic alphabet, was appointed for the girls. This meant that for five precious days it would be their joint duty to dust the blackboards and gather hats and coats for distribution at dismissal time. Daily he rehearsed a declaration for the cloakroom, but daily it adhered to his

tongue. He could merely swoon in the sweet, pervasive odour of cookies.

One morning Leila was absent, and the world grew grey. Day after day her seat remained vacant, and Paul took to walking by the river, casting furtive glances at the windows of the white cottage on the bluff where Leila lived. There was no sign of her and he would go back to the fields behind Aunt Verona's house and say comforting things to his patient "secrets." Then one day Miss Ranston, in a queer voice, told them that Leila Meddar would never come back to school, for she had been ill and God had taken her up into heaven where she would not have to suffer any more.

He walked from the schoolhouse in a daze, his thoughts floating high like balloons, trying to find some resting-place in his clouded knowledge concerning the other world. He took it for granted that Leila was "saved" and would go—perhaps had gone, even before the funeral—to the region of pearl and jasper which his mother and father and Uncle Isaiah and Becky States's little black boy inhabited. The light of his love for Leila was absorbed into the refulgence of this new experience, so palpitatingly mysterious, so gloriously awful. For a while he picked clover and buttercups and daisies, on a nameless urge, and wandered from secret to secret, as if to cull the images of Leila and rebreathe the ethereal odour of cookies. With flowers still in his hand he walked across the meadow and down the road toward Gritty Kestrell's brown house, over which clambered spreading vines of blue clematis. Gritty was not in sight, but in front of the carpenter shop, at the foot of the silvery, creaking windmill, Mr. Kestrell was planing a board in an intent manner which made Paul sure that his activity was in some way associated with Leila.

After supper Aunt Verona said illuminating things about sickness and dying, then accompanied him to his

bedroom, as she had done in the days before he was a big boy of seven. But she did not explain how such a little girl, no older than himself, could so unexpectedly stop living. Nor could Aunt Verona in any way bridge the yawning gap between Leila's existence as a girl who stood in spelling matches, who ate sandwiches and played tag, and her transfiguration into something divine, impersonal and infinitely far-away, like the people in the Bible. In bed Paul tried to picture heaven, as he had done on the occasion of a funeral procession across the river. Suddenly he was confronted with the thought that French-Canadians went to the same heaven as Leila, for Mr. Silva maintained that even Catholics went there when they were sincerely good. He wondered if God spoke French to them, or if He had some arrangement like Aunt Verona's, speaking different languages on different days. Perhaps everybody in heaven had to learn English. Very likely, for the Bible was in English. He fell asleep at last, and next day Aunt Verona gave him ten cents to take to Miss Ranston as his contribution towards the wreath which the school was to present. The flowers he had picked in the meadow were still lying on his window sill. Without knowing why he did so, he emptied the treasures out of his cracked lacquer box, placed the flowers in it, gently closed the lid and locked it, then took it to the bureau and placed it far back in the corner of an empty drawer.

On the day of the funeral a half-holiday was declared, an event which exalted the otherwise undistinguished little Leila upon a plane with the Prime Minister. Walter Dreer lowered the flag, and all the children marched to the cemetery. On the way up the long hill, Bean-Oh, who since the distant occasion when Paul had nearly blinded him had been particularly amicable, confided that Leila had perished of a simultaneous indulgence in milk and cucumbers. Gritty Kestrell denied this and swore it was

bad drains. Paul could only shrink, and marvel. As though in a trance he still saw a waxen face surrounded by lilies; still felt the tightness of chest and the nameless awe; and with a terrible, child's accuracy of perception he retained the impression of freckles—five or six—brown, brown, brown, left stranded on a tiny white nose by the ebbing of life.

In those days he was an ardent Christian; a defender of the faith. He dwelt in Abram's bosom; he went nightly "to Jesus"; he won Sunday-school "mottoes" and celluloid buttons; he lived through the week in the ecstatic anticipation of the Sabbath; he believed in and communed with the heavenly hosts. And that waxen face, incongruously befreckled, hovered over him night and day, being especially present when he was in the attic thieving lumps of sugar from the box which had been sent to Aunt Verona in return for Sunlight Soap wrappers, or when he was pouring purloined milk into the batter of Gritty's mud-cakes. How often, before doing perfectly legitimate things—things a little boy *must* do every day—did he hesitate in painful embarrassment at the thought of a little girl angel looking on!

5

Romantic love for Leila had been so completely diffused in the wonderment which Paul continued to experience after she had been taken up to God, that it ceased to exist as a separate emotion, and gradually he made the discovery that girls bored him. He decided that when he grew up he would marry Miss Todd, and thus dismissed the whole issue of sex from his mind—always with an exception in favour of Gritty Kestrell, who was a tomboy. Gritty was two months older than himself and could climb trees and skate figure eights and run races with any boy in Hale's Turning. She had the added advantages of being able to do up sore fingers and hold her own with

girls, to outwit or champion them as the eternal ends of justice might decree. Gritty could umpire a boy's lacrosse match, or substitute if any member of either team were disabled. She scorned handicaps. She hadn't much patience with dolls, and tore off the wig of Myrtle Wilcove's doll from Halifax in order that its attack of scarlet fever should seem more realistic. But, overwhelmed by Myrtle's even more realistic grief, Gritty had promptly readjusted the wig with glue "swiped" from her father's workshop. When it came to sailing boats, Gritty would never learn how to trim the sails and point the rudder to the requirements of the breeze; but, if your boat got stuck in the reeds of the marsh pond, nobody was more resourceful than she in getting it back for you, and she would wade in up to her middle at a pinch. She was the only girl who had ever "shinned up" to the top of the school flagpole. Once she had eaten a grasshopper on a dare, and next day had blackened Bob Meddar's eye for calling her "Bugs."

As a matter of fact, boys also, except in the case of a very few individuals, bored Paul. Among them he was never quite free from the dread that he was out of the picture, that the slightest expression of his really-truly opinion, as distinct from a sort of feigned community opinion, would at once let him in for a repetition of the hostile manifestation that had ended so disastrously on his second day of school. Indeed, the umbrella exploit had been re-enacted many times in terms of mordant words.

Before his ninth birthday he had discovered himself out of step with boys who did not live in a bare, mysterious house with an eccentric aunt. Privately he endured tortures of doubt at his own unclassifiability, and the pain was made more poignant by a conviction that he, and certainly Aunt Verona, were for some inexplicable reason more entitled to deference than the Dreers and

Wilcoves, for all their frosted cakes and rubber-tyred carriages. There was scant balm in the knowledge that Aunt Verona had the finest piano in the province, for no one came to see it, and unless the windows were open and you played *fortissimo* it couldn't be heard from the street. Moreover, there was something absurd about his clothes. In summer-time the blouses which Aunt Verona made for him were considered girlish, and in winter-time his mittens and cap were too obviously hand-knitted. If he repeated stories which he had read in Aunt Verona's books—*Oliver Twist* and *Kenilworth* and *Paul et Virginie*—he was rated as “stuck-up.” If he recited fables like “*Un mal qui répand la terreur*” or sang ditties like “*Es klappert die Mühle,*” he was accused of showing off.

On the other hand if he merely remained on the edge of the circle trying to enter into the spirit of a discussion or a game, his self-consciousness condemned him to a subsidiary function. He merely held things, while others performed feats. Although he might efface himself for a time, his nature was such that he preferred solitude to being a nonentity. In his own yard he was more despotic. But Mark Laval and Walter Dreer and Gritty Kestrell were the only playmates who ever came to his yard, and of these only Mark Laval, the humblest, could be counted on to remain when more exciting games were elsewhere afoot.

To avoid mockery he tried concealing his eccentricities, but that involved a cultivation of false enthusiasms from which his nature recoiled more inexorably than it shrank from ridicule. Often enough he faithfully chased a ball or a puck in the hope that by so doing he might win from his playmates a reciprocal wisp of goodwill and understanding regarding his mental games—the images and ideas which his mind kept pursuing night and day. But whenever he invited others to share his images he was met with incomprehension or jeers. Only Mark and Walter

showed an interest in his ideas, and the latter had a way of steering them into dubious channels.

Meanwhile Paul was continually being put off the field for "fumbling the ball" or lack of team sense. His most familiar sensation came to be that of yearning, followed by retaliatory moods given over to the building of a wall of indifference, moods coloured by music and stories. Loneliness, fear, doubt were his familiars, and his confidante was an aunt who, if one were not infinitely tactful, would glide away and sit for hours looking out of the window at nothing. More and more he resorted to silence, and, where necessary—as in the case of clothes—defiance of public opinion, but there was a heavy mental and emotional price to pay for silence and defiance, and his shoulders were never free of the burden of anomaly. This gave a tentative quality even to his most spontaneous smiles and made him inordinately diffident.

One of the few beings with whom there was no need for play-acting was the sympathetic old Portuguese, and, in the twilight of summer evenings when Paul went off to the pasture to help drive home the cow from which Mr. Silva derived part of his small income, there was a blessed sense of security in the companionship. He had not been able to tell Mr. Silva about Leila, for there were no words for his feeling, but he had told him about the afternoon when he and Wilfrid Fraser had gone with empty tomato tins and an axe into the summer woods to hunt for maple sugar and by force of talking about the possibility of a bull appearing on the scene had turned and run for their lives, though there wasn't a bull within a mile. Mr. Silva had gently explained that maple sugar could be drawn only in the first months of the year when the snow was still on the ground. Anyone else would have mocked him for being so ignorant and timid.

Mr. Silva had once been carpenter on a ship of which Paul's father had been captain, and could tell priceless

tales of his father's exploits. For Mr. Silva as well as for the boy, Captain Andrew Minas was a demigod.

There were long periods during which Paul yearned to be friendly with boys who knew how to make capital of his affection. And, although he learned to discriminate, he couldn't resist overtures. Those boys got his tops and marbles at scandalous bargains. But there was a definite limit to Paul's compliance and their knowledge of that fact created a margin of deference, even while they chafed under an authoritativeness they couldn't analyze. When the limit was exceeded Paul resorted to the umbrella expedient. How many times did he allow his feelings to be buffeted until, wounded to the quick by a heedless remark, he turned and pierced his victim with sharp words aimed at his betrayer's most secret weakness! An accomplishment that caused the victim momentary pain, dying away into vague spite, and Paul prolonged tortures of penitence.

His most reliable friend was Mark Laval, who was tabooed by most of the others. If Paul was freakish, he at least toed the mark in respect of manners and clean handkerchiefs, but his friend, two years older, was a ragamuffin with a shock of dusty hair, a great toothy mouth in an ugly face, and only a dog-like fidelity to commend him. Although Paul had always been conscious of Mark Laval as a sympathetic figure in his background, their friendship dated from a certain afternoon in his tenth year, when, on getting up from the piano he saw Mark seated under the cherry tree, chewing grass-stalks and dreaming. Strangely elated, Paul stole back to play his showiest solo, after which, on finding Mark in the same pensive attitude, he opened the door as casually as though he knew nothing of the other's presence.

Mark ceased pulling at the grass and looked up bashfully. As a means of breaking the ice, Paul slid down

the rounded surface of the wall at the side of the door-step.

“Seen *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*?” Mark asked.

Paul had no idea what *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was, and Mark explained that he had walked nine miles to see it performed in Dominion Hall at Bridgetown. He had paid ten cents for a seat. A man had given him the dime for carrying a bag.

Paul’s Sunday-school teacher had impressed upon him the evil of theatres, her clinching argument being that a former President of the United States had been shot in one! He maintained a patronizing silence.

“I could show you what it’s like, with little Eva and Legree and the bloodhounds,” Mark offered, “if I had a pencil and some paper.”

Paul glanced doubtfully at Mark’s muddy boots, but in the end invited him to go round to the back porch, where he would meet him with pencils and paper and wax crayons, and they suddenly dashed off.

On the back porch Mark showed Paul what little Eva “was like.” He also showed him what Julius Cæsar was like, and Boadicea and Napoleon and the boy on the burning deck. He gave them all Roman noses and crimson-lake lips, and portrayed them “eyes-right,” with turrets and ramparts in the background. But they were very real to Paul by dint of their creator’s intense, life-endowing belief in them, just as Paul’s music had been very real to Mark Laval for a similar reason. On the strength of that common interest Paul suddenly realized that Mark was his friend. Simultaneously he was penetrated with a sense of the French boy’s forlornness.

Mark had a father who came down from the lumber camps for whisky and vowed to kick all the nonsense out of his son. He was at school only because the authorities insisted on it. As soon as the law allowed, Mark’s father planned to take him into the woods. With this destiny

before his eyes, Mark clung to the few bright opportunities that remained. Paul thought of his friend as a boy doomed to look at life through a window, a wild boy infinitely crude, yet infinitely gentle, his eyes reflecting passionate, wistful, vain enthusiasms.

Looking back on that friendship Paul was to recognize in Mark Laval the first person who set for him an example of the vigorous individuality of thought and expression that is unaware of what other people may be thinking and saying; his own furtive defiance seemed ignoble by contrast. With a Philistinism hard to conquer, he contemplated Mark's ragged clothes and thought of his squalid home, then, in an access of contrition, invited Mark to stay to tea. Aunt Verona made no objection, and Mark, after dutifully scraping his boots, found himself confronted by a mysterious array of china while his host mumbled a mysterious incantation ending in "Amen." He was abashed by his own mishandling of the spoons, yet so eager not to offend Paul and Aunt Verona that he seemed to be apologizing to them for the daintiness of Aunt Verona's taste, and she talked rather brightly to put him at his ease. When he had gone, Paul, for the first time in years, ventured to hug Aunt Verona without invitation.

Next morning, as he was leaving the house, he found on the doorstep a smudged, paper-bound copy of *Ruy Blas*. In the margins were sketches and annotations. On one page he read: "This ought to be sung." And Paul's mind danced for glee at the discovery that there were lyrics in the world which might be set to music. He had thought of songs as having always existed in an inextricable alliance with their music, like hymns. Trust old Mark to open his eyes!

On the title-page was this inscription: "For you to read and keep Paul. I'll never forget yestiddy." For a second Paul shrank. The Puritanism of countless for-

bears was responsible for a slight stiffening of spine at this friendly demonstration. His pendantism was revolted by the fault in spelling. Nevertheless he skipped off to school with more kindness in his heart than ever before.

6

His alternative chum of this period was a boy of a conventionalized stamp. Walter Dreer's easy assurance reflected a definite social status which was substantiated by his father's victories at the local polls, and by the frosted walnut cakes that topped off his mother's Sunday-evening suppers. Everything about Walter was comfortably and infallibly bourgeois but his private thoughts, and these, as Paul later came to realize, verged on the lurid. Walter's prurience was an undercurrent against which Paul instinctively swam, cultivating Walter for his amiable laughter at one's whims and fancies, for his resourcefulness, his flexibility, his boundless information, and (since Paul was so generally isolated) for his popularity, which was in Paul's eyes a supreme distinction. Walter, *mirabile dictu*, approved of him, or seemed to, whereas he had always expected conventional people to disapprove or at the most approve with definite reservations. Above all, Walter constituted him the privileged audience for his best capers cut, as it were, for Paul's private amusement and in confident anticipation of Paul's rapturous applause—Walter, who had the whole village to choose from! Paul worshipped him.

Walter's cardinal deficiency was that he snubbed Mark Laval. Though Paul felt this to be unjust, he couldn't help being influenced by Walter's contemptuous opinion, and was guilty of treating Mark with less generosity than his instinct prompted. Moreover, in order to win Walter's fuller approval, he was at some pains to conceal his own

more glaring oddities, lest Walter might one day dismiss him too as a "freak."

For a year or two this comradeship was very close, being fostered by the fact that Walter, unlike Mark Laval, attended Paul's Sunday-school, which in a clanish community constituted an alliance. Then came a dark winter's day when Paul found Walter deep in the confidence of an enemy, John Ashmill, the son of Dave Ashmill who owned forests and gypsum mines, John Ashmill who had given Paul the nickname of "Polly" and always sang out, "Polly want a cracker?" when he hove into view. Walter was aware of the feud, and Paul was obliged to conclude that his chum was cultivating his enemy for the sake of the latter's liberal allowance and his superior sleds and skates.

It was a Saturday morning, a school holiday, and Paul had set off to find Walter, when he encountered him in company with his new playmate, a ribald despot with whom Paul supposed it was his duty to "mix," but on account of whose physical sense of humour he was carrying a scar on his temple, as well as more dire wounds that couldn't be seen. Paul greeted them without stopping, walking briskly towards nowhere. A solitary day lay before him, for Mark Laval had been taken off to the woods by his father, and Gritty was, after all, only half boy, and he had forsworn girls.

Then, at the corner, a malicious snowball burst upon his cap and penetrated freezingly into a corner of a stubborn young heart.

For six months after that he refused to speak to Walter Dreer, though they continued to meet in the street, and to sit in the same classroom. It was a bitterly unhappy winter and he suffered for the sake of a principle which he secretly felt to be distorted. He was *flattering* and *discording*. Instinct told him that an uncompromising attitude always failed to prove itself justified. Yet he was

powerless in the grip of his stubbornness. Often he thought of confiding in Aunt Verona but another precocious instinct warned him that Aunt Verona herself was a victim of some similar fate. At night he wrestled long hours with his angel rehearsing conciliatory speeches, yet day after day he passed Walter without a sign, and became almost mechanically oblivious of his friend's existence, all the while mourning his loss.

During the first days of spring, in Paul's eleventh year, Dr. Wilcove took him for a drive to Bridgetown, where he had to attend a patient. This was an ecstatic occasion. Aunt Verona gave him twenty-five cents to buy whatever he chose and Dr. Wilcove added a "quarter" for candy. Fifty cents! Gee-rusalem! It was more than he had ever had to spend, even on Firsts of July. While Dr. Wilcove paid his call, Paul wandered through the river town inspecting the shops, and finally selected a green top, a dozen striped glass marbles, and a "real agate" shooter. With the candy quarter he bought a mouth-organ and a "souvenir" pen-wiper to present to Aunt Verona, whereupon Dr. Wilcove himself went into another shop and returned with a bag of sweets, which capped the glories of the expedition.

The return drive, past purple furrows and groves of shimmering green hazel, was an uninterrupted delight. The little mare knew she was homeward bound and ran cheerfully all the way. Dr. Wilcove let Paul hold the reins, and told him stories about the deserted farmhouses on his route, thrilling him when he pointed out the house in which his mother and Aunt Verona had been born. Then Dr. Wilcove, in that incorrigible grown-up manner, shook his head sadly and remarked, "It might have been as famous a house as Sam Slick's in its way!" Paul was too diffident to ask for an explanation, and the doctor's next remark, about "throwing away a career," got mixed

up with a clucking noise destined for the ears of the little mare.

The afternoon was drenched as in a deep golden dew when they reached the brow of the hill overlooking Hale's Turning. Miss Todd's house came first into sight. Beneath it was the white Baptist church; opposite, the extensive acres of Dave Ashmill, bounded by a straggling cedar hedge. Farther on, the maples and elms and fruit trees of the village seemed to be growing in profusion out of a huge basket. The river lay beyond the roofs, mud-red, streaked with silver, broadening out toward the Basin. A wooden barque, her yards all criss-cross, rode at anchor near the mill. There were green stretches of marsh and pink mud flats too, and a shabby little train went rambling and rumbling across a trestle towards the long abandoned shipyard and rotting wharves that had been constructed by Paul's grandfather in the days when all vessels were made of wood.

As they descended the hill, with the warm sun in their faces, Paul had a strange sensation of ownership in this little village, so much more cosy and likeable than the bewildering Bridgetown for all its town hall built of stone, its brick schoolhouse, and a whole street full of shops. Bridgetown was vast and alien and unknowable, whereas Hale's Turning was almost his very own; he knew and for the moment loved every square foot of it. He knew and loved, as never before, every creature that dwelt in it. As they drove past the cedar hedge at the foot of the hill he felt he could almost have been friendly with John Ashmill, the bully who lived in such grandeur behind it. If only the little mare wouldn't trot so fast now!

Mr. Kestrell's windmill flashed in the sun. As they drove past the brown house, Paul caught a glimpse of Walter Dreer, walking along the muddy foot-path. His contentment took a more personal turn, leapt to a high

pitch. That Walter should see him driving in the doctor's rubber-tyred buggy was gratifying in the extreme. From the tail of his eye he tried to detect Walter's envy. Then they reached the big bare house, and it was time to thank Dr. Wilcove and say good-bye. Aunt Verona had rehearsed him in this final speech, and according to instructions he added, "Won't you come in, Dr. Wilcove, and have a cup of tea with us?" The doctor declined, patted him on the back in a way which made Paul suddenly wish he had a father, and drove off.

Paul lingered at the gate. He was still suffused in his sense of contentment, and his heart was beating strangely. He felt sure that Walter was walking faster now than when they had passed him. In a few seconds Walter would reach the gate. Paul pushed it, but as usual it stuck. The rusty hinges were as neglected as the garden. He gave a harder shove and dropped his bag of marbles. If he had been in a hurry he could have picked them up before Walter arrived. As it was, the shooter remained on the ground. Walter handed it to him with a curious, cajoling light in his brown eyes. The sun, shining on his eyes, gave them a resemblance to the shooter he was holding.

"Is it an agate?" he ventured, as Paul put it into the bag with the others.

Paul nodded.

"Get it in Bridgetown?"

"Yes," said Paul, and his sense of history in the making almost made him choke over the word—the first he had addressed to Walter in six months.

"Got any more?" Walter went on, swinging a jug which he was carrying to Mrs. Barker's for yeast.

"Only glassies," Paul replied.

"Let me see 'em?"

Walter praised the selection, and tried the green top, but the ground was too muddy for a successful spin.

He also ate a piece of candy, and smiled again. Paul was in the grip of emotions which made speech precarious.

"I'll play you allies after supper," Walter proposed. "For lends—not keeps."

"Got to practise. Been away all day."

"To-morrow, then."

"To-morrow's Sunday."

"We can play after Sunday-school, behind the school-house. Nobody'll see."

Paul agreed and turned toward the house. Walter called him back.

"I'm sorry I chucked that snowball," he said. His eyes and his smile were evidence that it cost him little to apologize.

Paul stiffened. "What snowball?" he inquired. He knew the dissembling was lost on Walter, but he also knew that Walter would handle his pride with tact. Walter's tact in the old days had been one of the virtues that had made their relation possible.

"That day I was playing with John," he explained.

"What difference does it make to me how much you play with John?"

"He's awful stupid," Walter pursued. "I like you best."

"Then what did you put red ink on my sandwiches for?" Paul cried, with a hint of pent-up anguish, whereupon Walter again smiled his penitence.

"See you to-morrow, eh?"

Again Paul nodded and hurried down the unkempt path toward the house. Gee-rusalem!

There was much to tell Aunt Verona about Bridgetown and the little mare, and supper in the kitchen was a heart-warming meal. Aunt Verona listened kindly and was pleased with the pen-wiper. But she was dismayed when he put down his knife and fork in the middle of supper

and broke into uncontrollable sobs. He tried to explain, but failed. Then Aunt Verona's hands jerked, her face went white, and she made a remark which, by intriguing him, restored his self-control. "Happiness is such a rare visitor," she said, "that when it comes it finds us unprepared. It's good to be able to weep."

II

I

ALTHOUGH Walter and Paul were more inseparable than ever, there was a new reserve in Paul's manner. In the bleak six months during which his pride had kept him aloof, he had strengthened his fortress. Now he peered over the wall and would not be enticed outside by anyone who had once succeeded in wounding him.

This economy of emotion, had he known it, lent a touch of the artistic to his personality, a touch which Walter had sufficient taste to appreciate. When Walter accused John Ashmill of being stupid, he had in mind John's lack of delicacy. The new Paul, more subtly sensitive than ever, faintly derisive at times, challenging, less gullible, obviously trying to discipline his own excess of gentleness, appealed to Walter's cajoling nature.

If Paul had spent the interval in learning arts of repression, Walter had not wasted his time. He had been acquiring stores of knowledge which his imagination had freely dramatized and which he was eager to display before an audience capable of appreciating fine shades. John Ashmill, among others, had put him on the track of discoveries which placed the universe in a new light. Hence at twelve Walter was in possession of all the information—and how much more!—that “a young boy ought to know.”

He had absorbed these facts gladly, but to Paul the revelation came with an unutterable sense of horror. For

years he was destined to struggle with Walter's facts before they would assume their right proportion. His lack of animal exuberance made it necessary for him to acquire an extensive new acreage of observation before the magnitude of the trees of knowledge could be dwarfed to normal. Walter was interested in facts *per se*—the more deeply dyed the better. Paul, even at the age of eleven, was interested in facts *per* the light they shed on the abiding rules of the universe. Night after night, his mind fevered with distorted images, he cursed his chum for having suggested them. For, more than any facts in his life, they seemed to fill the world with discord. Nothing had ever *flatted* as this discovery *flatted*. At first he refused to believe but there was no evading Walter's steady accumulation of proofs.

The matter was placed beyond dispute by Mark Laval. "Why, didn't you know?" the French boy commented, when Paul dared broach the subject. To Mark it was a truth as familiar as any other. His indifference had the effect of a cooling stream. If Mark, with his riotous imagination, could be so casual about the overwhelming phenomena of creation, there was surely some hope of a balance for Paul.

More jealously than ever, he guarded the margin of reserve in his companionship with Walter. For there were still dark wells in his chum's mind into which he steadfastly declined to look. He had learned new ways of keeping Walter in place. One of them was to cultivate Mark Laval. This was fair retaliation for Walter's association with John Ashmill, since Paul had agreed to drop his feud with the bully. Nothing humiliated Walter so promptly as a resort on Paul's part to French, which Mark spoke with a strong *habitant* twang. Walter understood not a word of what he enviously described as a "dirty lingo" and was brought to book by his sense of impotence, whereupon Paul's conscience troubled him at

the thought that he had yielded again to his besetting sin of showing off.

Paul's resentment of the new knowledge was at its sharpest when he attempted to reconcile it with the image of girls he knew. It made him sorry for nice girls and increased his dislike of horrid ones. He sincerely hoped Aunt Verona didn't know—though, being quite old, she might have found out by some unlucky accident. Of course all married people knew—Paul blushed and writhed as the faces of Mrs. Dreer and Mrs. Kestrell came before him.

Walter's scheme obliged every creature to submit to or indulge in nastiness, and Walter found in such a predicament a source of glee! Whereas Paul now looked at his girl acquaintances with a haunting pity, as he might watch a lamb going up the path to the butcher, Walter chortled over the prospect of their fate. Not only that, but he kept on the alert for any sign of knowledge on the part of the opposite sex, and was never happier than when he detected Miss Todd coughing over an equivocal word in the Sunday-school lesson. He was highly pleased with himself when he perceived that Mrs. Wilcove was going to have a baby. "You wait and see," he concluded, when Paul refused to take his word for it.

A few days later when Paul called at Mr. Kestrell's workshop to sharpen his knife, he caught a glimpse of Gritty and Myrtle Wilcove in the showroom. Gritty was stuffing coloured tissue-paper into her pinny and presently began to strut about the room like an actor made up for the part of Falstaff. He heard Myrtle giggle, whereupon he suddenly blushed and fled, without waiting to sharpen his knife. A wave of knowledge seemed to have passed over the village like an epidemic. Trust Gritty to catch it!

The blow drove him out into the fields behind Aunt Verona's house. The only secrets left in the whole world

seemed to be the soft green cushions of moss studded with red pins that clung to the roots of the trees. For the first time in many months he thought of Leila, and was passionately glad that she, for one, had escaped the epidemic.

2

Gradually the new knowledge ceased to be a wholly discordant interruption in the theme of life. At times there were notes in this particular movement which still seemed to *flat* hideously, just as there had been chords in certain Chopin *études* which had begun by offending his ear, but which he had learned to incorporate into a wider musical comprehension. On one occasion, when John Ashmill boasted of having done indescribable things with his cousin Hilda, who lived in Halifax and went to a dancing school, the discord had been so great that it fairly drowned the theme. But by the time, a few months later, that Walter Dreer had come with a similar tale involving Bessie Day, a girl whom Paul had always thought of as dirty and bold, the class of facts of which Walter's exploit was an example had taken its place as mere ornamentation in the pattern, and the theme of life was repeating itself triumphantly above the questionable harmonies of this latest variation. Paul had reached the point where he could make sharp distinctions between phenomena such as Mrs. Wilcove's condition and Walter Dreer's *immondices*. The one was clothed in the miraculous, a little ugly, but necessary and condonable; the other was on a par with all the things in life one ignored.

Yet Paul was still under the spell of his chum. After all, there were long periods when the lurid subject was lost to view in the interest of games and excursions in the fields, and even when it recurred Walter could provide fresh details which filled out gaps in the puzzle. Moreover, Walter had become more discreet in impart-

ing his facts, had lived down his first gloating excitement. He found it more profitable to discuss the world within the restrictions which Paul's instincts made obligatory than with the licence made possible by John Ashmill's coarseness. For coarseness implied a limitation of ideas, the calling of spades spades, the ruling out of all the interesting gradations between black and white.

Although Paul saw with relief that his theme of life could hold its own under the intricacies of the new variation, he found that the upheaval of mind resultant upon the discovery of sex had made it necessary to take a new cognizance of other phenomena which he had never thought to challenge. It was as though van-loads of furniture had arrived at the door of his mind, installation of which could be effected only after a wholesale pulling down of partitions and the discarding of outworn objects. The upheaval had awakened his critical faculty, and he found himself watching the world with a growing scepticism and unprecedented shyness. He, who had been the hero of all the school-concert tableaux, now actually quaked when he walked on the platform.

It was at this period that Miss Todd offered him the post of organist in the church, a post made vacant by the marriage and departure of Miss Ranston. The rush of surprise and elation, a new sense of importance in the community, served for a time to restore his old trustful complacency of outlook. He had also increased his practising to four hours a day, and music absorbed most of his surplus energy, physical and mental.

But under the surface, speculation and mutiny were quietly smouldering, and the fond ladies of the village who pointed to him as a model of the Christian virtues and pagan graces were far from guessing the presence in his nature of anything that would make for a conflagration. Paul himself was just sufficiently aware of his own combustibility to keep raking sods over the smoul-

dering pile. In so doing he for a while deceived even himself.

3

It was impossible to say exactly when the image of Phœbe Meddar began to be a permanent tenant of Paul's mind. In the far-off days when he and Leila were monitors together, he had, in the thoroughness of his imaginative arrangements, thought of Phœbe as a sort of sister-in-law elect. And since the day of the funeral he had always been a little more sharply conscious of Phœbe's presence in the universe than that of other girls—with the exception of Gritty, the tomboy, who of course never counted. Gritty was a fixture in the universe like himself.

It was not until five years after the funeral, when Leila's memory had faded into the substance of a dream, that Phœbe's image became insistent. And not until a certain summer day when her name was mentioned by Walter Dreer did she leap into his heart with full significance. From that day, however, her personality revealed itself to him as something wondrously sweet, something that partook of the nature of violets and pansies and roses, as fragrant and as delicate.

He had never been close enough to Phœbe to ascertain whether she smelt of coco-nut cookies. Something in his regard for her made him refrain from approaching. For one thing, she had a sister who was an angel. It was as though Phœbe were a goddess who moved in a faery haze which he must not attempt to penetrate. Her brother might pull her golden pigtails and elicit musical squeals of pain and remonstrance, and Walter Dreer might talk about her as though she were like any other pretty girl, might even crowd into her corner of the Sunday-school vestry and roll his eyes at her, but for Paul it was an awe-inspiring privilege to live in the same

world as Phœbe. He gave humble thanks that he could see her walking on the opposite side of the road or know she was in the family pew hearing the music he made for her.

Often in the summer afternoons or before falling asleep at night he would be suffused with a sense of well-being that recalled the afternoon of his drive with Dr. Wilcove. And in all such moments a vision of Phœbe Meddar came before him, a tranquil vision in ivory and gold, with eyes of gentian blue and a little tight pink smile.

Phœbe was a year younger than he, and a grade lower at school. This gave him a sense of seniority. His regard for her was at times paternal, always protective. The heavenly hosts had lost their glamour. He was beginning to be sceptical of the pearl and jasper, the pavements of gold. There was something second-rate about the glory of abandoning a Bechstein concert piano on earth for a measly harp on high. But his nature still yearned after the ineffable, yearned all the more by reason of the disintegration of his heavenly visions, and before he knew it Phœbe was a sort of living angel in an earthly paradise from which he was excluded, but of which it was his lot to catch radiant glimpses.

The only sign that his regard for Phœbe bordered on the terrestrial was a growing dislike for Walter Dreer's society. He hated Walter when he spoke of Phœbe Meddar as "darn good-looking" or wondered whether Phœbe would be "game." Gritty Kestrell, champion of truth at any price, once said right out that Phœbe was Walter's "girl." Walter acknowledged the impeachment with an easy smile, for which Paul gave him another black mark. For he knew that Phœbe disapproved of Walter. He had seen her shrink when Walter had tried by ruse to obtain her as partner at Myrtle Wilcove's birthday party. The ruse had been discovered in time and the girls had finally drawn lots for partners and were

called into a room one by one and cross-examined by the assembly, whose duty it was to establish the identity of the partners by eliciting descriptive details in three queries. Phœbe, by some miracle, had drawn the slip bearing Paul's name, as he guessed from a sudden demure glance she directed at him, and he waited with studied negligence and wild pulses.

"What colour is his hair?" inquired the first questioner in the circle, as the assembly sucked their lead pencils in anticipation of guessing the name.

"Black," Phœbe promptly replied.

"What colour are his eyes?" demanded the next.

Phœbe was lost. She had to think. "Uh—blue. I'm not sure," she finally pronounced.

Paul's eyes were black as coals, but the vicissitudes of childhood had already inured him to the pain of wounded vanity, and his adoration was proof against his goddess's carelessness in matters of observation. Besides, from her pew she saw more of the back of his head than she did of his face. He quite forgave her shortcoming when, at the close of the game, she evinced no reluctance at joining hands with him for the "Ring around the Rosy." The outstanding fact was that she had avoided Walter, and yet Walter could smile confidently when Gritty spoke of Phœbe as his girl. The world was like that.

The night before the Sunday-school picnic Walter told Paul of a rose garden which flourished in the Ashmill grounds. He proposed that they make a raid on it. "Girls like 'em," Walter said vaguely. Paul waived his scruples in the excitement of adventure, and they set forth.

"You go and get 'em," Walter suggested when they stood before the Ashmill cedar hedge. "I'll be sentinel."

This was an irregular suggestion, since Walter had proposed the expedition. But Paul made no demur, lest Walter should suspect that he dreaded the dark. Walter

whispered directions concerning a particular bush of pink tea-roses.

“Get four or five,” he instructed.

The grass was damp and the earth loose under Paul’s feet. The grounds stretched darkly away toward the orange windows of the Ashmill house, partly concealed behind black clumps of shrubbery. He crept beside the bushes, starting at vague sounds. His nerves were prepared for anything that might come bounding out at him. A dog’s bark would have been welcome, for it would have dispelled the weird silence. Walter would not have understood his fears—no other boy would have—only *he* was afraid of the dark, and no one in the world must ever suspect.

The air was heavy with a nameless blend of odours. He closed his eyes and pictured Phœbe Meddar, white and gold, blue and pink, fresh, cool and mysterious. The tea-roses were in the farthest corner. Dewdrops ran down his sleeve as he cut the stems. Thorns pricked his wrists. One, two, three, four, and a lovely bud. It seemed a pity, but there were hundreds left. He stole back and presented his flowers in timorous triumph. Walter concealed them under his coat and they regained the road.

Before Walter’s gate they made an arrangement to meet early in the morning, then said good night.

“I’d like to have the bud,” Paul said, as Walter closed the gate.

Walter detached the bud from the bouquet and Paul ran home.

In the morning Walter failed to appear at the rendezvous and Mrs. Dreer said he had already gone to the post office, where the waggons were to start. With the rose-bud and a picnic basket in his hand, Paul hurried to the post office. Among the boys and girls already assembled he detected the form of Phœbe Meddar. She

stood there with the pale morning light gilding her pig-tails. Her head was bare, for Gritty Kestrell was trying on Phœbe's new leghorn hat trimmed with heliotrope ribbon. Gritty's passion for dressing up was one of the few weaknesses that betrayed her sex. Ever since she had seen *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she had shown a tendency to strut about as Topsy or Aunt Ophelia. She could also impersonate Miss Todd singing her solos, and was particularly successful as Pokey Ned, the village idiot.

Walter was playing marbles with Bob Meddar and Skinny Wiggins. Paul was about to hurry forward with his rosebud and slip it into Phœbe's hand while the others were watching Gritty's antics, when Phœbe leaned down toward her basket and picked up a bouquet that was resting on it—a bouquet of four tea-roses—and buried her nose in it.

Paul swung on his heel.

Aunt Verona was astonished to see him. She knew how eagerly he had been looking forward to the trip to Slate Beach and hoarding pennies for ice-cream.

"I'm not going," he said, and Aunt Verona took the basket without further inquiry.

"I'll tell you what," she proposed. "Let's you and I have a picnic all by ourselves in the field by the brook. I'll make some doughnut men and animals."

He acquiesced with as much enthusiasm as he could muster, for he realized that Aunt Verona, in offering to go as far as the field, was making an unprecedented concession to comfort him, and he felt he ought to support her effort. But in the playroom, with the door shut, he leaned forward on the keyboard of the big piano and wept.

Although Paul continued on friendly terms with Walter Dreer, he contrived to see less of him, and only his dis-

trust of his own stubbornness saved him from a repetition of the old wordless estrangement. During the remainder of the summer vacation he divided his time between music and reading. His progress in the former was becoming rapid as his hands grew broader, and the excitement of being able to play Chopin *scherzos*, which Aunt Verona assured him nobody in Hale's Turning and very few people even in Halifax could have played, made him willing to practise five or six hours a day. In consideration of this extra application he was relieved of all household tasks, and even abandoned Mr. Silva's cow.

Aunt Verona had had Mr. Silva bring down a crate of books from the attic to swell the list in the playroom. There were novels and collections of poetry in German and French and English, text-books on harmony, treatises in philosophy, books of memoirs—a stimulating miscellany. On the title-page of a beautifully bound volume entitled *Confessions d'un Vieux Musicien*, there was an inscription which read: "*A la gracieuse Verona Windell, souvenir amical et affectueux de l'auteur, qui n'oubliera jamais ces soirées de Munich et de Vienne. A l'admirable artiste tout bonheur et tout succès!*"

Here was a field rich in possibilities. Yet he knew that a direct question would merely have the effect of vexing Aunt Verona or driving her into one of her brooding reveries. It was thrilling to learn that Aunt Verona had known a musician who had written a book, thrilling to know that she had been a person of consequence in Munich and Vienna, thrilling to know that she had been thought of as an admirable artist. He knew that Aunt Verona could play superbly, though he had never heard her, except for occasional phrases when she was teaching him how to produce certain effects. It was all intriguing and heart-warming, and with glowing eyes he plunged into the volume, taking care to read it in the play-

room so that Aunt Verona's attention should not be attracted to the inscription on the title-page. It might arouse some disagreeable memory, and he wished to avoid that, for she had been unnaturally depressed for several weeks.

It was a dull book, except for the parts in which the author spoke of composing symphonies and travelling over Europe to conduct them. There were grand pages relating his triumphs, and touching accounts of his disappointments and the treachery of his colleagues.

Then there came a page of crashing, glittering splendour—a page that set Paul's heart beating and wrapped his immediate world in a magic scarf. For he read: "It was at this selfsame concert that the public of Vienna first heard the young Canadian pianist, Mlle. Verona Windell, who performed the Schumann concerto in a manner that aroused the highest pitch of interest and curiosity. This artist undoubtedly has a brilliant future. As for my own concertos, not even Clara Schumann has played them with a finer sense of proportion and a more appealing charm. Mlle. Windell is of that rare company of musicians who abandon themselves to the composition in hand, without trickery, without ceremony, so that it becomes for the moment the channel for the deepest reservoirs of feeling of which the human organism is capable. Such artists should never be constrained to interpret petty music. Their energies need to be conserved for the great works."

With the open book in his hand and his eyes as widely open as the pages, Paul passed down the playroom into the kitchen. It was all very well to repress one's wonderment about Aunt Verona on ordinary occasions, but this —!

Aunt Verona paused in the act of wringing out a dish-cloth, and her face tightened as she saw the eager inquiry in Paul's eyes.

“What have you there?” she asked, coming to meet him and reaching for the book with wet hands. She glanced at the page, pressed her lips together, snapped the covers to, and placed the volume on the table.

“Aunt Verona—” Paul commenced tentatively, and waited.

“That’s a silly book, child,” she said, trying to keep a harsh note out of her voice. “I’d rather you didn’t read it . . . Run out and play a while before the sun goes down.”

Reluctantly, Paul left the room, giving an apprehensive glance over his shoulder at the crate on the floor with its scores of books in disorderly array. His apprehension clung to him out of doors, and he sat on a chopping block by the woodshed, wondering and wondering.

A few moments later his attention was caught by the changed colour and increased volume of smoke issuing from the chimney. He ran back and peeked into the kitchen. Aunt Verona had five or six books in her apron and was stuffing pages and bindings into the stove with the poker. She was muttering to herself, so engrossed in destruction that she failed to observe the intruder.

When the last volume in her apron was disposed of, she replaced the kettle over the flames, and Paul stole away to the woodyard, frightened, outraged, and sad. Life had gone terribly off-key again, and this time it was Aunt Verona who had deliberately played a false chord in her own theme. He was sure that many precious clues had been consumed in the flames, many an enchanting tale irrevocably pressed back by Aunt Verona’s drawn lips. It was small consolation that thirty or forty books had been spared. None of them, he felt, would breathe any hint of a more personal significance than ordinary books; their title-pages would be without penned inscriptions.

One volume from the crate he had brought away in

his pocket, a tiny German book with small print and a miniature wall-paper pattern inside its flexible covers. It was called *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. He found a comfortable seat on the pile of cord-wood and began to read.

5

Paul's hopeless wonderment regarding Aunt Verona added to the weight of hopeless love for Phœbe Meddar and the weight of Walter's betrayal pressed heavily on his mind. Fortunately his long hours at the piano and organ, the choir rehearsals at Miss Todd's, and his literary treasure-trove gave him the opportunity of merging his perplexities in an endless stream of fancy. Music was the most satisfactory outlet. He could even imagine, for instance, that he was Mlle. Verona Windell, and that the chairs and engravings in the playroom were the rapt and gaping citizens of Vienna. A yellow silk handkerchief tied round his head unaccountably heightened the illusion.

Or, when that rôle palled, he could imagine he was a grown-up Monsieur Minas, playing sonatas which he had made out of his own head, and that his audience was Mlle. Phœbe Meddar, a charming young lady from Canada whose pale gold hair and heliotrope gowns were the admiration of swarthy foreigners. At the end of the piece, when Mlle. Meddar had expressed her approval and averted her violet-blue eyes, he would lean forward and whisper, "Ah, my dear Mademoiselle Meddar, I am going to write a beautiful book, and on the front page I will write an inscription to you. Never shall I forget our evenings together in Munich and Vienna."

And Mlle. Meddar would reply, "Oh, Monsieur Minas, *will* you?"

With the reopening of school in September, Mark Laval made his reappearance. He had shot up and

spread out, and in his coating of tan looked like some great shaggy dog. His eyes Paul observed for the first time—with a sudden realization of the oversight, he smiled subtly at his recent condemnation of Phœbe's carelessness with respect to his own eyes. One of the books in Aunt Verona's box had been called *Les Fleurs du Mal*, a series of poems for the most part incomprehensible. In one poem about a cat, he had been struck by the description of the animal's eyes—"a mixture of metal and agate." That was the quality of Mark Laval's eyes. They magnetized your gaze and then, like a clairvoyant's crystal, held it in focus. But unlike the eyes of Baudelaire's cat, Mark's eyes were kind and loyal, even when his words were unyielding.

Coming into Paul's lonely and abstracted mood, Mark was doubly welcome. He walked home with Paul after the first morning at school, which had been devoted to an announcement of the year's programme of studies. Mark, despite his bare thirteen years, was almost grown-up, and in his presence Paul felt small, yet singularly secure, as secure as he had felt with Mr. Silva. The summer in camp had increased the older boy's awkwardness, without diminishing his intensity. A certain moodiness, however, like a dark cloud, had settled over him, making Paul feel his forlornness more acutely than ever. It was to be Mark's last year at school, and already he foretasted the exclusion which withdrawal from his schoolmates must entail for him. He was like a strong swimmer setting out towards the open sea knowing the waters must ultimately close over his head.

With a blunt thumb and a blunt forefinger Mark turned the pages of a characteristically grubby copy of *Evangeline* and read aloud from it. His voice and his belief in the poetry had the effect of transforming a sing-song tale into a glowing apotheosis of sentiment. At school Paul had taken slight interest in the tame Acadian

lovers who had lived at Grand-Pré, only a few miles distant from Hale's Turning, but under the spell of Mark's enthusiasm the old Norman days came to life and reminded him of his hereditary interest in their fate.

"Has a funny effect on you, poetry," Mark ventured, when the book had been closed and they were seated under the cherry tree in Aunt Verona's orchard. "Makes you feel sort of—more alive but all weak and runny too."

"And sad," added Paul.

"But nice sad—not gloomy."

"No, not gloomy. It's like music, kind of. Makes you feel serious but excited—and ready for something to happen . . . which usually doesn't," he added with precocious cynicism.

"Like cryin' because you're happy, the way women do."

"Men too, sometimes."

"I never seen a man cry."

"Werther did—often."

"Who's he?"

"In a German book. He killed himself at the end."

"You stay in Purgatory if you do that."

"Oh, pooh! That's what the priests say."

"Well, they know."

"You think they do, you mean. There's another thing I read, in a French book, that said something about priests in poetry. I remembered to tell you. It said:

*"Les prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple pense,
Notre crédulité fait toute leur science."*

"Must a been a book of sin."

"Oh, you say that because you're narrow-minded. All Catholics are narrow-minded."

"Are they! What about you? You're narrow-

mindful for runnin' down Catholics. You think you're right about everything just because you're rich."

Paul was as snobbish as most boys of eleven, but he was also truthful. John Ashmill's father was rich, but to think of himself as rich was the height of absurdity.

"I am not," he contradicted.

"Yes you are," Mark insisted. "You own this house and a ship and the wharf and lots of things."

Paul laughed at his friend's ignorance. "My father did, but he's been dead ten years. He died at sea with yellow fever."

"Sure, and he left everything to your mother. When she died she left everything to you. There wasn't nobody else. It's all yours now."

"It is not." Paul had nothing to go by but a sense of the grotesqueness of his owning anything so big and useless. "He left me the gold watch that the queen gave him, but I'm not to have it till I can play the Liszt sonata."

"You ask Miss Windell."

Paul considered this. It would do no harm to ask Aunt Verona, and he certainly meant to. But he preferred to wait, for in the event of her saying yes he would lose the argument, which would be humiliating.

"I have to practise now," he finally announced.

Mark's appreciation of his music was the corner-stone of their friendship, and his eyes now dwelt on Paul in a sort of wistful envy, free from any taint of grudge.

"Can I stay here and listen?" he asked.

Paul melted. He could concede even an argument to such an eager friend. "Sure you can," he said, "if you want to."

"Play the Impromptu," Mark coaxed.

"The Schubert in A-flat?" Paul inquired. He couldn't resist this little parade of specialized lore.

"Yes—all runny."

"Oh, it's easy," Paul deprecated. "I know dozens of things harder than that."

"I like it," Mark insisted. "Play it—go on."

"It's rather monotonous—too much repeating."

He closed the door behind him with an elation he wouldn't have betrayed to Mark for worlds, and proceeded to the kitchen sink to wash his hands. Aunt Verona was mending stockings.

"Aunt Verona, Mark Laval says I own a ship and a shipyard. I don't, do I?"

She waited a moment, then replied:

"Don't let people put notions into your head. Here are some cookies before you practise."

Paul blushed. He was thinking of the notions Walter had put into his head.

At the open window of the playroom he tossed a cookie out to his friend, who was pulling at the grass. "You're wrong, Mark," he whispered, "about the ships and things. I asked my aunt."

Mark merely shook his head in indulgent contradiction, accommodating the cookie in two bites.

"Play the Impromptu," he returned.

6

The opening of the crate of books had consequences more far-reaching than Paul could have foreseen. From the day when Aunt Verona had consigned the souvenir volumes to the fire, the disconcerting blank moods had gained a new ascendancy. With increasing frequency and at the most unexpected moments she repaired to the playroom to stare unseeingly through the window. She confused the days, too, and spoke German oftener than French. Occasionally she disappeared upstairs and Paul, listening breathlessly, could hear the faint rumbling of drawers, the shutting down of boxes, the crunching of

keys in rusty locks. But Aunt Verona collected texts with the same meaningless precision, and there were now two drawers overflowing with the bescribbled scraps of paper.

As the winter advanced a new habit was formed. Aunt Verona took to writing at a furious rate on sheets of foolscap. At times her ideas lagged and she would sit staring at the paper in an abstraction which was proof against even the smell of burning bread. Paul found himself saddled with a new responsibility regarding the proper running of the small *ménage*. When Aunt Verona's ideas failed her, she would end by locking away the sheets of foolscap in the dresser. Perhaps five minutes later, as she was carrying a kettle from stove to sink, the recalcitrant ideas would come to her, whereupon she would abandon the task in hand, bring out the foolscap, and commence scribbling.

One evening after supper, when she had left her seat at the kitchen table to consult a dictionary in the play-room, Paul looked up from his arithmetic exercise and glanced at the sentences on her page. He succeeded in reading this:

“But Heinrich, though he could feel that one was an artist in every fibre, would never have understood how one might be so thoroughly and abysmally an artist as to be unable to succeed in art, once one's faith in one's higher ego were jeopardized. For him the fulfilment of an artistic aim would be gaged by public proclamation that the aim had been fulfilled, by public recognition of mere dexterity, or whatever. For the motto ‘To thine own self be true’ he would have substituted ‘To the world's preconception of you, be true.’ Art for him was a compromise between the individual and the community, just as his status was a compromise between the monarchical whip-hand and the grovelling of the masses, their willing or unwilling allegiance to his numbskull sire.

In a sense his myopia was less ridiculous than my idealism. He at any rate was under no illusions as to his inherent princeliness, whereas I most whole-souledly was. And my belief in his inherent princeliness, my devout, mad, piteous belief in it superseded and gradually strangled my belief in my singleness of purpose, in my—God save the mark—genius. He considered himself a prince because he was the son, the grandson, the great-grandson, the nephew, the cousin of kings, and for no other reason. For me he would have been a prince had I met him mounting guard at the palace gates instead of mingling with guests of State. Whereas had I come to him unheralded, with nothing but my belief in myself to support whatever grace God had given me and a French dressmaker had accentuated, who knows——”

Aunt Verona's step cut short the surreptitious perusal, and Paul glued his eyes on his task. The ciphers swam, and the exercise became abracadabra. He wondered and wondered, until the mystery and the glamour emanating from the end of Aunt Verona's stubby pencil became a positive pain. His cheeks were flushed and his head ached. On the blurred page of his arithmetic, in the softly yellow circle of light made by the kerosene lamp, he saw a youthful version of Aunt Verona gowned in “white samite, mystic, wonderful,” curtsying to a blonde youth in gold braid, with ribbons and medals on his breast and a gleaming sword at his side. He saw her pale and pretty, with the faint, serious smile modifying the austerity of her face, sitting at a long piano, while in curved ranks, beyond shiny spaces of floor, under millions of glittering prisms, flanked by mirrors and marble columns, in a warm flood of perfume, potentates and bejewelled ladies listened spellbound to the fabulous strains of the Liszt sonata. He saw the arms fall away from the piano, he saw the young artist lift a red rose from the lid and carry it to her lips, he heard complimentary mur-

murs and the patter of white gloves, he saw the blonde prince advancing across the shiny space——

Suddenly he broke the spell and cast a furtive glance toward the end of the table. There was Aunt Verona, quite old-looking, over forty, her dark eyes burning, her face drained of colour, her lips tightly pressed together, her grey-streaked hair parted in a manner that recalled the picture of the lady who had written *Daniel Deronda*, her figure muffled in a green woollen dressing-jacket, her cramped, cold, scarred, veined, nervous, bony fingers racing across the page.

He got up from his seat and went to throw himself down on a sofa in the dark playroom. His departure was unnoticed. Life was vast and terrifying: a great stormy adventure illuminated by brief flashes which only accentuated the blackness. One would go on groping, always groping, for ever and ever, alone. An endless fugue that got harder and harder to play. One could not hope even to trace the line of the theme, much less master the intricacies of subsidiary voices.

To-night he knew he would have to keep his back pressed against the wall all the way up the dark stairs.

7

When Aunt Verona was not given over to the fever of writing, she moved about in a cloud, working mechanically, or staring through the playroom window at nothing. In bewildering sallies she emerged from her abstraction and returned to the old routine, making hot scones, mending stockings and mittens, sweeping, polishing, dusting, asking questions, and presiding over the early-morning music lesson. These intervals, however, found Paul unresponsive, for he had adapted his manner to Aunt Verona's growing impersonality and found it difficult to step out of his shell without warning.

Thrown on his own resources, he had become pre-co-

ciously self-sufficing, and as his mind became more and more stocked with images from books—books like *Candide*, *Vanity Fair*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *Adam Bede*, *Hypatia*, *The Light of Asia*, *Knight Errant*, *The First Violin*, *Ben Hur*—he found that life was changing from a fixed thing, as it appeared on the afternoon when he had driven into Hale's Turning with Dr. Wilcove, into a shifting drama, with ever new characters and settings. Even customs and institutions which he had always thought of as irreproachable, and in their nature immutable, he found were arbitrary. Everything under the sun, he made out, was challengeable.

At first this truth made him hold to his surroundings to see if he was steady. But as his critical faculty spread tentative wings a little thrill went through him, and he surmised that life was going to consist in an endless flitting, a long quest for the honey of truth, broken by intervals of recreation in the choicest flower-beds.

As a small child he had felt that all the security and permanence of life were harboured within Aunt Verona's kitchen and his playroom and bedroom. Now the gaunt old house was becoming an abode of ghostly ideas, and he saw it as a waning phase in the progress of his life, a single variation of the big theme, while a richer security, the culminating variations were to be sought outside this house, outside this village, beyond the farthest horizon. The value of life would be great or small in the measure that one's faring forth in search of its treasures were bold or timid. In exalted moments, moments when the truths buried in books came out of their graves to dazzle him with an astral radiance, he promised himself that he would fly carefully, but high and far. And his smouldering scepticism, the concealed sparks that ever gnawed at the roots of his daily habits, gave signs of bursting through in flame. So far the fire was known only to

himself, and he still made a point of raking dead leaves over the scorched roots. He was too conscious of his weakness to risk provoking opposition as yet, but the day would come—of that he was confident—and he went back to his books and solitary dialogues with renewed concentration.

The only outward sign of a growing self-reliance was a new indifference to companionship of the only sort available. Even his regard for Phœbe Meddar became a half symbolic sentiment which played the rôle of a kindly moon as contrasted with the burnished sun of his mental activity. He could dispense with the society of boys who had had little to offer in return for the painstaking efforts he had made to get on a footing with them. He no longer hovered on the edge of the circle. He drew a circle of his own, somewhat superciliously, and with a tinge of bitterness noticed that no one but Mark Laval sought the privilege of stepping inside its circumference—Mark whose value was largely discounted, even while it was enhanced, by his uncritical devotion. Not even Mark could reach the centre of the circle, and Paul often voluntarily stepped over the line, carrying his best ideas into a territory more accessible to his uncouth friend. In this act he was making a sincere attempt to live down an accusation of Mark's which he had at first resented; his wider reading had proved to him not only that he *had* been narrow-minded, as Mark had alleged, but that the gaining of the whole world was positively contingent upon his becoming broad-minded. He felt like a mole, burrowing steadily towards the light, yet still embedded in deep strata of inherited prejudice. His only tools were his critical claws, and he dug the more fiercely to sharpen them.

There had been some talk of his entering a Baptist preparatory school in Wolfville. At first he had favoured the project, welcoming the breath of adventure implied

in a change of scene and neighbours. On reflection it occurred to him that Wolfville must be only a sort of glorified Hale's Turning, that the very safety and regularity implied in Dr. Wilcove's partisan approval of the school in question augured ill for one's chances of finding therein companions akin to the stimulating people in books. Dr. Wilcove was kind but Dr. Wilcove was an usher and dearly loved that moment when it was time to get up and pass the plate—a moment which Paul had grown to despise. He had learned, aided, as always, by hints from Aunt Verona, that mere showing-off can become mortally dull and barren. He was suffering from the reaction of a long exhibition of virtuosity. Doxologies and postludes had grown sour, like milk, from standing still; his responses in Sunday-school had become parrot-like; his intimate relationship with the Holy Ghost was extinct. He could therefore muster little enthusiasm for the proposed school on the ground of its being a continuance of the traditions of the family set. Rather than sink into that bog he would shock the village by subscribing to Mark Laval's arguments in favour of the college of St. Francis Xavier. After all, what he objected to in Dr. Wilcove's proposal was precisely what Mark had objected to in his former cocksure assertions: namely, complacency and a casual assumption of infallibility. "Anything for a change," was his motto for the time being, but the change must be real and not merely apparent.

8

Becky States, the black washerwoman, had come to live in the house as general servant. Dr. Wilcove had insisted on the arrangement and the decision was arrived at one cold day in January when Paul had come in for his skates to find Aunt Verona flushed and strangely tense, in conference with the doctor. The latter was pre-

paring to leave, and while Paul was on the porch putting new laces in his skating boots he overheard their final remarks.

"But your nerves will have to pay for it in the end," the doctor was expostulating. "Neuralgia will then be the very least of your troubles. There's no such thing in nature as utter inflexibility."

"Nuns fret not at their convents' narrow room," Aunt Verona commented in a brittle tone.

"Ah, but you *do* fret without knowing it. It's like bleeding inwardly. Besides, you're the last woman who should ever have dreamed of turning your back on life."

"I gave it a trial."

"Not a fair one. You dived into a shallow pool, stunned yourself, then concluded that the pool had been deep and that you had been stunned through incompetent diving—which is grossly unjust to yourself. Since then, by disdainful little pools and shrinking from big ones, you've shirked the issues of life. Be warned while there's still time."

When Paul returned from skating two or three hours later, he paused at the gate, thinking he had heard the sound of a piano. But he doubted his ears, for they tingled from the cold wind on the frozen marsh ponds, and the sound might have been a distant sleigh-bell or the clinking of skates slung over his shoulder. He hurried down the icy board-walk to the kitchen door, stood still a moment to listen, then though the window saw Aunt Verona lighting the lamp.

It was Friday night and he had to hurry through supper in order not to be late for choir practice. He was tired after the afternoon's exercise and would have preferred to sit at home with a book. He could play the silly anthems at sight and resented the necessity of going over and over the separate parts to accommodate tenors and contraltos whose musicianship was of the hit-or-miss

variety. Mr. Silva was the only member of the choir who invariably sang the right note. Even Miss Todd—whom Walter Dreer spoke of as “gurgling Gertrude”—fumbled for the notes when sight-reading and beat time with her head. There was one point—E or E-sharp—where her voice passed without warning from molten brass into brass wire, and if the finale of her solo called for a sudden jump to G-sharp or A she trembled for a moment like a distraught hot-water pipe, then emitted the same sort of pinched moan—sometimes painfully faint, sometimes squawkingly shrill. When her solos were written higher than usual, Paul mercifully transposed the music without her knowledge. He couldn't transpose the anthems, because then the basses got beyond their depth; besides, Mr. Silva always knew when one took liberties with the key.

It was time Miss Todd gave place to a new soloist, but nobody had the nerve to tell her so, for she was sweet and gentle. Moreover, it was time he chucked his job, and some bright morning he *would*. Already he could hear the minister say in his oily voice, “Why, what now, my little man!” Little man—Gee-rusalem! In church, as soon as he had memorized the text, he fooled everybody by reading books behind a high choir seat—books that would have horrified the minister's wife.

Sunday-school was becoming intolerable too. Year in and year out, the same cycle of lessons and golden-texts, with an attempt to enliven the dreary proceedings by coloured cards and chalk pictures of lilies on the blackboard. Decidedly he had outgrown it, as he had outgrown everything else in this sleepy village. There wasn't a grown-up in Hale's Turning who had read books like *Werther*!

He was developing the habit of playing hookey. One morning, instead of going to school, he and Gritty had

pooled their savings, sneaked into the train, and gone to Bridgetown to see a thrilling matinée performance of *Hazel Kirke*. During the return journey they had stood on the platform and each smoked half a Sweet Caporal. Gritty had even suggested that they should run away and go on the stage.

As the winter progressed and the long thaw set in, Aunt Verona's time was almost wholly devoted to her manuscripts. Becky was in control, and her unearthly growls and rich baritone bursts of song brought an unaccountable note of cheer into the depression of the house. "Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile," Becky would drone as she scrubbed, and once Aunt Verona looked up to exclaim, with an old-time gleam of humour, "Mercy, Becky, what a gloomy tune!"

But Becky, who was a law unto herself, went on, *de plus belle*, "a long ways from ho-o-ome, a long wa-ays from home." It was plain to her, as it was to Paul, that Aunt Verona liked the song. Besides, Becky's lugubriousness was one of Hale's Turning's stock diversions. Its comic value was enhanced by the long glass prisms hanging from her ears and resting on her calico shoulders.

One morning in April, after weeks of wind and rain, a flicker of sunlight broke through the clouds and a breeze stole into the village with the news that Spring was coming. The trees whispered the message; the sparrows, eavesdropping in their branches, overheard it and flew up and down and around in excitement. Paul guessed it and ran out of the house, brandishing his book-bag and leaping high over the mud-puddles. Aunt Verona must have known it too, with the experience of many a barren change of season. She had spent a sleepless night and was suffering with neuralgia, an ailment of long-standing. When Becky had cleared the breakfast table, Aunt Verona went into the playroom and stood at the window to wave Paul the usual good-bye. The trees in the neg-

lected orchard were palely gilded. The clouds above were being rolled back like some billowing curtain in order that the sun might have full play upon the vast stage where the annual drama of creation was commencing. Over the fields there was a faint green halo of growth. In a few weeks the trees would be spilling over with leaves and blossoms; summer would come at one stride, then autumn with its fruits, and winter again with its blizzards and silences and delays—world without end, Amen. Nature was showing off to-day, Nature the virtuoso. The genius of God was putting to the blush anything man might hope to accomplish.

When Paul passed through the gate on his breathless return for dinner, he stopped short in amazement. This time there was no mistaking his ears, and he went around to the orchard side of the house and listened under the playroom window.

Great chords were tumbling forth with a profusion beyond anything he had ever heard. From the idiom of the music he recognized it as Beethoven, but it was as though the instrument—his child piano—had grown up and burst into song with the deep-throated voice of maturity. The music screamed, roared, rumbled, pleaded, wailed, grieved, sighed, and suddenly subsided to a singing plaintiveness. His heart was in his mouth as he listened, and tears stung his eyelids. To think of all that eloquence having been repressed for years and years and years, buried like the false steward's talent, like the precious books packed into crates, like the untold treasures locked in trunks and drawers!

The music broke off, recommenced, broke off again at the same point, recommenced, impatiently. Aunt Verona, he reflected, must be so badly out of practice after all the silent years that she found those mordents difficult. *He* could have played them—easily! Ah, but he couldn't have given the piano a soul as she had done.

At the same spot the music again came to a halt, then without warning a frightful jangling chord which seemed to have been struck with four or five hands at once was wrenched out, as though some gigantic claw had reached down and ripped the wires across the whole width of the piano. The cruel, thunderous discord made Paul jump. With a queer presentiment he stepped back from the window, hesitated, then ran around the house to the kitchen door. On opening it he caught sight of Becky standing agape, her eyes on Aunt Verona, who, with feverish energy, was snatching piles of manuscript from the drawer of the dresser and tossing them on the floor. When the last sheet of foolscap had been added to the pile, she thrust in the drawer and began to gather the sheets into her arms. Her manner reminded Paul of the day when she had destroyed the books, and he stepped forward apprehensively.

"Out of my way, child!" commanded Aunt Verona, pushing him aside as she proceeded toward the stove.

Her face! He was too astounded by it to be terrified.

He resisted and caught her arms. "No, no, Aunt Verona," he implored, in hysterical tones. "Please, *please* don't burn the story!"

His resistance was in vain. She had seized the poker and prodded up the stove-lid.

"Story!" she cried, with a harsh laugh. "Story! It's me—*me!* My cremation! There! There! *There!*" She fed the flames with one hand and poked at the burning pages with the other, while Paul succumbed to an overwhelming sense of impotence.

"It isn't right to do that!" he reproached in a despairing sob. "It's wrong!"

She gave no heed. Her eyes were glittering, her grey lips pressed together.

"Oh," he finally wailed, "I think you're mean, mean, mean!"

Something infinitely precious, something supremely vital had gone. It was as though one of his own limbs had been amputated. He recalled now something he had heard Aunt Verona mutter a few days back about her manuscript, about its being "wicked" and "futile." Life appeared for the first time menacing, sardonic.

9

Aunt Verona went upstairs to her cold bedroom, and Paul tried to eat some dinner, ignoring Becky's croaking, growling, throat-scratching commentary. Some instinct warned him to report the morning's happenings, and he called at Dr. Wilcove's house on the way to school.

On his return at four o'clock he found that his instinct had been more than justified. Becky's eyes were rolling and she was as incoherently voluble as some hybrid of dog and monkey. Mr. Silva was sitting in the kitchen, cap in hand, shaking his head solemnly, waiting, as he cryptically announced, until he was needed, and there was a note in the doctor's handwriting:

"DEAR PAUL,

"Go at once to Mrs. Kestrell's and stay there for the night. Your aunt is very ill, but there is nothing you can do. I'll come and explain matters to you at Mrs. Kestrell's to-morrow. Show her this note, and say I'm relying on her kindness."

"Where is he?" Paul finally succeeded in saying, though his voice was faint and his mind nothing but an empty, buzzing box.

Mr. Silva jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the stairs. "You're not to go up," he said. "They've telegraphed to Bridgetown for the ambulance."

Paul supposed the "ambulance" was some especially

skilful sort of doctor. Into the blankness of his mind was creeping an old memory, long dormant—the memory of his mother tearing herself away in the night, heedless of his fears.

He couldn't trust himself to ask questions, could scarcely formulate any. With the note in his hand and his book-bag still slung across his shoulder, he left the house and turned up the road towards Gritty Kestrell's. He had never spent a night under any roof but Aunt Verona's, and suddenly a sort of awkward, despairing friendliness for the sinister old house clutched at him—despairing, for he seemed to be saying farewell to it, tearing himself away from it as his mother had done nine years ago. Something mysterious was transpiring in Aunt Verona's bedroom, something more ominous than mere sickness, for anything that affected Aunt Verona was somehow more ominous than phenomena affecting other people. He was sure it was the end of a variation. Nothing had *flatted* this time. A movement had just been hopelessly interrupted. And with its cessation he realized that he had loved it.

His eyes were drowning in tears and he trudged on, oblivious of the ruts and puddles.

III

I

By imperceptible degrees Paul had dropped from the head of his class to the bottom, and in June failed to pass his examinations. He was shocked at his failure, for it seemed to place him in the category of dunces, but he quickly relapsed into apathy. He had failed—well, what of it? Repeat the year? No fear! He was still himself, a person more important than any other, and he could be even more completely himself in some town like Halifax or Montreal or Boston or New York.

When the prospect of the vacation was hanging drearily on his hands, Dr. Wilcove drove up to Mrs. Kestrell's door one morning and asked to see him. In the walnut and horsehair parlour, with its paper roses and musty odour, Dr. Wilcove assumed an expression which Paul intuitively understood.

"I know what you've come to tell me," he forestalled. "You're wondering how you can break it to me. It's all right."

In his own ears the words seemed hard and stilted. But he was by no means as unfeeling as Dr. Wilcove momentarily judged, for he had already lived through the impending tragedy and had been preparing himself for this day ever since the doctor had first refused to let him see Aunt Verona. If it was true that she had been unable to move or to speak during all the long dragging weeks since she had burned her manuscripts, Paul felt

it much more merciful that she should cease to live. The news which he read on Dr. Wilcove's countenance made it again possible for the boy to think of Aunt Verona with a sense of ease. Henceforth, for ever and ever, though he should not see her again, she would be with him in spirit as the old Aunt Verona, the kind, quiet Aunt Verona who sat at his side when he did his lessons; who made hot scones for his supper and doughnut men and animals; who called out from the kitchen when he got the time wrong; the Aunt Verona who said pungent things about neighbours with whom she never communed; who broke into odd, serious smiles when *he* said amusing things; who had solemnly taught him the way to accept invitations and lift his hat; the Aunt Verona who understood his pride and emotional intemperance; the Aunt Verona to whom he could explain his alien ideas; who confirmed his faith in the validity of his own impressions and encouraged him to formulate them honestly; the Aunt Verona who set a daily example of mental playfulness; who had made him realize that there was a feminine attitude toward phenomena which differed from the masculine; the Aunt Verona who inquired what his teacher had said to him, what Miss Todd had worn at Flora Ashmill's strawberry social; the Aunt Verona who had been very important when she was younger and who might have continued to be important but for some unkind defeat; who had lived a life romantic and distinguished beyond the guessing capacities of Hale's Turning; the Aunt Verona who never overlooked his faults yet who never made fun of him nor took an unfair advantage; who reproved and corrected but never scolded; the Aunt Verona who—who collected texts. And the thought of those poor useless scraps of paper stuffed pell-mell into the cabinet on the dresser, that irrational but methodically compiled jumble, that painstakingly memorized but mad record of three or four hundred sermons that even the

preacher had forgotten—this thought twisted his face out of shape, and Dr. Wilcove had cause to revise his hasty judgment and utter a little speech which Paul rather cynically prided himself on recognizing to be nicely adjusted to the occasion. He had long since acquired the habit of indulging grown-ups in their favourite attitudes, of playing down to their preconceptions of juvenility, of making responses that appeared to confirm them in their superior sense of fitness. Dr. Wilcove would have been put out, could he have known with what accuracy his young ward had, in his own mind, fore-echoed his words and the gravity of his tone.

The preparations for the funeral meant very little to Paul. He had not even flinched when he had suddenly realized why Mr. Kestrell was so busy in his workshop. He had a strange conviction that Aunt Verona was now, in some inexplicable manner, getting her second opportunity, that the empty years were being made up to her. He was equally sure that she was not languishing in that silly Sunday-school-card paradise in which he had once believed—as he had believed in Santa Claus.

And when the mealy-mouthed minister said at the funeral service that Verona Windell was now in the presence of her Maker, Paul squirmed in his seat and longed to yell hot denials of the ineptitude. He knew Aunt Verona would never have wished to go to what the minister spoke of as her Maker, and he knew that Aunt Verona was now where she had *wished* to be. The minister was getting it all crookedy. Who was he, to take smug charge of such a delicate ceremony!

As “chief mourner” Paul felt a sense of importance which soon left him, for he passionately resented the spirit of the proceedings. Why had all these people come? Curiosity? The minister spoke of “one whom some of you here gathered were privileged to see growing up as a girl amongst you.” Yes, but if Aunt Verona

had finally come back to them and for years and years steadfastly refused to receive them, what right had they to intrude now? They had been privileged to see her growing up because she was only a child and couldn't prevent it; but they hadn't been privileged to see her after she *had* grown up, and Paul begrudged the posthumous invasion upon her privacy. He had almost snarled when the villagers had walked past the ebony box and peered through the little window at Aunt Verona's wasted face.

Had Dr. Wilcove been gossiping? Did those farmer cousins from Upper Bridgetown know something of Aunt Verona's life abroad? Or was the minister guessing when he spoke glibly of "brilliant promise" and "voluntary retirement to a life of piety and seclusion"? And why spoil it all by calling poor Aunt Verona "one of the Lord's handmaidens?" He pictured the twisted smile with which Aunt Verona would have received that description. He heard her saying, "Me, Verona Windell, a handmaiden of the Lord God! Well, well—poor God! You mustn't say that word, child—I can but you mustn't—promise!" Then she would have gone to the playroom and sat looking out of the window. Aunt Verona might conceivably be *the* handmaiden; but to think of her as *one* of the handmaidens, standing with a group of others, wearing the same robes, indistinguishable from them, her grey-black hair down her back—it was grotesque.

Not only did he scorn the minister, but he bore a grudge against the ecclesiastical machinery that had inculcated such untenable notions. Recalling the days when he had seen a tiny replica of hell in the red coals over which Aunt Verona had braised onions to cure his colds, he felt extravagant compassion for that child who had been so needlessly terrified, and extravagant anger against the Man of God who so obtusely lied—yes, lied, whether he meant to or not. Ass! And the service went on and on.

Gurgling Gertrude—dear old thing, with tears in her eyes—was singing “Abide with Me.”

Suddenly a flash of understanding came to him. Out of the dim past he recalled a phrase of Aunt Verona’s which now explained much. “You must always try to listen to the sermon, child, and believe all they tell you in church. It was your mother’s wish.” That was it! That was why Aunt Verona had never checked his piety; that explained her queer smiles and reticences and sighs and head-shakes; that was why she could say “God” and he couldn’t—because of some dying injunction of her sister’s! The loyalty of Aunt Verona—and the unquestioning faith of his poor mother! It was beautiful that his mother had believed in all these notions. They ceased to be silly when *she* believed in them; they only became so when it was a question of his own mind. Aunt Verona had known better. And now he would, gradually, have to think back through his whole life and make a new allowance for the fact that Aunt Verona had been under a handicap regarding the free expression of her views. Was that, perhaps, why she had made him memorize texts? He was glad of his mother’s injunction, glad that Aunt Verona had dutifully fulfilled her compact in so far as she was able, glad that he was free to disbelieve for himself now that Aunt Verona’s stewardship was at an end and he was—well, scarcely grown-up, but very old for his age—much older than other boys of twelve, almost old enough to commence that vague worldwide adventure which he had often discussed with Aunt Verona.

The day on which Aunt Verona had burnt her manuscript had been a milestone in his experience. Her act had turned the key in a lock of desire. She had destroyed his only clue to romantic and adventurous living; therefore he must plan to see for himself all the marvels he and Aunt Verona had talked about, do all the marvels she and he knew there were to be done. She could have

done them—had indeed commenced, then stopped. He must go on alone, pretending she was at his back to suggest and encourage, to call out whenever he skipped a note or got the time wrong. Dr. Wilcove had said Paul reminded him of his aunt, and Paul was shrewd enough to notice that the remark had been made when he was in a rebellious mood. Through the haze of memory there came a ring of revolutionary spears against conventional bucklers. It came in the form of daring epigrams muttered by Aunt Verona which, though incomprehensible, had lingered for future consideration. Dr. Wilcove's remark gave him not only a clue to himself, but a clue to Aunt Verona. They were bold pioneers, he and Aunt Verona. The minister said that the meek should inherit the earth. The meek! What had the meek minister inherited, or the meek Miss Todd? Mr. Silva was meek and had inherited more than all the others, though he was one of the poorest men in the village—but his inheritance, which was an inheritance of understanding and common sense, he had brought with him—from Portugal! And he enjoyed his heritage in spite of his meekness, rather than by reason of it. Mr. Silva *could* have been an adventurer; indeed when he had been ship's carpenter on the *Brandywine* he *had* been an adventurer, serving under a very prince of adventurers, who had roamed the world over, who had saved Dutch sailors from a burning ship in an Atlantic hurricane, and brought Aunt Verona one of the finest pianos in all Germany.

To the minister Paul announced that he would like to resign his post as organist. His only excuse was "Under the circumstances," but he advanced it so adroitly that the minister had no choice but to look and say:

"Well, my little man, you've done a splendid work for the Master, and we shall sorely miss your help. I trust that when the next few weeks have brought comfort and blessing, you will be ready to resume the post again."

“No fear!” Paul vowed to himself. Never, never, never. But all he said was, “Thank you.”

That night when, after saying good night to Gritty and her parents in the kitchen, he took his candle and went up the steep back-stairs to the “spare bedroom” that had become his makeshift home, his loss came to him in a blinding flash, which for an instant illuminated his life then left him in darkness. Never again would he experience the sense of safety and protection he had known ever since he could remember. From now on, nothing stood between him and the buffetings of life but his own puny will and the clumsy if well-meaning kindness of strangers who chanced to take a liking to him. For a moment he stood on the stairs while the candlelight cast wavering shadows which hideously dwarfed him. The moment seemed an eternity, for with his sudden serenity of thought and feeling the very universe stood still.

The slamming of an outer door caught him out of his thrall and he mounted the remaining steps.

Mrs. Kestrell was kind to him—kind and stupid. She had a rather absurd respect for his talents and good manners and always gave him a white linen table-napkin, whereas Gritty’s was of crash with a pink border. While he secretly shared Mrs. Kestrell’s respect for himself, he was ashamed of the feeling and disliked to use finer linen than Gritty. Not that Gritty minded, for she was a good sport. Besides, if Gritty had been piqued she would have gone straight to the cupboard and helped herself to the best table-napkin in the house. He preferred the rôle of quite ordinary boy. If you were treated as a quite ordinary boy you could surprise people by occasional revelations of superior wisdom, and it was amusing to surprise people; whereas if you were treated as a superior being you were cramped and intimidated by the consciousness that you must do nothing inferior, and in lots of ways

you really *were* inferior—football, for instance. The deference of Mrs. Kestrell, the pats and endearments of Miss Todd, and the practical solicitude of Dr. Wilcove were in a sense more embarrassing than indifference would have been. Their kindness only blurred the edges of his problem, and he had never been more in need of keeping the edges sharply defined.

The condolence of Phœbe Meddar was the sweetest of all. She saw him at Gritty's gate, crossed the road and stopped before him, then said, shyly but sincerely, "I'm sorry about your auntie, Paul; and I missed your playing in church last Sunday." That was the most delicate manifestation of sympathy and the most thrilling recognition of his musical importance that had ever been vouchsafed to him, but, after all, it was only a negative offering to a boy whose whole attention must be concentrated on putting together the puzzle-pieces of his disrupted life. And Phœbe's little offering summed up the whole of Hale's Turning. Hale's Turning took the trouble to be sorry because he cut a picturesque figure. He could not do much with its sorrow, still less with its white linen table-napkins and its plans to enfold him within the bigoted traditions of its life. He was obsessed with a desire to escape, to go where he could see only strange faces, hear only strange voices, move among people who had never even heard of Hale's Turning and its sleepy ways, people whose ideas were fresh and exciting and drawn from rich sources. He wanted to leave his old self—the self that had somehow been laid to rest in the graveyard—and set out in search of a new self, to wander, if necessary, to the very edge of the world in search of it.

2

If anything had been needed to tip the scale more sharply on the side of rebellion, the effect was accom-

plished by a series of revivalist meetings, which, sweeping over the country-side like a plague, had the magnetic effect of a circus. Paul disdained any public celebration which he had not helped to organize. School concerts, tableaux, "socials," and First of July parades were different, for in them he had always played "no mean part." But Gritty Kestrell, who adored crowds, half dragged him along to the big tent on the hill above the church where a renowned evangelist was to hold forth.

Some of the hymns were new and stirring, but Paul could not subscribe to the machine-like manner in which the evangelist's partner played them on the portable organ. The tent was crowded to suffocation. Baptists predominated, but Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians and nondescripts kept squeezing in between the chairs and the sides of the tent. In front were benches kept vacant for penitents.

Paul had come to scoff, and there was material at hand at the very outset. How, for instance, could anything be made "whiter than snow" by being "washed in the blood of the lamb"? At best it was an ugly picture.

Moment by moment the atmosphere became tenser. Impossible to keep one's eyes off that electric man, whose mouth writhed, whose arms never rested, whose eyes flashed and pierced, whose voice made your spine shiver. Paul could hear his neighbours breathing. Women and old men were whispering, "Praise be to His Holy Name." At regular intervals the speaker leaned forward like an impassioned auctioneer, making his congregation feel that when the gavel descended the bargain would be forever lost to them, salvation beyond their reach, damnation and agony their portion.

Suddenly Paul caught sight of Becky States. Growling and chattering more weirdly than ever, rolling her eyes till they glistened like porcelain in her black face, she wrenched the prisms from her ears and flung herself

on her knees, crawling up the aisle over the grass floor and sobbing hoarsely. And the evangelist leaned still farther forward and said soothingly to her—to black Becky—“Ay, sister, ay, sister!”

Holy smoke! Yet Paul couldn't laugh—he felt too tight.

Suddenly his attention leapt as though it had been lashed with a whip. For the man was pointing straight at him. “You there, you and you and you! How much longer do you reckon you can go on concealing your shame—eh? What would your feelings be if you found out that somebody had been watching you all those times you thought nobody was looking? Ay, my poor friends, you'd blush and stammer if you thought your neighbours could see all the meanness in your heart. But in the darkest hours, behind the locked door, in the most unlikely places, where nobody is looking, God can see. He *has* seen—think back, he *saw* you; he's got it down in a book; what excuse will you make on the Day of Judgment when he confronts you with the record? What will your blushing and stammering avail you then? You may go on hoodwinking yourself and your neighbours, but you can't hoodwink the Almighty. You can't flee the wrath to come—not by a long sight! The flames of hell are never damped. They're hungry for fuel. What kind of a fix will you and you and you and you be in if God reaches down His hand this very night and smites you?”

Paul was not trying to guess the answer; he was merely swallowed up in the terror of his own shortcomings. He was mesmerised by this horrid man who fingered the secrets of one's soul. His throat was dry and his heart bumped. People were moaning and pushing their way towards the front; he felt that in a moment he would be drawn there himself; desperately he was trying to remember some reason why he shouldn't follow, why he

shouldn't answer this final invitation to be saved. One *might* die in the night.

He felt a hot little hand grip his fingers, and looked around to find Gritty in a panic. Her blue eyes were fairly growing, her lips were apart, her face had lost its pertness and was pale and appealing. A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over him. Gritty too! That swine up there had been making Gritty think *she* was a sinner—Gritty, the best little sport in Hale's Turning, a girl who would tackle anybody with her fists, even John Ashmill, in the interests of truth; Gritty who got into scrapes but who always owned up, Gritty who had run out into the hall and bitten the Principal's hand when he tried to strap Wilfrid Fraser for shooting spit-balls! That duffer might point out *his* sins, the sins of Paul Minas, but he needn't go insulting Gritty Kestrell! If God was going to send Gritty to eternal punishment, well, he could send Paul Minas along with her—they would go to hell together, just as they had planned to go on the stage together. Paul thought of the Sweet Caporal they had smoked, and hesitated. There was that of course. Gritty wasn't faultless—far from it. She wasn't above stealing things from the pantry, or pelting people's windows on Hallow-e'en. But it was all in fun. And if God wanted faultless people he could whistle for them.

"Hey, Gritty," he whispered. "Let's get out of this." She was still in a tremble and quite prepared to go through with whatever the man should prescribe. This was unlike Gritty, who usually said something saucy when you commanded her. He got up, dragging at her arm, and she followed. The evangelist saw them turn towards the exit, instead of towards the mercy seat, and called out to them. Paul's knees threatened to give way, and Gritty gasped. A surge of nervous indignation swept over Paul and he went grimly on.

"Come on," he said and gave her a brutal yank.

"You two there—you boy and girl——"

Paul could bear it no longer. Pushing Gritty through the opening in the tent he stepped outside, then thrust back his head and cried at the top of his lungs:

"Mind your own business and go to hell!"

It was the first time he had ever said a real "swear word."

He saw a blur of outraged heads swing round, and was for an instant aware of two startled eyes in a familiar face, terror-stricken eyes that ought somehow to have been cajoling. Walter Dreer! He grasped Gritty more tightly by the hand and ran with her for dear life down the hill, past the church, bringing up at Gritty's gate. The twilight had turned to night—indigo night—and on the hill the entrance to the tent showed in an orange triangle, surrounded by faintly luminous canvas. A miniature hell set up as a puny challenge to a vast, dark, beneficent world.

A scent of syringas clung to the little brown house. The windmill creaked faintly and the trees rustled. Gritty was panting from the swift run. The sparkle had come back to her eyes, which caught a gleam from the lamp-light pouring softly through the window. It was Paul who collapsed on the doorstep, scared by the enormity of his deed. But he was just daring to be glad, glad! That swine had tried to prevent him from leaving the meeting! He had retaliated by doing something he had wanted to do ever since he could remember. Often, before the mirror, he had practised "faces" he would like to make at people—the minister, for one. At last he had done even better: had sworn out loud in a meeting-place, and everybody had heard. He had got even with the community for an injury he couldn't quite formulate. The long smouldering had given way to a flare-up. Now they would *know* he was on fire.

"Oh, Paul," Gritty broke the silence, speaking with a hushed, ecstatic admiration, "I wouldn't a dreamt you'd ever a dasst do a thing like that! Not even John Ashmill would a dasst! What'd Miss Windell a said?"

He pictured himself bursting into the old kitchen with the story on his lips—no text this time. A tardy realization of Aunt Verona's sense of fitness brought back his composure as if by magic, for instead of the dreaded blank expression he saw Aunt Verona's lips work strangely and her hands give a little nervous jerk—while her eyes half narrowed and she walked to the stove to test an iron with a moistened finger.

"I think Aunt Verona would have laughed," he said; then added, with a touch of repressed glee, "I'm *sure* she'd have laughed—to herself!"

A few days later he was walking along the bluff and was arrested by the sight of a group of people in black clothes standing up to their waists in the river. The penitents were being baptized. Paul knew the rite. "They call it the Jordan!" he remarked to himself, and sat down on the cliff to watch. "Like sheep dipping," he commented cynically, then caught himself up, for into his mind had come the echo of something Mark Laval had once said about narrow-mindedness. "But it won't make Becky whiter than snow," he mused.

After supper that night there was a ring at the doorbell.

"It's the minister to see Paul," Mrs. Kestrell announced, in her most subservient manner.

For a moment Paul was intimidated. He would fight the minister if need be, but would rather elude him. He remembered the days when he had answered the bell for Aunt Verona.

"Say I'm not at home," he instructed, with a not too successful attempt at lordliness.

"Oh, but——" Mrs. Kestrell began.

Her unmanageable daughter elbowed her to one side. "I'll tell him," Gritty announced.

Mrs. Kestrell looked frightened, but Gritty's hand was already on the door-knob.

"You know where girls go for telling fibs," Paul cautioned her in the bantering tones he and Gritty had begun to assume with regard to religious discussions.

"Oh, pooh!" she flung back. "I ain't afraid of no hell nor no ministers."

"Why, Margaret!" exclaimed Mrs. Kestrell in deep distress. She had never used the nickname by which her daughter was universally known.

"Leave me be, ma. I'm *going*, I tell you."

Paul stole out through the back door, and from behind the well watched the minister leave the house. When Gritty joined him, they went to the gate and, with thumbs to their noses, waggled eighteen grubby fingers at the retreating broadcloth.

3

When Paul had gained his point with regard to the Baptist school at Wolfville, he had no valid excuse for rejecting the alternative, a non-sectarian boy's school in Halifax. The fact that the suggestion emanated from Dr. Wilcove implied that the school was depressingly safe, but he could scarcely object on such negative evidence. After all, the school was in Halifax, a city infinitely bigger than Bridgetown, with a population of 40,000—so many people that you might never "get to know" them all by sight. It was thrilling too, to be going so far alone on the train, with a trunk, two bags, and five dollars. It was kind of Dr. Wilcove to give him so much money. It never occurred to him that the money might be his own, and not the doctor's. He had heard vague talk of trustees, but had thought of them as of-

ficers who met in the vestry of the church after Wednesday night prayer-meetings.

During the summer Dr. Wilcove had given him the key of the playroom in order that he might practise on the big piano, but he had made no use of the privilege, because when he had gone back one afternoon he had been so strangely subdued by the stillness of the house that he had replaced the lid on the piano with a shudder, tiptoed out of the room, locked the door, and walked away without having struck a note. In Halifax he was to receive lessons from a lady to whose name was affixed a string of letters. He would ask her to teach him the Liszt sonata.

It was two weeks before Paul was shown into the presence of this personage. He was impressed by her spectacles and her "English accent." She told him she had a diploma from an academy in London, and he marvelled. Then she placed Schumann's "Merry Peasant" on the piano before him and said: "Can you play that?" He shut the book impatiently and handed it back to her.

"I played that at a concert in Hale's Turning Town Hall when I was six," he said. "I'm twelve now."

"Then will you play me one of your latest pieces," she invited, not as impressed as she might have been, Paul thought.

Something unyielding behind her spectacles made him bristle. He was sure of his ground in the realm of music, for he had been subjected to a rigorous discipline. Aunt Verona had seldom complimented him, but when she had done so she had given minute reasons for her approval. There was one piece, not as difficult as some, but tricky in an unusual way. After he had toiled over it for weeks with Aunt Verona, she had said, "*Endlich, mein Kind, hast du es richtig begriffen.*"

Then she had gone on to tell him, in a rare burst of confidence, that the composer of the piece, whose name

was Leschetizky, had himself shown her how it ought to be done, and that Paul had reproduced it in a manner which would have made the composer pat him on the back. He decided to test his new teacher. Without announcing the name of the piece he began to play it. Except for occasional hours at Mrs. Kestrell's feeble instrument he had neglected his exercises, and he was not in his best form. For all that he gave, as he secretly felt, a creditable performance, without faltering once on the runs. When he had finished he waited. The teacher was visibly taken aback. Paul was sure she had no idea what he had been playing.

"Very good indeed," she finally said. "You have a mature grasp. Unfortunately your method is quite wrong. We shall have to put you on exercise for a long while yet. You'll have to begin at the beginning."

She motioned him from his seat and gave a demonstration of what he must learn to do with his hands.

"Do you see?" she kept asking, as she explained each new step in a bookish rigmarole.

He nodded his head repeatedly by way of answer, but his whole being was stiff with disgust.

"Come to-morrow at three for the first lesson," she said, ushering him from the studio.

He went straight to the head master's study. "I've decided not to take music lessons," he announced timidly.

The master looked him over. "It's not exactly for you to decide my lad," he said. "You're here to study what your guardian has arranged for you to study."

"But she doesn't *know*," cried Paul. He groped for words. "I can almost play the Liszt sonata," he hurried on, "and she says I'll have to begin at the beginning—*her* funny old beginning. I've been organist in a church and everything, and she asked me if I could play 'The Merry Peasant!' I *won't* be her pupil," he continued, with

the boldness of desperation. "She hits the keys like an old stick!"

The master had got up from his seat. "I'll speak to Miss Mason," he said, "and find out what she has to say about it. Meanwhile you must learn once and for all that schools are not run in accordance with the whims of scholars who think they know more than their teachers. And it isn't exactly respectful to apply such a term as 'old stick' to one's music-mistress. You'll report as usual for your music lesson until your grade has been finally settled. Now go and report yourself to the physical instructor."

Indeed, he would do no such thing. Gym was all right in a way. The swimming tank was a delight, and basket-ball was good fun when not taken too seriously. Drill, however, with its concerted lunging and bending and marching to the tune of "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey" on a jangling piano, was grotesque, and they might as well know—"once and for all" as the head master said—that he just couldn't be bothered with it.

The tragedy of the music-room had blurred his sense of duty. There was a good measure of liberty in the school, but for a boy whose comings and goings had always been adjustable to his mood the schedules were an insufferable nuisance. As he walked through the campus his eyes lifted toward the distant hill crowned by the citadel. From that eminence there must be a splendid view of the city and the harbour. With a sense of guilt and a still stronger sense of elation he slipped through the gate and ran down the road.

"But your method is quite wrong!" That sentence kept ringing in his ears. A fat lot she knew about methods! "The Merry Peasant!" Why, even Gritty Kestrell could play that! She could *have* her old diploma! "You're here to study what your guardian has arranged for you to study!" And what did old boy Wilcove know

about it? Who was *he*, to arrange one's life! Hadn't one agreed to come here simply to escape the Wilcoves and the wiseacres! "Report yourself to the physical instructor!" Let the physical instructor report himself and see how he liked it!

He had started to run up the long grassy slope towards the citadel.

4

The French class was droning out, in unison, the parts of the verb "to have." Paul sat sullen beside a young savage with whom he had been paired, presumably, in accordance with a theory that Paul's good manners would have a civilizing effect. The theory may have been excellent, but it scarcely compensated Paul for the pin-pricks and pinches, the surreptitious kicks and hair-pulling whereby the savage was working his way up in the scale of civilization.

A stormy scene in the head master's study, following Paul's failure to appear for music lessons, had been followed by a still stormier séance in which he had been held to account in the matter of absences from Gym. This morning there had been a humiliating exposition in the arithmetic class, all because Paul, standing at the blackboard, hadn't been able to see through a new system of "doing" decimals, and had, after a long, fatiguing, chalky evolution come to the conclusion that the farmer had paid \$185,363 for a dozen sheep. His classmates had slapped their legs in ecstasy, and the teacher, with an air of relenting—which only made matters worse, for it was a new way of belittling him; as if the silly answer mattered one way or another!—had said, "Don't you think you could reduce that sum so that it would be more in keeping with a poor farmer's purse? Experiment with the decimal. See if you can't put it in a more reasonable place."

Exasperated by taunts, exhausted by the arduous figuring, Paul had gone hot, then cold—cold with vindictiveness. He had had enough of standing at the blackboard and furnishing amusement for those who were safe in their seats. With ominous deliberation he picked up the chalk and put a solid white point after every digit in the long answer. Let them take their choice! He replaced the chalk and walked to his seat. The class was too dumbfounded to laugh.

As Paul sat down, the teacher sharply called his name:

“Minas, stand up.” Paul stood up. “Did I ask you to leave the blackboard?”

Paul felt thirty pairs of eyes on him. “You asked me to experiment with the decimal,” he replied in a steely voice.

“But not to make a fool of yourself.”

Paul winced. “And I didn’t ask to be sent to the board to be made a fool of, either.”

“You will report to the head master at three o’clock.”

That interview was still pending, and Paul, sick at heart, weighed during the endless French lesson the pros and cons of reporting to the head master. The world was becoming hideously impersonal; his raw smarts were being reduced to a neuralgic ache. Nothing now seemed to matter. All he knew was that he would never knuckle under—never, never, never!

“*J’ai, tu as, il a,*” chanted the class, “*nous avons, vous avez, ils ont.*”

The savage beside him was chanting it with the rest, but Paul was dumb. The teacher’s eyes had been watching him.

“Some members of the class,” he said, “are not repeating the words after me. Now once again.”

Still Paul declined to move his lips, and the savage, from the tail of his eye, gave him a wondering glance.

At the end of this repetition there was a portentous silence.

“Stand up, Minas.”

As Paul stood up with the usual weary shuffle, the savage dropped a book, as though it had fallen from Paul's knees.

“You've ignored my warnings. Now explain why you've refused to repeat the drill.”

Despair and nausea were pulling at the vitals of the rebel. Once more the smouldering embers broke into flame. He felt himself on some pedestal surveying a mob which was taunting him with his inability to get down. Couldn't get down, eh! He'd show them that he was “King of the Castle” and they were the “dirty rascals!” His eyes narrowed, he leaned forward, and whipped out the words with a vicious little flourish:

“Parce que c'est pire qu'idiot—ces chansons que vous nous faites chanter. J'en ai plein le dos!”

For a moment he thrilled at the showing off, then his spirits sank to despondent depths. How he longed for the safe kitchen, the freedom and wisdom and comprehension of the empty house where he and Aunt Verona had enjoyed a communion more precious than he had realized at the time, more wonderful than anybody would ever be able to understand. He felt the friendly warmth of that historic little stove, smelt the friendly odour of fresh-baked scones, the evening odour of kerosene, heard the clatter of logs which Mr. Silva dropped from his arms to the floor of the porch, the sound of a protective voice which called out “Paul, Paul, go back two bars!”

He was too sick to enjoy the dramatic effect his outpour had created, too apathetic to fear the inevitable punishment. He was dimly conscious that, for once, there was a spirit of deference in the regard of his fellows; but he was also aware that the teacher was getting ready to say something “teacherish.” He waited with cynical patience.

"You don't seem to realize, Minas, that there is such a thing as esprit de corps. Even though you know something about French, it doesn't absolve you from doing as the rest of the class does, so long as you're a member of it."

Paul remained silent, relentless.

"You see that, don't you?"

Paul would have one more shot, were it suicidal. "I don't see what esprit de corps has to do with my wasting my time. I'd rather be in the library reading French books than saying *J'ai, tu as, il a.*"

The vindictive mimicry of the last phrase brought a suppressed chuckle from the class. The savage whispered, "Sail into him, Polly!" With the bully's instinct he had hit on the nickname which John Ashmill had made traditional in Hale's Turning.

"I think, Minas," said the teacher, "you had better leave the room, and report your grievance to the head master at three."

Paul gathered up his books and departed. As he was closing the door he heard the teacher say, "Now, class, once more, '*J'ai*——'"

The "cons" had it at last. He would *not* report to the head master. He flung his books into a locker and walked out of the building. Nearly two dollars remained of his fund. Setting out for the heart of the town he mentally composed a telegram to Dr. Wilcove. "Will not stay here a minute longer. Can you come or shall I return?" That was the form he finally approved.

Yet when it came to the scratch he hesitated. The telegraph office was in sight now, and his knees were trembling, his steps lagging. He pictured Dr. Wilcove's dismay, his sigh of vexation, his protestations. There would be more interviews, more arguments—an expostulating group of grown-ups seized in the grip of a pitiable necessity to defend their wisdom from the affronts of

juvenility. They would have all the words they needed—logic, that grown-up monopoly!—whereas, he, well, somehow there were no words to describe his misery. There was an implacable ego within him which protested, which saw the injustice of their attitude, which refused to be gulled by their phrases, which could cry out, but which couldn't coherently state itself. It could put a sling into his hands wherewith he might slay a legion of Philistines, but it couldn't devise an articulate battle-cry. So far his rebelliousness had only beat against the wall without forcing a breach.

He walked past the telegraph office, past the smutty-looking post office, past the markets, on and on blindly toward the harbour. He liked the acrid, tarry smells of the warehouses and ship chandlers' stores. He envied the stevedores who were lounging about, chewing tobacco and drinking out of tin cans, envied them for having outlived the nightmare of school. They could whistle as they trundled heavy bales over the cobble-stones.

Paul noticed a big, bronzed, bearded man who looked ill at ease in a tweed suit, new boots and a hat too small for him. This man acknowledged the greeting of a lounging stevedore and his words struck a sudden spark against the flint of the boy's heart.

"Ay, I expected to clear to-day," he said, "and I may yet, if I can complete my crew. I've put my steward in the forecastle. He'd been at me the last two trips to go before the mast. But that leaves one watch still a man short, and no steward. Too long a voyage to start out short-handed."

The lounging stevedore turned over his wad of tobacco and spat. "Astraly's a long ways off," he commented. "Nobody's anxious to go so far from home, not in a wind-jammer. They're all for steam these days. You'll soon be a back number, captain."

Paul heard no more. His faculties were merged in a

single wild hope. He hurried forward, plunged into the group, and turned to the bearded man.

"Oh, captain, won't you take me as cabin-boy?" he begged.

The captain surveyed him with a surprised, twinkling eye, and Paul's wits began to work at high tension. Instinct told him he must lie as he had never before lied, boldly and directly, must rapidly invent a story that would hold water, at the same time allowing this particular specimen of grown-up-ness to indulge to the full whatever cut and dried theories it might have as to the judging and handling of youth. But, above all, he *must* gain his end, for if he didn't something would die within him.

The men standing near seemed to take it as a joke. Then there were arguments and cross-examinations, questions advanced in the hope of tripping him up. He met them all, and found new arguments to support every answer. Away at the base of sub-consciousness was an image of Gritty Kestrell. He was employing tactics that Gritty had, by her example, taught him—Gritty who braved everybody and always got what she wanted.

His name? Minas was too well known among sailors. Once more Aunt Verona must be his stand-by. But Windell was also well known. Then he had an inspiration. "Laval," he lied. "Paul Laval."

"*Parlez-vous* ding-dong?"

"*Parfaitement, monsieur.*"

More questions, more and more, but Paul held his ground. A harbour official advanced, accompanied by a lurching figure.

"Just looking for you, Captain Caxton," he said. "I've found you a man. He's not an A. B., but he's been before the mast." He jerked his thumb towards the applicant. "It'll take a day or two to sober him up, but he's a husky brute. Been working at the fisheries."

The captain turned to question the seaman, who replied

in a beery voice and fished out a greasy discharge certificate. Paul's nerves were tense, and every moment of delay added to his anxiety.

"About the tug," broke in the harbour official, "McDonald is ordered out to look for the *Swanhilda*. If you're ready in an hour he'll tow you out, and kill two birds with the one stone."

The captain breathed deeply at the prospect, consulted his watch, then turned to Paul with a more business-like interest.

"Are you willing to swear to all you've told me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

The captain pursed his lips and ruminated. "Well," he said at length, "you know what you're in for. If you're ready to rough it, you can come up to the office and sign on."

"Thank you, sir." Paul knew that this particular grown-up expected some such acknowledgment, and his nerves relaxed as the captain turned to the others with a twinkle and said:

"I reckon we've all of us run away once in our lives, eh?" The others nodded. "Might do worse than take this hobo," he continued, indicating the swaying seaman. "Hate to wait any longer. Been held up a week a'ready getting a crew. My cook only come aboard to-day. A Russian Finn. All right, boy, this way."

Paul was digging his nails into his palms. The thought of signing the articles under the eyes of government officials intimidated him. Even yet something might go wrong.

The process of signing on was a simple matter. The esteem in which the captain seemed to be held made it even a pleasant social function. Still more pleasant was Paul's discovery that he was going to be *paid* for being rescued! The thought of a salary hadn't entered his

head until the captain said, "The wages is three pound ten."

Paul knew what pounds were. Miss Todd had one made into a brooch and called it her "Jubilee sovereign." And he was to receive three of them every month and ten shillings as well! Shillings were quarters. He would send jubilees to Phœbe and Gritty.

His mind went soaring, until he was on board the tow-boat, seated beside his beery shipmate.

"No dunnage?" inquired the captain.

Paul recalled an incident in *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. "Pawnd everything I had," he explained. Instantly he saw the pitfall.

"Got the tickets?"

Surely he wasn't going to blunder at the last minute. Ah, he had it! "Gave 'em to a waitress for my last meal," he said.

The captain looked sceptical, but the engine bell had rung and the hawser came plump down in the stern. The wharf retreated and with the churn of the water all the discords of the past weeks suddenly ceased, giving place to a thrilling serenity. A hoarse scream from the whistle proclaimed the beginning of a new theme, a theme which he could play as he chose; and he knew, despite a hundred Miss Masons, that his method would prove to be the right one.

Far above the blackened buildings rose a brown, grassy hill, crowned by the citadel from whose ramparts he had, only a few days since, looked down with a vague yearning at this very harbour, at the high masts and broad yards of the very ship towards which he was now being propelled. *Quel miracle!*

In his pocket there was a pencil and a school notebook. He could get an envelope from the captain of the tug, give him two cents for a stamp, and ask him to post the letter on his return to port.

"DEAR GRITTY," he scribbled.

"I'm running away to sea. School was driving me crazy. You know how I mean. Gritty be a sport and tell Dr. Wilcove for me. I haven't got the nerve to. He's kind and I'm grateful for what he did, but I don't know how to explain to him. The music teacher was the worst, she was something fierce, and the French teacher too. They picked on me like the Principal used to pick on Wilfrid Fraser and if you'd of been here you would have bitten them. But it was my fault because I didn't obey the rules. So I picked back on them. I can't tell you where I'm going, but I'll write when I arrive. You won't get the letter for months and months, because I'm going as far as you can see on the geography. I'm only running away because I want to see everything, and hate school. Break it as nicely as you can to Dr. Wilcove. Thank your mother again for me. And good-bye, old Gritty. Don't ever forget me. I won't you. And don't you dare say coffin out loud.

"PAUL WINDELL MINAS."

PART II

IV

I

SEATED on an anchor caked with drying mud—an anchor that had been heaved on deck and made fast after much grunting, yo-hoing and pushing of breasts against capstan bars—Paul gazed far ahead, beyond the fat, steel bowsprit, beyond the foamy grey waves that advanced at a slant, towards a narrow, horizontal strip of blue above which stretched a wall of mist surmounted by clusters of cloud that looked like wash-drawings of gigantic balls of lint swept up on a carpet. Straight for that turquoise rift, straining and creaking, careening with great stately lunges, raising a starboard shoulder to avoid the hissing crests of the waves, then swerving broadly to port as she dipped into the ensuing hollows, the *Clytemnestra* drove on and on, patiently, grimly, loyally, too engrossed in her efforts to be eager, yet too intent on her goal to dally.

Once she even rebuked the helmsman. When he put the wheel over too hard, so that she was forced a point closer to the wind—a point that threatened to stifle her breath—she sent back a hasty warning by flapping her jib and fore upper top-gallantsail, then quivered with relief when the wheel went spinning back and disaster was averted. Paul turned, narrowed his eyes, gazed in righteous disapproval down the length of the ship, then grunted understandingly, for it was the new man, the beery hobo, who was not as familiar with the art of

steering as he might have been. From the depths of his nautical experience—extending over several long days now—Paul scolded. The simpleton might have got the ship aback, then there would have been the devil to pay. Didn't he know that that was how top-masts were snapped off—sometimes, when a gale was blowing? This ten-knot breeze, Paul had to remind himself, was, of course, only a zephyr. Wait till they ran into a real gale—then that land-lubber would see!

Paul had learned much about gales, hurricanes and typhoons. He felt there wouldn't, somehow, be any on this voyage; the worst storms seemed to have blown themselves out years ago; nothing could ever again be as terrific as the hurricanes that the second mate and the sailmaker and the cook and the carpenter—"Chips"—and half the men in the fore-castle had weathered in their time. Paul felt it was a pity he had struck such a tame sort of ship. Nothing, apparently, could be expected to happen to her. She was so much smaller—for all her two thousand and forty-nine registered tonnage—than those other fine vessels he had been told about; so much slower, so much less convenient to handle, carried so much less canvas, was so inadequately victualled, so prosaically devoid of hoodoos—and one had, in one's pitiable ignorance, thought her such a brave-looking craft, had thought the sails so vast and neat and stout, the ropes so thick and strong, the paint so fresh, the decks so velvety smooth, the food so—well, not really bad.

Even the mate and the "old man," hardy Canadians of the "blue-nose" stamp, Paul had looked upon as competent and sailorly to a degree—yet now he knew that, though the "old man understood what he was about," still he wasn't a patch on other old men under whom this weirdly variegated score of men had sailed in good old days which Paul, having been born so lamentably late in history, could enjoy only through the medium of

narrative. Glorious as all these yarns were, instinct as they were with the inspiriting breath of adventure, Paul could almost have wished he had been left in ignorance of those incomparable clippers and packet ships, for there was something magnificently regal about the *Clytemnestra*; it would have been easy to offer her unstinted fealty; she was so obviously doing her best. And this afternoon he had crept forward by himself, as soon as his manifold duties had permitted, in order that no inveterate narrator might dull the fine edge of his enjoyment.

The cook was his chief entertainer, for they were thrown a good deal in each other's society. Six times a day Paul had to wait in the hot, narrow galley while the greasy Finn filled up the basket with tureens and platters, tea-pots, coffee-pots, vegetable and pudding dishes: one trip for the table of the captain and first mate, and another for that of the second mate, carpenter and sailmaker. Then at odd moments throughout the day he visited the galley for hot water, or to carry supplies from the store-room, or to heat irons to press the old man's shirts and pyjamas and handkerchiefs. And the cook had an anecdote to impart on each occasion.

He had recently got his discharge from a Yankee barque, the *Ezra R. Smith*, on which there had been unlimited weekly rations of sugar and baking powder, yeast, spices, butter, and eggs preserved in water-glass. Wherefore, for the bread served on the *Ezra R. Smith* there had been no need to apologize; the plum duffs on the *Ezra R. Smith*, thanks to the plethora of ingredients, had come into spontaneous and succulent being—they had, presumably, little kinship with the present rubberoid abortions. The prunes on the *Ezra R. Smith* had not been wrinkled of mien nor coal-like in consistency; the dried apples had been less reminiscent of scraps from a cobbler's floor; the pots and pans, the hatchets and meat-grinders had been more numerous and sharp, the ovens

hotter. Paul wondered how the *Clytemnestra*—even though she had been built on the Clyde and sailed under the protection of that celebrated Britannia whom as a child, he had pictured, on the seashore with a school foot-rule in her hand, “ruling” the waves!—he wondered how she had the courage to drive on, under such handicaps, until the second mate, who swore by the *Macrihanish*, enlightened him by saying, apropos of the *Ezra R. Smith*, “What, that sieve! That floating casket! Why I went aboard o’ her in Rosario once. She liked to never got there, at that. The only sailin’ she done was backwards till the skipper run short o’ booze, eighty-odd days out, and come on deck for the first time and filled her sails with cusses. God help any mother’s son that ships on that fire bucket. She’s one o’ your hunch-back wooden old-timers—except that it ain’t lucky to touch her hump. She’ll part amidships one o’ these days. Good enough in her time, twenty-five year ago. I mind once, when I was boatswain aboard the *Macrihanish*—” but Paul had seen the captain’s form emerging from the chart-room and scurried off to polish the knives.

To-day, a Sunday and nearly a week out, it was pleasant to sit on the anchor and, for the first time since losing sight of land, really take stock of the situation. Up to this moment he had been too busy to meditate. The first hours on board, when the citadel, then the broad gate of the outer harbour, and finally the whole coast-line dropped away, had been more wonderful than anything in his experience. Never should he forget his strange exaltation as he had stood staring up at the little black figures crooked over the yards and watched the grey sails loosen and unfold and finally come clanking, creaking, flapping and ballooning down, till they made vast, bulging oblongs between the tapering yards and were securely held in place by a system of blocks and braces.

The unerring skill with which each man selected one

rope from a bewildering choice and made it fast to its allotted pin! The nonchalance of perilously poised figures! The lusty shouts from deck to topmast! The queer falsetto break in the voices as arms strained and backs arched to overcome the resistance of enormous canvas folds! The picturesque oaths and the strange jargon of "buntlin's" and "gaskets"! The gathering momentum, proved by the speed at which bits of seaweed were left astern! The sheer romance of endowing with life this cumbersome mass of iron and wood! The heart-catching wonder of feeling oneself borne along by the wings of a monstrous bird! What an incomparable setting for a new movement in the theme of life—life more abundant than anything one could have dreamed!

The tow-boat had screamed its farewell, and throughout the yellowish-grey afternoon, the sails had been set. Night had descended and phosphorescent glints had begun to appear over the side before the last order of "Ay, belay that!" had been given, the yards brought into final alignment to the tune of strange, German-sounding heaving-cries, and the weary double watch had slouched forward for supper. Then Paul, replacing the last of his crockery in the pantry racks, hanging cups on hooks in the ceiling, mopping up a crumby shelf and proceeding to fill his tiny cabin lamp with oil, had begun to wonder whether——

He relived the experience of that first evening. Perhaps if he hurried off to bed! he had thought. The water bottles in the captain's bathroom had been filled, the captain's blankets turned down and the saloon lights lowered; the mates' cabins had been seen to—what a filthy reek of tobacco in the corridors!

Perhaps, if he undressed quickly and got straight——

If they hadn't put such silly dashboard-things at all the doors! Would one ever learn to step over them

without stumbling? Oh, dear, what endless see-sawing! Up and down, up and down, relentlessly, and the heavy drawers groaned, the lamps swung patiently, in their sockets. The smell of oil! The strong, clean smell of tar and hemp in the store-room as one replaced the tin of kerosene in its frame—everything had a frame or a rack at sea; even the dining-table, in case the plate should slide off! Once in one's cabin—but it was away at the other side of the saloon, down another corridor, next to the lazaret—a long way. “A long wa-ays from home!” Sometimes, like Becky, he felt “like a motherless chile!” Dare he put down the lamp a minute? Terrible to set the ship afire!

Oh, dear! Would there be anyone on deck to see, in case—— After all, it was dark out there—the lee side. Would it be safe to try and blow out the lamp, or would the act of blowing tend to release the muscular control—that drawn-in tension——

He had reached the lee side just in time.

By standing on the huge iron “double post thing”—would they call it a cleat? No, not that, something more nautical; “bits,” that was it—one's shoulders cleared the side. Rather comfortable, standing on these bits, pressed against the teak shelf-thing in which holes were bored for belaying pins, which were like “men” in the game called “cribbage.” What a long slow rhythm to this incessant teetering; it seemed minutes between the rise and fall, and for all the see-sawing, the deck had a permanent slant—one would have to walk uphill to get back to the cabin door. One would be walking uphill all the way to Australia.

It hadn't lasted long. But how it made your eyes smart! Those big pilot-crackers in the pantry locker—they would help make up for a lost supper. Thank Heaven nobody had seen.

Would one be all right in the morning? Surely.

“See-saw, Margery Daw——” If Gritty could only have foreseen, when singing that little song! Gritty—Hale’s Turning. Already they seemed like a dream.

The second day had started badly, for in bringing breakfast aft he had unwisely contemplated a daub of porridge on the lid of a bowl. The sea had seemed quite needlessly busy; the decks cold, wet, and foolishly unstable. He had felt greenish and nibbled pilot bread rather desperately, and it had been hard to laugh at their talk of swallowing raw pork, but there had been so much to do! The old man had spent hours demonstrating how the corners were to be mopped, how the soda and borax were to be mixed, the brass polished, the linoleum scrubbed, had shown him where the stores were kept, revealed lockers under settees, explained how the mattresses were to be turned and the blankets tucked in. And one’s head had ached, ached, ached—see-saw, ache, ache—whilst heavy loads of water dashed against the iron walls, hissing and spluttering at closed ports, and it was stuffy, and the old man was saying, “Once a week,” and the Lord only knew what he was referring to.

Washing up the greasy platters was horrible. The serving at table was easy enough, but the white jacket was too long in the sleeves—Otto, his predecessor in office, being six feet tall.

Otto, who was now an ordinary seaman, had taken a whole hour out of his watch below to come and scrub the floors of the mates’ rooms for him—and all because he had been able to chat with Otto in German. The sailors had professed to scorn the language, but his knowledge of it had given him a prestige, which was increased when he tied intricate knots Mr. Silva had taught him. Neither of these accomplishments had received adequate recognition in Hale’s Turning. At last Aunt Verona’s Mondays and Wednesdays were bearing fruit—as everything instigated by Aunt Verona had a

way of doing. At the least they had won him a powerful ally in the fore-castle.

Those floors! The saloon and the captain's bedroom and bathroom were spotless—a pleasure to do them out. But the mates! They chewed tobacco. On the floor, within convenient reach, were brass receptacles—but the mates were appallingly bad shots! Whenever it came time to scrub those two tiny floors, Paul found it necessary to think about something miles away, or hum strenuously—not too strenuously, for in this new world somebody was always asleep—while he slathered and brushed and slapped; for if he let himself dwell on the situation in hand—well, it meant another hasty exit, and one couldn't *always* pretend to be looking over the side for jelly-fish!

After the third or fourth day, the see-sawing had become less annoying, and the emergency pilot-crackers crumbled to powder in his pockets. But every day he discovered new areas of brass to be polished. The people who had fitted forth the *Clytemnestra* had shown a maddening partiality for this metal. It covered the silly dashboards that blocked progress from cabin to cabin; it embellished every door; it encircled every port-hole; it was twisted into fantastic settings for lamps and barometers, with myriad angles and crevices that caught the white paste and defied your efforts to dislodge it, whereupon you delivered yourself, *sotto voce*, of robust oaths which would have startled the eaves of Hale's Turning, but which seemed meet and fitting at sea.

That he *could* swear with an untroubled conscience illustrated the quality of this new plane of existence. Here oaths and ribaldries that would formerly have crisped his hair had no more consequence than the spray which leapt over the sides. Like spray they evaporated, leaving a tang of salt which was not unpleasant—he

even licked his arms, as Mr. Silva's cow licked rock salt in the corner of the pasture.

In Hale's Turning such allusions had menaced the neat precarious cohorts of his childish ideals, like vandal dogs among tin soldiers. They had riled waters which, since the dawn of consciousness, had been limpid. Walter's stories, the minister's patronage, the evangelist's religious debauchery, Miss Mason's myopic dogmatism, the head master's coercion, had aroused his scorn, because they fell below the twenty-four-carat standard of fitness that prevailed in the privacy of Aunt Verona's kitchen. Thrust into a civilization adapted to the needs of little Nova Scotia at large, and bereft of the touchstone of Aunt Verona's interpretative faculty (even Aunt Verona had not assayed half the specimens of truth-ore he might have submitted), he had been shocked by the divergence between his notion of true gold and the base alloy in public currency. Having been nourished for twelve years on dishes seasoned to his palate, then brusquely confronted with dishes from which he had been spared by guardian angels, he had been nauseated. He had eyed them with the candour of a child whose idealistic development had not been hampered, and had immediately detected adulterations, which he with child-like inexorableness condemned. To have accepted the dishes would have meant swallowing the adulterations for the sake of a few honest currants and cloves, or persuading himself that adulterated food was the most wholesome, as all the other adolescents seemed to be doing. But such a course would have been a repudiation of Aunt Verona's kitchen, would have implied that its eclecticism had been some sort of hoax, a sham as petty as the talk of gold cobble-stones in heaven. That constituted a *reductio ad absurdum*, for nothing in life could shake his faith in Aunt Verona's kitchen. Whether the method of living he had learnt there were right or wrong

it was at least the only method possible for him, and for no conceivable bribe would he think of going back to the beginning and starting all over again.

He could improve his method, adapt it to his growth, but he could no more change it than he could change the colour of his eyes. *Tiens!* Phœbe, the day of the party, had been in doubt about the colour of his eyes and to be on the safe side had given out that they were "Uh—blue," like all the other vague eyes in the world. Similarly, society, in doubt about the nature of his method of life, had, to be on the safe side, sought to make him conform to a rule-of-thumb method fit only for bullies and dunces and nonentities incapable of self-navigation. In Aunt Verona's kitchen, year by year, he had felt his theme becoming clearer, stronger, more soaring; his long hours of practice and his miscellaneous reading, his days of German and French, his ambling talks with Mr. Silva and engrossing arguments with Mark Laval, his sentimental exploits and solitary wanderings in the fields, his excursions into the world of day-school and church and his nightly draughts from Aunt Verona's well of wisdom—all had contributed harmonies, rhythms, and sonorities to the theme, and he felt that a clearly defined movement in the vast composition had come to an end with Aunt Verona's death. In Halifax he had hoped to commence a new movement which, if not a variation on the original theme, should at least put forward a theme in keeping with it and develop the opening ideas in some progressive manner. Instead, he had heard but feeble reiterations of out-grown configurations drowned in a discordant chorus.

Whereas here, on the scudding sea, he was in a position to sing forth his theme "full organ." Here the raw materials of life were at hand, to be dealt with as instinct, and not arbitrary authority, should dictate. Authority in this little world was a force which directed

you to "do" a brass knob again because you had done it badly the first time, which reminded you to moisten the linen before pressing it, which told you to look sharp and scolded if the soup was cold—a force which was usually reasonable, tolerably kind, irksome of course, but quite understandable at its worst, a force which in no sense meddled with your theories, which made no indecent assaults on your principles, which never obliged you to climb down from the walls of your mental castle to be a mere "dirty rascal." Ideals were hurled at you here, and you took your choice, without coercion; your convictions were scoffed at by burly, good-natured grown-ups, but you were not asked to report to the captain "at three o'clock" and retract them.

True enough, in this world you performed many acts for the sake of what the French master had called *esprit de corps*. You lent a hand at the main brace, for instance, if you happened to be on deck when the mate was wearing ship—or you ran up to the poop and manipulated the main royal and upper topgallant braces all by yourself. But that sort of co-operation didn't cheapen you in your own estimation, as the *j'ai-tu-as-il-a* sort most certainly did. On the contrary, lending a hand on deck, humble and brawny co-operation though it was, added a pleasant new sonority to your theme, and certainly did more for your muscles than dipping and lunging in Gym to the tune of "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" or "Put me off at Buffalo."

Moreover, in this world you learned plenty of things from the beginning: you learned, for instance, that there was no such thing as the "key of the keelson," and that you had been sent to ask the old man for it merely that a dozen tarry and salty men-babies might split their sides with laughter at your greenness, but you were much more willing to learn useless things of this sort than the useless or pernicious things Miss Mason

had to teach, for in the former case there was no question of betraying a miraculously gifted aunt.

It was with some such inventory as this, though the realization of it was present to him in the nebular form of feeling rather than the precision of formulated thought, that Paul accounted for his nonchalance in the face of bloody oaths and smutty stories, and he breathed deep draughts of his freedom as he sat in the bows of the barque and gazed far out at the horizon. When his mind went back to the life he was forswearing, it went straight to the little village, without pausing in the painful city. He pictured Aunt Verona's twisted smile and kind eyes. He saw the glass monuments flashing at Becky's ears, and heard her unearthly growlings give place to the cadences of "Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile, a long wa-ays from ho-o-ome"—Becky whose bursts of song were more musical to the inch than Miss Todd's *Ave Maria's* to the yard—poor gurgling Gertrude who called him "Paul dear."

He wistfully recalled the night when he had stolen roses from the Ashmill gardens and kept a bud for Phœbe Meddar. His tenderness toward Phœbe had in no wise suffered at the hands of the boy who outmanœuvred him. Phœbe burying her straight little nose in Walter's bouquet was as precious to him as Phœbe in any other pretty pose. For that matter he earnestly guessed she had loved the blossoms because they were lovely, not because Walter had given them to her.

And Gritty—vulgar, loyal, tigerish, inimitable Gritty! She had got the letter before this, and all Hale's Turning must have heard. Dr. Wilcove might even at this moment be holding a pow-wow with the head master while he, Paul Minas, *alias* Paul Laval, was—according to the second mate—"somewheres about the same latitude as Baltimore." Rather rough on old boy Wilcove—but he would soon forget about his troublesome ward and pass

the collection plate till Kingdom Come, while Miss Todd's G's grew squeakier and squeakier and the minister served up the réchauffé sermons of his youth.

He left his anchor seat to lean over the iron railing, gazing into the liquid mountains that flung themselves up against the curving bow. Three miles deep! He tried to think his way down to the bottom. From Hale's Turning to Bridgetown was nine miles—a third of the distance would be as far as the shanty where the blind Indian made baskets out of sweet grass and the gipsies camped in summer. Down, down—he could think down as far as the distance from Aunt Verona's to the schoolhouse—down, down—to the church and Miss Todd's and up the hill? No, his mind wouldn't sink any farther than Gritty's gate, where a demure little girl was saying, "I'm sorry about your auntie, Paul."

The turquoise strip had expanded. The water was changing from steel grey to steel blue. And the ship drove on, while one's thoughts glided and circled like the gulls, without getting tired or lost. On and on unflaggingly towards the blue horizon. The *Clytemnestra* was abandoning the autumnal rigours of the north for the south's warm promise, bearing one towards knowledge and achievement, like the kindly white bear in the tale called *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*.

A resounding bell made him jump. Good Lord! Quarter to four. That uproar in the forecastle was Fritz calling the first mate's watch. The old man would be looking for his tea, and might peek into the pantry and discover the bottle of limejuice swiped from the storeroom!

He descended the iron ladder, running the length of the main deck till he came to the mainsail-sheet stretched across his route. When it was slack, he balanced on it, for the fun of being jerked into the air as the bellying sail snapped it taut. A black kitten was playing

“Mouse” with a frayed end of manilla, trying vainly to make Mother evince a spark of interest. Paul thought of Becky’s black baby whom he had once tried so hard to visualize in heaven—a little coon angel! Would the old cat sit blinking on the fife-rail if her piccaninny should pounce a few inches too far and go shooting through the scupper hole?

From the grating which ran forward from the poop to the standard compass, Paul suddenly noticed the old man frowning down at him.

“What about my tea, steward?” he inquired.

“Yes, sir, in a minute. It’s drawing.”

This was inaccurate, but the young steward was confident of being able to smuggle the empty teapot to the galley under his loose jacket. Just so, a young organist had known how to improvise a modulation bridging his private reverie with the celebration of a rite.

2

On and on, striving toward the south but ever frustrated by winds which made it necessary to veer south-south-west or south-east-by-east. Paul had mastered the psychology of those that go down to the sea in ships and was no longer surprised to hear his mates curse the old man in one breath for making them unbend stout sails and replace them by worn, fair-weather sails, then, in the next breath, commend him for his thrift. And when, after thoughtful examination of some speck on the horizon, the old man gave an order to take in the royals and topgallantsails, and perhaps even the foresail and mainsail, Paul knew that the incarnadined phrases dropped by the men clambering up the shrouds like tired gorillas, while ostensibly aimed at the old man’s head, were in reality meant for the capriciousness of fate. The expedition with which they took in sail proved deep-

seated if grudging faith in their captain's *flair* for a storm.

Once, at dead of night, when Paul was seated on the hatch amidships listening to Otto's tales of schooldays in Bremen, the old man made a portentous appearance on deck, his pyjamas looming in the moonlight. A moment later the second mate was roused and the watch below turned out. Grumbling and adjusting their sheath knives, the men straggled forth and took to the rigging. Then the moonlight was cut off as when a slide is drawn across a dark-lantern, the vessel shivered, a cold breath crept into pockets of canvas, and soon there was a commotion aloft, a clanking and flapping and knocking of blocks and tackle that reminded Paul of a panic in a stable. The ship heeled over steeply and drove ahead. Paul remembered the open ports in the cabin and flew aft to screw them to. On his return the wind rushed at him. The shrouds hummed like tuning forks and from perches high above the ghostly wall of canvas came faint falsetto yohoings mingled with an affrighting flow of blasphemy, which was drowned in the increasing roar of wind and sea.

Even in the shelter of the main deck, Paul had difficulty in gaining the mate's side to help with the letting out and making fast of lines, and when the situation had been saved and the yards gleamed faintly like the limbs of a dancing skeleton, while human insects groped their way along slack footholds imprisoning ends of rope, the mate stooped and bellowed in his ear, "Clumsy bastards, this squall has put the fear of God into 'em!" Whereupon Paul divined that the same holy emotion had penetrated into the heart of the mate, and he wondered, as he clung to a stanchion for support, whether this "squall" might not compare favourably with the cataclysmal hurricanes that had struck other ships.

Although the poop was out of bounds to anyone but

the old man, the helmsman, and the officer on duty, Paul for once ventured to ascend the steps. The captain stood beside the binnacles, his grim, vigilant, bearded face revealed in the glow of the lamps. Belatedly Paul's sense of duty revived and he dived into the companion-way to fetch the old man's oilskins and seaboots. These were donned without a word of acknowledgment, but Paul knew that his thoughtfulness was appreciated, and accepting the abnormal circumstances as a special license remained at the break of the poop, clinging to the rail and bracing himself against the blast. The old man had altered the course, letting the ship drive before the storm.

A crackle of lightning, as bright as though it had been touched off by a photographer, revealed the denuded outline of the vessel, making her seem as grotesquely tiny as she had, in the dark, seemed gigantically big. With only the topsails and staysails set, floundering in foam-tipped seas of greenish putty she reminded Paul of a little ship in a bottle, like the model Otto was making for him. Before he could account for this discrepancy there came a grinding, splintering, exploding crash, as though all heaven had been riven asunder. He crouched in the belief that a mast had given way and would come down with its trappings of wood and steel to annihilate him. Impossible that mere thunder could be so close, so ear-splitting and heart-shaking! He waited with tense muscles for the next flash, and rejoiced in the deluge that swept across the decks and drenched him to the skin.

Until dawn he maintained his position on the poop, absorbed in the ruthless spectacle, exultantly aware of his puniness, glorying in the thought that, with a slightly increased concentration of wrath, the elements might engulf him in one swirl of wreckage. Tons of water tossed themselves on the deck below and, failing to stave in the tarpaulined hatches, seethed from scupper to scup-

per in search of exits, that they might return to the assault in more overwhelming force. If they only would! Paul caught himself "rooting" for the wind and waves, inciting them to greater and greater violence. He was almost sure that years hence, when he was skipper of some fine ship, he would recall this occasion and say, "I mind one night aboard the old *Clytemnestra*——"

By the time the first grey streaks of light were stealing into the dishevelled sky, the wind, although it would still have seemed hurricanic in other circumstances, had abated, and only the colossal seas were animated by the hope of smashing the toy man had sent to defy them. The captain had gone below, and Paul reluctantly followed to snatch a little sleep. In the musty corridors he had a different impression of the storm. The sides were trembling with each brutal attack, and the waves, sliding upwards, smothered the ports with a sickly gurgle. In his cabin, books and "gear" of all sorts had been flung to the floor and his canvas chair was upside down in a corner. With the fore and aft pitching, the lamp in its brass socket strove to turn somersaults. What if the captain had not appeared on deck during that talk with Otto—how long ago it seemed! Would the mate have seen the danger in time?

Paul shivered. The muffled uproar lost its glamour—it was rather like being buried alive—and he no longer desired the storm to do its worst. Water had forced its way into the cabin, soaking strips of carpet—and that meant extra work. He threw aside his drenched garments, towelled himself, and got into pyjamas—a cast-off suit of the old man's well reefed.

It had been the most exciting night of his life, and he was tired.

On and on. Until propitious northern "Trades" were encountered, the pencil in the chart-room recorded a sharp zigzag. Then, to a point near the equator, the

course proceeded in a straight line, representing blue, golden, foam-flecked days when steady progress had made for a settled routine. When the Trade Winds petered out, a tropical languor stole over the ship, and she could do nothing but roll in the long glassy swell under an ardent sun, while the sails, damp from swift recurring downpours, slapped against masts and cordage, then, as the vessel dipped forward, filled out with their own dead weight, drawing in the slack sheets with a whip-like snap. The rudder punctuated the long rhythms by dull kicks that sounded like the distant slamming of a barn door.

See-saw, see-saw—but it was now the drowsy teetering of a “painted ship upon a painted ocean.” How those sullenly memorized verses of *The Ancient Mariner* came to glowing life! One day Paul caught a mollycoddle, which Otto said was nearly as big as an albatross, by means of a baited, triangular ring of tin, into a corner of which it thrust its hooked beak. Keeping the line taut, he had drawn the bird aboard. Once on deck it was unable to fly away, because there was no air purchase for its wings. It declined food and drink. The black kitten, peering around a corner of the house, humped its back at the apparition of a ten-foot spread of wing, and ran for its life, hiding in the hollow of the bowsprit under the forecastle head. Paul finally lifted the bewildered bird to the rail and it flew away, little the worse for its adventure. He had, nevertheless, felt guilty during its captivity, and that night dreamt it hung about his neck while Chips and the cook cursed him with fever-glazed eyes.

Merciless heat, a soft azure sky, towers of canvas mirrored in a field of gently undulating sapphire—and, on boatswain-chairs hung over the sides, men scraped and hammered at flakes of rust, applying great swathes of vermilion paint. At close range, if you stood on the

fat iron bits and gazed into the sea, you could detect an amethyst tinge in the water as the rays of the sun probed down, revealing in the depths flecks and shreds, like the motes in sunbeams. You looked into the heart of a circle of mixed water and light, warmest and most amethystine at the centre and becoming less translucent, and colder in tint, towards the rim of vision, like the misty halos surrounding street lamps. Then perhaps an olive shadow would writhe across the circle, and you would tease yourself by imagining that you *had*, after all, obeyed an impulse to tie the end of a lee brace about your waist and dive overboard for a swim. If you had! Ugh! For however cautiously those shadowy monsters might approach a bait of salt pork, you had no assurance that they were abstinent in the case of cabin-boys seductively browned by the sun!

Swansen, the Swede—the old man referred to all foreigners as “dis-and-datters”—was drawing bucketfuls of water which Otto poured down a pipe leading to the captain’s bathroom. The sun wrapped itself about its victims. For twenty-four hours there had been no stirring of air, except for little rushes caused by the sails as they collapsed against the shrouds. The ship rocked like some canopied cradle in a bowl of jelly. The captain, whose hobby was sailmaking, was seated on the poop with needle, beeswax and palm, at work on a mending job.

The tank was filled, Otto screwed down the brass plate, and as he pattered forward, his enormous, bare feet stuck to the tar that bubbled up between the smooth planks. He seemed unaware of it. He was incredibly tough, as he was incredibly tall, ugly, powerful, and good-natured. His face was distorted in a friendly grin that revealed gaps between his teeth and wrinkled the narrow space between his piggy blue eyes and reddish curls. Swansen had drawn two buckets more than necessary. Otto

picked them up and was about to descend from the poop when Paul ran to the foot of the steps and begged for a shower-bath. After glancing towards the old man, Otto obligingly emptied the buckets over the naked shoulders of his protégé. The water was colder than it looked. Paul gasped and cavorted about the broiling deck, leaving a trail and making a clumping noise with the slop-chest slippers into which his feet were thrust. Then he grabbed his basket, vaulted to Otto's shoulders, and was borne forward.

Dinner was not yet ready to be dished up, and to escape the heat of the galley Paul mounted the forecastle head to look for the sail which had been sighted during the morning. It was still on the horizon, gleaming like a tiny pearl. In the absence of a breeze, both ships were at the mercy of whatever current there might be. After weeks of isolation the prospect of passing another ship was of the essence of romance.

While serving dinner, Paul heard the captain report a change in the barometer that gave promise of a breeze, rather than a mere repetition of futile showers. And, by the time he had finished washing up, a ripple was passing like a film over the sapphire, broken by a million golden glints. The ship responded, and for a welcome change slid through the water, overtaking great opalescent jelly-fish—"Portuguese men-o'-war"—and leaving a little wake of bubbles astern. "About three knots," Paul estimated, as he leaned over the side and shook the crumbs from the tablecloth.

The sail locker was a most satisfactory retreat. It could be ventilated by two portholes, and the folds of canvas provided a safe, comfortable privacy in which to consume stolen fruits: tinned cherries and grapes and asparagus. All that was lacking was an adequate supply of books. The dog's-eared paperbound volumes from the mates' cabins were dismal fare, and the captain's

shelves were richer in works on tides, soundings and cloud formations than in works of fiction and poetry.

In the beginning the captain had been a little forbidding in manner, and Paul, to his dying day, would not forget the look that had been turned on him when he had so far forgotten himself as to sit on a corner of the bench at the dining-table while the captain regaled the mate with an enthralling yarn. The old man hadn't reprimanded him in words, but had simply stopped talking and waited, in surprise but not anger, and Paul had risen, a wave of shame surging over him. His cheeks burned and his heart had seemed to leap out. The captain had resumed the tale, and Paul had walked quickly from the saloon with his tray, passed the pantry-door, and gained the deck with some confused intention of flinging himself and the crockery into the hissing sea, to perish with the death of his self-esteem. He might grow up to be a criminal and be condemned by his peers, but never again could he experience quite such an overwhelming sense of humiliation as he had been reduced to by that mute reminder of his menial estate. It was the first time he had thought of it as menial, and it had indeed been rendered so by his witless lapse.

A few days later there had been a momentous interview. Running to his cabin with his mind full of some errand, Paul had found the captain examining the big gold watch which for once he had forgotten to conceal. The sight gave him the feeling in his spine that he might have experienced had an umbrella suddenly snapped shut over his head. The old man was staring at the Dutch inscription inside the case as though he were seeing a ghost.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"My father left it to me," Paul confessed, through sheer inability to say otherwise. What excuse could he offer for having it with him, when he had sworn in Hali-

fax that he had pawned all his possessions? The captain would think him a thief as well as a liar, yet he could no more have lied at this juncture than he could have poisoned the food.

"Was your father Captain Andrew Minas?" the old man asked.

"Yes, sir."

"How many other lies have you told me?"

Paul's eyes dropped. "None, sir, since leaving port."

The captain replaced the watch on the dresser. "See here, boy," he admonished, "you've done your work ship-shape, and I'm not finding fault. But you take and count ten before ever you go telling me any more fantastical yarns. What's more, don't leave *that* lying about. It ain't as though it was an ordinary timepiece."

"No, sir."

"Away now to that job of varnishing."

As he was leaving, Paul couldn't resist one question. "Did you know my father, sir?"

"Can't say I ever knew a drunken lumber-jack by the name of Laval," replied the old man.

Since that memorable day the captain's attitude had been less forbidding, though he was as impersonal as ever, and Paul redoubled in diligence. But the captain had made new concessions and Paul felt that an ordinary steward would not have been given lessons in the science of navigation nor allowed to take the sun with an extra sextant. The old man had explained the chronometers and compass, had entrusted him with the log-line, and even let him take the wheel on occasion. He had also turned over to Paul the slop-chest accounts, and every Saturday night, when the men came slouching aft for tobacco, clay pipes, knives, caps, and dungarees, it was Paul who acted as shopkeeper and importantly noted the debits in the captain's book.

Paul also recognized a special concession in the Cap-

tain's proposal that he should unlock the old square piano and play during spare moments in the dog-watches. And once he thought he detected a twinkle in the old man's eye when, at table, the mate had spoken of the *Brandywine*, the ship which Mark Laval had thought Paul owned.

Paul lingered in the sail locker reading and ruminating, though it was time to take in the washing and see to the old man's tea. He must open a new tin of fancy biscuits, and set aside some of the chocolate-coated ones for himself. His conscience condoned petty larcenies in the storeroom. In the first place, he could not stomach salt beef and porridge and bacon, and had to make up for such staples of sea diet by extra rations of tinned food. Besides, the captain always left the chocolate-coated biscuits on the plate. The cigars he had smuggled forward to Otto? Well, he hadn't taken more than four, and after all the captain hadn't paid for them; they were "come-shaw."

When he returned to the deck he found that the breeze had pleasantly transformed his circumscribed world. While the tea was steeping he ran to look for the sail. To his joy it occupied a greater space on the horizon. Apparently it was coming north, and as the wind was abeam for both ships they should, at the present rate, pass each other before dark.

The appearance of a vessel was a phenomenon sufficient to give a festive air to the evening gathering on the fore hatch. After supper Paul hurried forward to hear scraps of talk. It was a strangely assorted group. Chips, an old Dane from Holstein, had migrated in his youth to escape the German yoke. In his shop, half buried in shavings, he had told Paul of the tyrannies borne by his family, and solemnly prophesied a day of deliverance for Denmark. These accounts had stimulated the cook to similar tales of oppression in Finland. Rather than submit to Russian rule, he had crossed to

Stockholm and eventually gone to sea in Swedish vessels. Swansen, the Swede, showed no particular devotion to the country in which the Finn had taken refuge, but planned to make his way eventually to Seattle and become a good American.

For Paul, the situation of Otto was the most interesting, for it involved a curious blend of sentiment and compulsion. Otto had run away from school five years previously, and within the next six months would have to return to Germany for a period of military or naval training. The captain had promised him his discharge on arrival in Australia.

Paul had been a little shocked to learn that young men in European countries were conscripted in this fashion. It made him feel slightly apprehensive, as he had been wont to feel in the days of estrangement when he had seen John Ashmill and Skinny Wiggins making snowballs with stone kernels and storing them in the fastnesses of a snow fort. The thought of obligatory training was hard to reconcile with his preconceived notions of Otto's fatherland; an abode of music and poetry; the eclectic land where Aunt Verona had passed an exquisite youth; where Werther had loved and sighed and wept; where kindly millers ground corn which kindly bakers made into cake, "*der immer den Kindern besonders gut schmeckt.*"

"Why do they make you train?" he had asked Otto.

"So we'll know how to fight when the time comes."

"Is there going to be a war?"

"There are always wars."

"But why should any country want to go and fight?"

"To protect its honour."

"How? Are there good countries and bad ones?"

"Yes."

"What bad country is there for your country to fight?"

"France is bad. And England."

"It isn't! They aren't!"

Otto smiled his good-natured smile.

“Do *you* want to fight against France and England?” Paul insisted.

“It isn’t me. I have no quarrel with them.”

“Then why do you go back to train?”

“Because my country commands me. *Was kann ich dafür?*”

“You can just plain refuse,” Paul retorted. “*Das kannst du dafür!*”

“Then my poor old father would have to pay a fine to the authorities, and I would be a disgrace to him.”

“I should think he’d rather pay a fine than have you turned into a slave. *I* wouldn’t let any country boss *me* about!”

“You would do as all the others did.”

“Not unless I felt like it! I’d run away. Why, you ran away yourself, from school. How could you do that, if you’re so fussy about obeying authorities?”

“Running away from school is different. It affects only oneself. Running away from military service affects the country.”

“Do you mean to say you’re willing to be bullied by your country just because it may need you to help kill people of a country which *it* thinks is bad, but which isn’t bad at all? I suppose you would have stayed at school and let the teachers bully you, had the fatherland decided its honour could be saved only if all the kids in Germany learned square root and decimals!”

Otto was unmoved by this outpour.

“Besides,” continued Paul severely, “fighting does no earthly good. Liars and thieves can win fights, if they’re strong enough, and they usually are.” He was thinking bitterly of frays behind the schoolhouse in Hale’s Turning. “And it’s liars and thieves who prate about honour. I don’t believe honest people worry about theirs.”

He recalled an occasion when Skinny Wiggins had

pinned him to the wall and attempted to frighten him into conceding a moral advantage to which, as every boy within earshot knew, Skinny had not the slightest right. "Am I a liar? Am I a liar?" Skinny had reiterated with idiotic insistence. "Yes, you are," Paul had truthfully replied, and his valour had merely earned him a bloody nose.

He was strangely perturbed by this issue and pondered it long after his talk with Otto. Among other difficult points, just what did "country" mean? There might be bad kings and good kings, but surely a country was only land occupied by a collection of people, good and bad mixed! Suppose all the people in France went to live in Germany, and all the people in Germany went to live in France. Would the fact of their being on French soil make Germans bad, or would the advent of Germans make French soil good? He feared there was some terrible fallacy at the base of Otto's contentions.

Moreover, if France and England were bad, how could such splendid books be written in London and Paris? Englishmen and Germans must be very much alike. Otto should realize that, after having been two years on a British ship.

More than ever Paul felt he must see all countries at close range, giving a wide berth to reefs of national prejudice, which was too like the clannish braggadoccio of the schoolyard. He had once heard Skinny Wiggins boasting to Mark Laval, "Aw, you dirty Canuck, my father can do your father, one hand tied behind his back!" Mark, in point of fact, had forthwith blacked Skinny's eye, and Might, for once, had been Right.

However Otto might reflect the conscriptive policy of European diplomats, the worst enemy of his fatherland could not have taken offence at any act of his. Chips, for all his anti-German bias, never hesitated to supply Otto with wood and tools for his "models," while Fritz, a

gigantic German in the second mate's watch, ruled the forecandle by sheer radiation of goodwill.

Surrounding Otto on the hatch were seamen of various nationalities: the once beery hobo, who was Irish-Canadian; a dour young Cornishman known as "Dismal Jimmy"; a Scot; a Frisian who spoke a weird dialect; and a decrepit "hard case" from Cardiff who, though past the age of mating, beguiled the forecandle with tales of his amative exploits and the exploits of an amazing creature in Sydney known as Dirty Dora, the Sailors' friend.

That such an assortment could chat unconstrainedly, drinking like all the beasts of the jungle at a common pool which slaked their thirst for yarns, was a source of wonderment to Paul. Each had a grudge of some sort, yet when they were socially foregathered the grudges were sheathed, and differences of opinion led to no manifestation more hostile than a satiric grin, a humorous broadside, or an incredulous hitching up of trousers.

"M'n dee got to be shipmates togedder," was the philosophic carpenter's explanation to Paul. "Don't do to go monkey-shinin' when dee're all in de same boat." But Chips, a teetotaller, was inclined to saddle Rum with the responsibility for the world's disasters. "When dee get ashore and get drunk," he moralized, "dee suddenly remember dee're a different nationality as de oders, and dee start breakin' each oder's heads. And next day de ol' man got to go to de police court to find 'em. Men is more stoopid as animals."

This evening there was certainly no hint of discord. Otto had gone to fetch an accordion, and as if by magic, mouth-organs and concertinas made their appearance. Fritz and Chips sang German words to the tunes. Dismal Jimmy played a Jew's harp. Paul performed on a comb covered with tissue-paper, interrupting the melody now and again to brush his tickled lips. And those who

had no better instrument beat time on stanchions with ringing steel marlin spikes.

Paul winced as the accordions and mouth-organs played major intervals for minor, which they seemed unable to negotiate. But on the whole it was a stirring din. Certainly Otto was a musician, and everybody followed his conducting with zest. A naïve glow was reflected on the stolid faces. Paul recalled Mr. Silva's notion of music as the soul's esperanto. How Mr. Silva would have rejoiced in just such a concert!

When Paul knew the words he abandoned his comb and sang, with the last vestiges of a boyish soprano. Some of the men danced thumpingly together, reminding Paul of the trained bear that came to Hale's Turning every spring. A sailor called Shorty seized him as partner, but Paul couldn't waltz, for Hale's Turning had never countenanced anything so heathenish. He vowed he would learn.

Between selections he kept watch for the approaching ship. From a pearly blot on the horizon she had gradually taken form as a dark hull surmounted by a huge spread of canvas. For a time she had loomed high and higher, then the breeze had failed. The sky was flushed with an ardent rose screened by low-lying, etiolated brown clouds. High above the clouds were fields of pale jade and primrose, and near the horizon were palette swirls of lilac deepening to purple. Paul had feared that night would cut off the strange ship, when the man who had gone to take up his lookout duties reported lights ahead. At this announcement, he flew to the side and found the vessel only a short distance away. For hours she had seemed stationary, and now she was visibly creeping near.

The concert was abandoned and the crew came to watch—deprecatingly. Paul attributed their attitude to diffidence. He knew they were excited, to a man.

As the vessel slowly advanced, it was possible to make

out four masts, and finally her rig—a four-mast barque, carry skysails on the main and mizzen masts. Otto and Fritz recognized in her lines a German build, and the others were obliged on principle to differ. Then a perfect hush descended on the world, broken only by the faint crisp lapping of water and the sighing of canvas.

The brown clouds had faded and were now stretched across the horizon like patches of ash over the glowing end of a cigar. Twilight was descending swiftly, and as the last hint of gold dissolved in the west the unknown ship, a towering black silhouette, came regally abeam of the *Clytemnestra*, not more than three or four ship-lengths away. At long intervals she inclined, like a queen acknowledging homage, her mastheads tracing imaginary curves against the vault. The horizon showed dully wine-coloured in the spaces between her sails. Little men were visible on deck. Faint strains of music could be heard across the water—the music of an accordion.

Suddenly Fritz climbed a few steps into the rigging and broke the unearthly silence with a booming inquiry in German, his hands held to his face as a megaphone.

Ears strained to catch the reply. A thrill shot through Paul and a lump came to his throat.

Deliberately, Fritz boomed out another question, not in the voice full of humps and hollows that he employed in talking, nor the jumbled falsetto with which he marked time when pulling at the head of the braces. It was an even tone that stretched out like a wire. And after tense seconds of waiting a similar voice, like a ghostly echo, made the return journey with answers and reciprocal inquiries. Paul asked himself how Fritz dared stand forth in the presence of his mates and give such a personal exhibition; there was something gloriously immodest in the physical outpouring of sound. Paul felt that the *Clytemnestra* must be blushing for the prosaic nature of the information conveyed.

"It's the *Dornröschen*," Fritz announced. "Bound for Hamburg. Thirty-one days out from Montevideo."

In a few moments the ship had passed. Paul's eyes regretfully followed her. Hamburg, where his father had got Aunt Verona's piano! "The Sleeping Beauty," with twenty-five or thirty men aboard—another little floating world—like the *Clytemnestra* a living thing, losing herself in the softly encroaching gloom! It was beautiful; his throat ached and his eyes smarted from the sheer loveliness of the experience.

The last hint of colour had gone. Night closed in and all that could be seen of the strange ship was a pin-point of light at the stern. She had vanished as quietly as a dream. The presence of another ship on this lonely ocean revived, for a moment, his old fear of the dark.

He walked slowly aft. The concert had been half-heartedly resumed, although the second mate's watch was preparing to turn in. As heard from the after quarters, the music had a haunting appeal. Distance lent enchantment to the harsh accordions.

Hai-li, hai-lo; hai-li, hai-lo;
Bei uns da geht's immer also.

The little tune was vulgar but somehow fitting. It was even beautiful, rendered so by the homely cravings it satisfied. Just such a tune had come across the water from the mysterious *Dornröschen*. And there were still many weeks of isolation before the cape could be rounded and the coast of Western Australia sighted.

He wondered if there were some lad on that other ship—cabin-boy or apprentice—who had also been impressed by the beauty of the encounter, or had the old *Clytemnestra*, with her three masts and her daubs of red lead,

looked too shabby against the eastern sky? He wondered if that other boy, provided he existed, were wondering if there were any such boy as himself, Paul Minas!

With a strange pang he hoped so.

V

I

ONE night early in January Paul kept an independent watch on the house deck, perched on the gunwale of a spare lifeboat. He would have preferred his favourite daytime seat on the anchor, but there was a rule against distracting the attention of the lookout. Despite a moderate fair breeze, the heat generated during the day still enveloped the ship. It was as though the gloom of the Indian Ocean were made of warm, impalpable wool. Some of the men had brought their bedding out on the hatches. Paul could not sleep when there was a prospect of a light being sighted before dawn.

To think that the goal was less than a hundred miles distant, that with daylight the outlines of a new coast should be visible! The antipodes—the other side of the world! And only a year or two ago, it had been difficult to grasp the conception that people in these latitudes did not feel like flies walking on a ceiling!

On and on, with never a sign of lagging provided there was the ghost of a breeze to support her—good old *Clytemnestra*! A little weary, perhaps, but it was not her fault if barnacles thickened on her hull. Perhaps she was looking forward to the prospect of dry-dock as eagerly as any of her thoughtless crew looked forward to a fried egg and a pint of bitters in a pub.

After nearly four months of unbroken horizons, the thought of the coming day was overpoweringly sweet.

The four months had been wonderful enough in their own way. During that period Paul felt he had crossed the invisible meridian separating childhood from adolescence. Just as the *Clytemnestra* had brought him into a region of bright new stars and a more potent sun, so she had mysteriously brought him into a new personal hemisphere; the sun of his individuality bore down upon him more directly, and his vague desires shone forth in constellations. The second movement in the composition of his life was well under way; the opening theme had been declaimed and sonorously amplified, and this lonely night watch was a sort of mental recitative, making a transition to the variation which would begin on the morrow, a variation which he could not quite foretell. That made the waiting breathlessly expectant.

He was now thirteen years of age, but the moral experience of several years had been crowded into the interval since his twelfth anniversary. He felt much older in mind and body than when he had signed the articles, yet he enjoyed a freedom and buoyancy of spirit he had never known in those years which grown-ups referred to as the happiest. Men spoke lightly of care-free childhood. He regarded childhood as a period of bitter perplexity, of groping fears, of haunted, tear-stained nights, of tortuously developed principles and convictions, of brutal misunderstanding.

What price the far-off nights when he had cried himself sick at the fear that his mother had been buried alive! The endless days when he had striven vainly to overcome his enmity towards John Ashmill! The months of feud against Walter Dreer with whom he yearned to become reconciled! The weeks when he had struggled with monsters called into being by Walter's vile insinuations! Happiness, when every morning he had awakened to the sense of some ordeal! Happiness, when he had never entered the doors of a school-

house without a trace of dread, nor passed out through the gates without feeling reprieved! If running breathlessly home from school, slamming the gate on a barbaric world, and seeking protection in a kitchen peopled with fantastic images could be accounted as happiness, he had had happy moments—but at what cost! Had glib grown-ups forgotten their own childhood, or had they been different? Probably that was the answer: he, Paul Minas, was a freak.

The four months had wrought a physical change, for he could now perform feats he would never have attempted in Gym. Moreover, his nautical lore had added cubits to his worldly stature. For the first time in his life he felt he occupied a classifiable status. True, he was a sailor with a difference, just as he had been an organist and a scholar with a difference. But being a sailor was a comfortable, inclusive estate in which there was accommodation for all the parts of one's nature difficult to classify.

In his information concerning ships and seafaring there were still vast gaps. At the same time, thanks to the old man and to his own aptitude, he knew more about navigation from the technical point of view than the oldest A.B. in the fore-castle. And he could understand, if not execute, almost any order given on deck. The network of lines and tackle no longer baffled him, and he had ventured as far as the royal yard-arms in his desire to solve puzzles of construction. Ropes that had intrigued him he had followed to their sources, climbing hand over hand, or shinning aloft on converging lines. Once the old man had reprimanded him for attempting to climb a rope which was not supposed to be made fast at the upper end, and which might have come away under his weight. He could steer by the wind or by the compass, except on rough days, when the wheel kicked so hard that his young arms were

overpowered. He had learned how to take dead reckonings and read portents in the sky.

It was an engrossing study, but there had been hours when the monotony oppressed him. He had grown mortally weary of twenty-odd circumscribed minds, the unending yarns which, if not lacking in picturesqueness and variety of detail, were hopelessly similar in tone, being confined to some aspect of sea life or the deeds of seamen on land. His mates had few ideas left with which to surprise him, and Paul had discovered that the element of surprise was as necessary to mental progress as salt was necessary in food.

It was consequently with a very fever of elation that he strained his eyes through the velvety blackness. Fair winds had been blowing for days, following a series of storms encountered south of the Cape of Good Hope. The pencil record in the chart-room showed only a short space between the position at noon and the port of Fremantle. And now a propitious breeze was bearing them straight towards the promised land.

“Birds of variegated plumage abound, but their cries are for the most part raucous. The songsters of European groves are practically unknown in the Commonwealth,” Paul had read, and he wondered if he would see wild parrots perching on telegraph wires. He disliked parrots. But for them the boys of Hale’s Turning would never have lurked around corners waiting to scream out at his approach, “Polly want a cracker, Polly want a cracker!”

He wondered if Australians ate pancakes and corn-meal muffins and frosted walnut cakes. He wondered what Australian candy was like, and marbles and tops. Did they play Nobbies and Lacrosse and Duck on the Rock? Almost any strange custom might prevail in a country where even the seasons were upside down. Fancy being hot and sticky in January! While he was

clad in a cotton shirt, duck trousers and a pair of slippers, Walter Dreer and Gritty Kestrell were coasting down the snowy hill past Miss Todd's, or skating figure eights on the marsh ponds under the railway trestle!

On and on—east of the sun and west of the moon. A man stumbled aft to relieve his mate at the wheel. At intervals came the ghostly call from the bows, "All's well," followed by a gruff acknowledgment.

At midnight the watch changed, but Paul merely snuggled to a more comfortable position on a thwart of the lifeboat. Despite his subdued excitement he was drowsy and thought of curling up in the hanging folds of a lowered staysail, when he was electrified by the cry, "Light ahead."

Feeling that circumstances justified a breach of the regulations, he scrambled down from the house and ran to see for himself. "Blimey!" exclaimed the lookout in a cautious whisper. "It's Gentleman Jim out of 'is bed. Smell the steak and kidney puddin', did 'e?"

"Where is it?" demanded Paul.

"First turnin' on the roight. Sign o' the crown and anchor. Wut you gunna 'ave?"

"Oh shut up, Shorty. Show me the light."

As a protest against the nickname, the lookout snatched Paul up, bore him to the rail, and pointed ahead. "Watch," he directed. In a few moments Paul detected a tiny point lower than the stars and more golden in lustre, which disappeared like some stealthy signal. After long seconds it flashed again—and again.

"At last!" he sighed, as the seaman put him down.

"Oho! Y'ain't old enough to 'ave a woman, you know."

"Is that so? And what could a little shorty like you do with one?"

The reply was entrusted to the toe of an agile boot, but Paul ducked, and from the safety of the iron ladder

thumbed his nose. He found the mate pacing the poop, but didn't dare ask all the questions in his mind, lest he be thought childish.

The next few hours passed slowly, but with dawn came the sight so eagerly awaited—a low, slate-black shadow dividing the sky from an ocean all mother-of-pearl. At six o'clock Paul took tea to the captain's room, and two hours later, when he went forward with the basket, the sun had dispelled the shadows, the water had become a yellowish jade, and the coast was revealed in a sand-coloured stretch, patched with green hollows. White clouds hovered over the hills, and everything was bathed in gold. The *Clytemnestra* had ceased to represent the boundaries of the world, and was now a mere insect crawling painfully over a wrinkled pool. The captain peered through his telescope at a blob of smoke.

"It's a tug already," remarked the mate as he came down to breakfast. "We'll be alongside by noon."

Paul contrived to be on deck when the tow-boat approached within hailing distance. He had never seen a sight more exhilarating than this sturdy tug as she reared and coughed and wallowed in the green waves, belching forth smoke. She was intensely alive, and her personality was not unlike that of an officious sheep-dog.

Thanks to the fair wind, which would have enabled him to sail to the very mouth of the Swan river, the old man drove a sharp bargain with the captain of the tow-boat. To Paul's astonishment his first question, when terms had been settled by the aid of a megaphone, was as to the outcome of "the war." The old man seemed unaccountably pleased that somebody had licked somebody else. Paul had not even known they were fighting; but he was tremendously interested in the discovery that Australians—judging from the captain of the tow-boat—said "sile" for sail.

At the old man's command, Paul ran up to the poop and threw out a sounding line to which one of the deckhands, amiably—and a little patronizingly—smiling, attached a bundle of newspapers. Paul drew the packet aboard, with professional gestures, and the tug, with a clang of bells and a churning of the propeller, plunged forward, preparing to let out her thick hawser.

Paul spread the newspaper on the chart-room desk. Such strange-looking sheets they were—not a bit like the *Halifax Herald*! The captain's form loomed in the companion-way, and Paul ran off to make the beds, debating the mighty, jubilant, breathless alternatives: should he go first to see *Veronique*, or *Hamlet*, or Miss Dolly Castles in *Pinafore*?

2

Never had trees been so green, roofs so red, nor life itself so promising. Even the bare island that lay off the coast had a personality, for "There," said the pilot, "is where the *Orizaba* went down."

The sails were furled. The tow-boat had dropped back and made fast at the side to guide the helpless vessel through the channel of the river. Had water ever been as utterly flat as this? Paul wondered that it could float tall ships.

That vivid brick building on the bank, surmounted by a short mast on which was a time-ball—those vines with purple-blue flowers like the clematis that split down the walls of Gritty's brown house thousands and thousands of miles away—but of a blueness!

The gigantic black-funnelled liner moored to the quay—a P. and O. And ahead of her was a real battle cruiser! The only warship Paul had seen was a wheezy revenue cutter in Halifax. "That's the *Euryalis*," explained the pilot, most satisfactory of men, "the flagship of the Australian squadron."

Slowly past steamers, past warehouses, towards the innermost space of the quay, near the bridge which cut off the navigable portion of the river. It seemed hours before the ship was finally moored, a rat-guard placed on each hawser, the gangway adjusted. The captain had gone ashore with the quarantine officer. Stevedores, ship chandlers, butchers, and grocers were making their way aboard, and dinner was standing cold on the table. Men and horses, a thousand bewildering signs of the life lived on land! Paul was feeling the effect of his vigil, and chafed at the thought that he could not set foot on this enchanted soil until the day's tasks were done, perhaps not then. Moreover, it appeared that one's wages were not paid outright, but in dribblets, at the captain's discretion. For the first time he realized the significance of having signed on for a full voyage, which meant that his discharge and pay-day were contingent upon his returning to the home port, Liverpool.

He was vaguely apprehensive. It would be just like old boy Wilcove to find out what ships had sailed from Halifax on the date of his disappearance. Paul was not sure whether or not Dr. Wilcove had any legal control over him, but the man who was always referred to as his guardian, whatever that implied, might be fussy enough to take some measures toward compelling him to return. What if an Australian policeman should come aboard and march him off to the big P. and O. boat flying the blue Peter! His imagination was fired at the thought of travelling by steam through the Red Sea and being transferred in England to another splendid liner bound for Halifax. But Halifax! And Hale's Turning! And school! Without seeing Australia!

He was tempted to bolt. In this little city—he now knew it *was* little, though from the mouth of the river

it had seemed boundless—he could find something to do, surely. But the old man!

Paul returned to his broom and dust-pan. He couldn't play the old man false, for somehow he was confident the old man wouldn't play *him* false. Contact with the fine sailorliness of his captain had instilled in him a sense of sportsmanship.

Not much chance of getting ashore to-night. But the stevedore had said they might be two months unloading. Then they would have to take on ballast before proceeding to Sydney for a cargo. There was plenty of time, and he was tired. It was strange to be motionless. His bunk would not seem natural without the lulling sea-saw and the creaking of beams. And the ship, made fast to a wharf, her yards projected against the walls of warehouses, seemed to have lost her very identity.

Such quantities of sand as there were in the place! Enough to make the walrus weep! When the wind blew it drove in dusty clouds along the roads. And the low opposite bank of the river was a long stretch of pure sand, broken only by a few scrubby trees and amorphous buildings.

The captain returned at supper time, followed by a man carrying bags of fruit for the cabin table. Paul could read nothing in the old man's countenance, and under the stress of issuing orders the captain seemed oblivious of his existence. Piqued, Paul rang the supper bell with needless vigour. Then, on returning to the pantry, he heard a voice sharply calling, "Steward!"

In his bedroom the captain was sorting out letters for members of the crew. "Take these forward," he ordered. "And these are for you."

Paul picked up two envelopes addressed "Master Paul W. Minas, care Captain Caxton, Br. Barque Clytemnestra, Fremantle, W.A."

A few minutes later, in the pantry, with a sinking heart and tremulous curiosity, he opened them. One was from Dr. Wilcove!

“MY DEAR PAUL,

“Whatever possessed you to play such a prank? However, by the time this reaches you, you will have regretted your impulse as much as we have all regretted it, so I needn't rub it in.”

Regret it, forsooth!

“I trust this will find you none the worse for your voyage.”

None the worse!

“Margaret Kestrell came to see me on receiving your letter. I'm bound to say I'm surprised that you chose to confide in a little girl rather than your guardian. I had had no hint of your difficulties at school until I hurried up to Halifax. It seems that there was misunderstanding on both sides, yet none, I feel sure, that could not have been adjusted.”

“So?” This was an echo of Otto's dialect.

“However, that's a closed chapter. What I now propose, and indeed insist on, is that you return to consult with me concerning your education. You may not realize that as executor of your father's will and that of Miss Windell, I am responsible for properties being administered in your interest until you come of age. So long as we here are responsible for your welfare, the least you can do is to render our task possible. Perhaps you can understand our anxiety, and our wish to regain

the confidence which, perhaps owing to our own negligence, we seem to have forfeited."

Paul felt guilty.

"I am writing to Captain Caxton, who, as you doubtless know, was with your father at the time of his death on the *Brandywine*."

Julius Priest! And the old man hadn't let on!

"I am also sending him a draft for £150——"

Five times fifteen—\$750—Gee-rusalem!

"He will arrange passage home for you. I expect you to write me on receipt of this, and please believe me, my dear Paul,

"Your affectionate guardian."

Paul replaced the letter in its envelope. On returning from the supper table with the remains of the first course—how they had pitched into the fresh beef!—he broke open the other letter:

"DEAR PAUL,

"three cheers my I wisht I was with you The doctor near fainted when I told him he went to halifax and when he come back I made him tell me your address to write to do you have to wear a sailor suit paul when you are comeing back I'm going to run away when I save enough money from my sunday school collection money I hate here papa spanked me for catching me smokeing a pine cone I wunt forget you paul never nor the secrets nor nothing Paul Goodbye X X X O O O from Gritty."

3

When Paul was lighting the lamps that evening the captain looked up from his papers. "They seem to have been worried about you back in Nova Scotia," he commented.

"Yes, sir." The match trembled in Paul's fingers.

"Your cock and bull story put rather a different face on matters, didn't it?"

Paul bristled and drew himself up with a tinge of theatricality. "I hope I've proved how much in earnest I was," he said.

The captain smiled and puffed at his cigar. "You've earned your wages all right. But I'm afraid you'll have to go back."

Paul's eyes smarted, and he had to remind himself that in a day or two he would be wearing long trousers.

"I'd jump overboard rather than go back to Hale's Turning," he retorted.

The captain tapped his cigar ash into a tray, and Paul could no longer control himself.

"Oh, why are you on their side?" he cried. "If you were a friend of my father's, like Dr. Wilcove said, why do you want to send me back to a hateful, rotten, stuffy school? If you do, I'll only run away again where *nobody* can find me, so you might as well not!"

"Do you think your father and mother would have approved of your running away?"

Paul glanced up at the old man with a new interest. "Did you know my mother too, sir?"

"For the matter of that," replied the captain, "I knew you, as well. I was mate with Captain Andrew when he took your mother and you on a voyage to Durban. You were pretty young then. From about one to one and a half."

Paul shrank weakly to a settee, forgetful of his stew-

ardship. His mouth was open, but he had nothing to say. Finally he exclaimed:

“And you knew all the time!”

“Since the day when I saw your father’s watch lying on the table—the watch you forgot to pawn.”

Paul winced at the needless thrust. If the old man only knew how he treasured the keepsake!

“Do you think your mother would have been pleased at the thought of your leaving school so young?”

“How do I know? I don’t think she would have objected if she knew how stupid it was!” His only clue to his mother was through Aunt Verona, and Aunt Verona had always seemed to be on his side. “Do *you* think she would have objected?” he inquired diffidently.

“She was a rare one for books and music. That old piano there used to belong to her.”

So that was why the old man had suggested his playing it in the dog-watches! His own mother’s piano! Verily, life was almost too painfully miraculous. Music was the weak spot in his armour. There had been moments during the long voyage when he had yearned for the big piano in the playroom. But if it must come to a choice between music and the sea, between a life of practising and a life of seeing hundreds of new countries, he could only decide in favour of the latter. In his mind, for months and months, had been running the phrase: “*Qui n’oubliera jamais ces soirées de Munich et de Vienne.*” He, too, must see places that he would never be able to forget. What education could compare with a visit to cities steeped in music and romance, cities which had fostered rare spirits! Besides, education was largely a matter of books. He had learned ten times as much in Aunt Verona’s kitchen as he had learned from Miss Ranston and Miss Hornby.

“I don’t see why I can’t read at sea as well as at school,” he argued.

The captain was non-committal. "Well," he concluded, "it don't do to decide rashly."

Paul felt that this remark might refer to his rashness in having run away. Tears threatened to break through his defences, as he got up from the settee. He was unwilling to leave the matter on such a dubious footing. He was wretched and craved some crumb of encouragement.

"If you were my father, instead of you, sir," he ventured, in husky tones, "would you think me awful for acting the way I have?"

The captain rose from his chair and placed a hand on Paul's shoulder. "Oh, I don't know as I'd go *that* far," he said. "At any rate, if I was your father, instead of me, I'd be a damn sight better man than I *am* . . . He'd a been pleased at the way you've kept the slop-chest accounts and done the brass. And, if he'd a gone for to blame you, you could a reminded him that he run away himself when he was a lad."

"Oh, did he?" Paul's throat ached. He wanted to thank the old man for something, but didn't know what, nor how.

"Better turn in now," advised the captain.

4

The dread that he might be sent home, tinging all his moods during the ensuing days, added a strange poignancy to Paul's impressions. The little town with its narrow streets and low brick buildings was full of marvels. The commonest objects wore an aspect so different from corresponding objects at home that they acquired an abnormal intrinsic interest. Instead of asking for candy you asked for lollies; instead of buying chocolate dudes you bought little cardboard boxes labelled "Fry's" or "Cadbury's." You had to be

wary of half-crowns, for they were deceitfully like florins.

Then the speech of these people! They said “thruppense” for threepence, “frock” for dress, and “gaing” for going. They called ice-cream “hokey-pokey” and served it in little cups made of biscuit. The newsvenders sold queer papers like *Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday* and *Tid-Bits* and when they spoke of “home” they meant England! And such an odd way of pronouncing “home”—as though there were at least two vowels in the middle and no *h* to speak of!

And Miss Green, who arranged entertainments at the Seamen’s Institute, Miss Green who was about thirty and rather thin, Miss Green with whom he might quite easily have fallen in love, had he not already fallen in love with Miss Dolly Castles, the star of that quite too delicious *Pinafore*—to say nothing of Phœbe Meddar, whose image he kept “polishing up so faithfully” in his heart—Miss Green lived in what she called an “upstairs ’ouse!” Most houses here hadn’t any upstairs! And Miss Green had never seen snow! But she had been in a part of the north-west where it was so hot you couldn’t put your hand on a cat’s back—and Paul had asked if the cat burnt her tongue when she tried to lick herself!

There was something quaint about it all, and something heart-catching. Probably it was merely the thought that you might have to turn your back on everything and go home, just when you had set foot on the edge of experience!

The evening at the theatre had been dazzling and faultless. *Hazel Kirke* was tame compared with Dick Dead-eye and Hebe and Josephine and the sisters and cousins and aunts in their pink dresses—no, frocks. “And I polished up the handles so faithfully, that now I’m the Ruler of the Queen’s Navee—” That was *him*, Paul Minas! And the lilt of it! If Gritty could only have been along!

He pictured Gritty, with her snub nose and saucy eyes, singing "I'm called little Buttercup, de-ah little Buttercup——"

Veronique and *Hamlet*, alas, were being played in Perth. Perth was an elegant city, compared with the grubby seaport. But his heart was none the less in the grubby seaport, for it represented his first glimpse and taste of exoticism. Nothing in life could ever eclipse his first walk along the shopping streets of Freemantle, nothing could ever be as sweet as the first "lolly" he had put into his mouth, nothing quite so thrilling in its way as the first order he had ever given a waitress, in a funny tea-shop where there were only three tables!

One of the sharpest thrills of all had come during his first walk through the streets of Perth. In a baker's window he had seen a placard advertising a recital to be given by Madame Melba. For a moment the material world fell away, he was transported straight into a world of tangible dreams, and he realized that the great life of adventure had begun in earnest. For Melba was one of the immortal figures portrayed in Aunt Verona's big blue volume of musical celebrities. How well he recalled the portrait—the long plaits of hair, the eyes lifted toward heaven, the hands clasping a prayer book. In the same volume were portraits of Max Alvary, and Frances Saville, Jean de Reszke, Paderewski, Patti, Rubinstein and a dozen others. He had thought of them as creatures who had had their being in a world quite remote from any he would ever be likely to know. True, Aunt Verona had once breathed the atmosphere of that faery world, but that only enhanced the glamour. It had never occurred to him that those creatures might still be alive; the mere fact that their photographs were in a book seemed to throw them into some dim past. And now, here in Perth, was an announcement that the fabulous

Melba was going to sing! And he, Paul Minas of Hale's Turning, was actually in a corner of the globe where such miracles came to pass!

Unhappily, when he had examined the placard more closely he had found that it was many months old. It was a lazy baker. She had come and gone. Even so, he was breathing air into which glorious notes had been poured—notes as much more enthralling than Miss Todd's as heaven was more enthralling than earth—if there "would have been" a heaven! He had nearly seen a dream come true—had been "hot," as they said in the game of "search the button." And Dr. Wilcove and the old man coolly expected him to go back to Hale's Turning to be *educated!*

Of all the sensations that had stirred him, the most profound, the most haunting had been the sound of the chimes—in the tower of the Fremantle town hall. The second evening in port he had hurried through his tasks and come ashore alone, unwilling to have his first impressions clouded by the inept remarks of a companion. After ferreting his way through side-streets, he had walked to a sandy hill behind the town from which he could see the ocean. The hill was covered with tufts of wiry grass, and here and there were eucalyptus trees, their long smooth, bark-patched trunks showing pink and lavender and palest lemon in the glow of the dying day. Far away, on one side, was an Oval dotted with cricketers, and a fife and drum band was playing "Cock o' the North." The brick and stone villas, so quaint after the wooden houses of Nova Scotia, clustering beneath him and stretching along the river bank, seemed ineffably cosy. Each was a home, replete with mother, father and children: the three essential factors of the game called "House" which was a favourite with the little girls of Hale's Turning. Here he was on the opposite side of the world, alone on a bare hill-top, with mere fancies to

serve him as brothers and sisters, while at his feet nestled the homes of aliens who, for all their odd ways, were quite similar to Nova Scotians. Yet on this whole continent there was no creature who had heard of Paul Minas. Here he stood, like the son of a god on some sacred mount, watching Australians at their sports, philosophizing about them in a brand new pair of long trousers, infinitely well-disposed toward them, yet for all they knew of it he might just as well be on the top side of the world. If he were to go back the very next day, it would be to them as though he had never been here, yet for him the whole world would henceforth seem quite different than it would have seemed had he not been here. When the sun had sunk into the sea, he made his way down the hill and walked towards the centre of town along a residential street bordered by scorched gardens in which dusty red and yellow flowers struggled for existence. At the juncture of two deserted streets he came to the town hall, and as he was crossing the triangular space in front of it, his thoughts in a cloud, the bells began to chime.

At home there was the school bell, and every church had a single bell which on the Sabbath summoned the faithful monotonously to its doors, but until this evening Paul had never heard chimes. The four deep-voiced bells, solemnly intoning their formula of sixteen notes, enthralled him, and he stood spellbound as a still deeper voice tolled the hour. But the musical formula of the chimes did more than enthrall him: it engendered a nameless mood compounded of wistfulness, yearning, loneliness, disillusionment, regret, confidence, and iridescent hope. The chimes were beautiful but infinitely sombre; they were a little weary, a little sad, resigned, but at the same time unflinching. Above all, they were wise. Their message was a proverb, a simple chord which yet expressed the essence of all truth. There was a hint of

eternity in the chimes, and a hint of fortitude. For Paul they were even prophetic.

“You, boy,” they seemed to say, “you will go from this town to other towns, from this land to other lands, always exploring, always an alien. You will seek knowledge and happiness, but you will find them only in oddments, like apples fallen from a barrow; the barrow will always be beyond the brow of the hill. It is your destiny to be sad when you wish to be glad, and most sad of all when you learn that life is only a brief solo, and that your solo, in the ears of God, is, like a million others, merged into the blurred, harmonious hum of the cosmos. So much for vanity, boy. So much for your long trousers. Our chime is a marching-song and an epitaph. Let it for ever echo in your heart, and you will be neither too improvidently hopeful nor too cruelly deceived:

La-fa-so-do,
Do-so-la-fa;
La-so-fa-do,
Do-so-la-fa.”

Paul had been unconsciously holding a bruised leaf of eucalyptus to his face. Its odour, bitter-sweet and pungent, seemed an integral part of the oracle.

5

Miss Green's invitation to attend the concert at the Seamen's Institute Paul regarded as a tribute to his personal distinction, and he made a careful toilet. On arriving at the hall he was discountenanced to find not only that the whole crew had been invited, but that one of them, Dismal Jimmy, was to contribute a song to the programme. Paul's vanity was punctured, and as he took a seat beside Otto he chided himself for having been a prig.

Otto had received his discharge and was to sail next day as deck-hand on a German liner, the *Barbarossa*. Paul regretted the prospective loss of his burly chum and was envious of Otto's opportunity to return to such a romantic land—though he still disapproved of Otto's reason for returning.

The hall was soon filled, for there were several ships in port and apart from the pubs and the beguilements of Perth—some miles distant—rival attractions were few. The fact that Dismal Jimmy was on the programme while he, Paul Minas, was merely a member of the audience, offended his sense of proportion. Furthermore, his long musical abstention, while it had brought surcease from practice, had ended by inducing an acute desire to make music. As he sat looking up at the piano his shoulders and arms and finger-ends yearned. The antiquated piano on the ship was feeble and unresponsive. Here was a piano which looked as though it might wail and exult. Through his mind coursed grandiose passages from the Schumann "Carnival," and from the querulous, clamorous Chopin *étude* in C minor which gave off flashes of lightning in the treble while thundering in the base. And no one had even asked if he could "do" anything! The curse of being only thirteen.

A sailor with a rasping baritone sang about "the brave, the brave hussars," and another, with erratic notions of pitch and tempo, sang a ballad which was largely a matter of "Dairy down dairy ah, dairy dairy oh!" Miss Green doggedly accompanied, whilst necklaces danced about her thin dry neck. There were two daubs of pink on her cheek-bones; her nose was whiter than her elbows; and she wore a yellow muslin dress that made her hair look dusty. But Miss Green was nice. In her presence one felt pleasantly masculine and protective, and jealous of all other males. And Paul had a loyal desire not to be captious about her appearance or her musicianship. Perhaps

some day a thoroughly chivalrous first-mate would lead her to the altar, then her necklaces might cease rattling.

When Dismal Jimmy's turn came, there was an awkward consultation in whispers. The Cornishman had no music, and Miss Green couldn't play by ear. Paul's pulses throbbed. He was sure Dismal Jimmy planned to sing "The Vicar of Bray" or "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep." Paul could improvise accompaniments, provided he knew the tune. Consequently when the curate, who was chairman, called for a volunteer Paul timidly responded. Otto gave him a friendly clap on the shoulder and shoved him into the aisle. When Dismal Jimmy had settled the matter of key, Paul played a flourishing *entrée*, and the song proceeded.

At its conclusion Miss Green waylaid Paul. On her homely face was an expression he knew quite well: fond, indulgent, adoring. If, after the manner of Miss Todd, she had linked her arm in his and said, "You're a wonder, Paul—dear," he would not have been surprised. What she did say was more to the point: "After *that*, you can't get out of giving us a solo! I'll tell Mr. Simpkins."

The next few numbers were a blur in Paul's mind. He was trying to select an appropriate piece from his old *répertoire*. The "Davidsbündler" march and the "Revolution" *étude* would sound grotesque on a programme that included such ditties as "We all went into the shop, to see what we could see!" He thought of *salon* pieces that would be sure of provoking applause. But he restlessly rejected them, for as the programme went on he became less anxious to show off than to convey to this roomful of seamen, stokers, engineers and stewards some superfine message. The simple wisdom of the bells had penetrated into his heart. His appetite for exotic sensations, appeased for the moment, had given place to a sense of well-being which became diffused in a new tenderness. Dimly, gropingly, he felt that if he could imbue his neigh-

bours with a similar sense of well-being, some priceless blessing would grow out of it. He recalled Mr. Silva's old sayings, and longed to place these men under a spell they could never forget, to weld them together so that, as one, they should share the benefit of his recent meditations. He had it at heart to evoke in them some counterpart of the awe and humility, melancholy and exaltation, pity and fortitude he had felt upon hearing the symbolic chimes. He was still undecided when the curate announced that the next "item" would be a "piano selection by Master Laval of the *Clytemnestra*."

The jolt of being thus classified brought before Paul's eyes a vision of the good old *Clytemnestra*, trudging on, carrying him like the faithful white bear east of the sun and west of the moon. Moon! Those blue velvet nights when his thoughts had walked down its yellow carpet to the very edge of the world, when out of the silence he had conjured up the strains of the composition which Aunt Verona said was miscalled the "Moonlight Sonata." Assuredly it was out of place in this reeking hall—well, he must simply make it *in* place!

With a new sort of confidence but with none of the swagger of school-concert days, he mounted to the platform. In his mind he was reviewing whole pages to be sure he remembered the intricate passages.

Instead of compelling his audience to warm his heart with their flattery, he would warm their hearts with the message of Beethoven, a message which he understood tonight infinitely better than in the days when he had glibly performed the sonata with uncalloused hands.

These men, he felt, expected something flashy, ragtime for preference: "Hunky-dory" or "Coon, Coon, Coon, I wish my colour would fade!" They were still humming the refrain of "Old Bull and Bush." A long dormant theatrical instinct seized him in its grip. For the moment he was on his old pedestal, his organ-bench, his sail locker,

his fore-castle-head nook, his cloud-top—King of the Castle. Nothing should detract from the illusion he meant to create—the illusion of warm velvety blackness, tropical seas, a carpet of moonlight, meditations reaching out toward infinite knowledge and informed by whisperings of the voice of God. They might think him silly, but silly or not he would exercise his kingly prerogative.

“Will some one please turn out the lights,” he requested.

Mr. Simpkins raised his eyebrows; Miss Green fidgeted; the audience gaped. There was some fussing in the small room behind the platform, the curate cleared his throat and made faces, but Paul held his ground, and finally the lights went out with a resentful snap. A street lamp shed a bluish glow through the windows, but the platform was in obscurity. To dispel the awkwardness Paul played preparatory chords and arpeggios, and waited. Then with all the will power at his command, he submerged himself in the mood of the sonata.

With the opening bars a solemn elation possessed him, and his surroundings fell away. It was as though some divine soothsayer were using him to convey to mortals a beneficent augury. Often enough he had played this first movement literally. To-night he was contributing to its literal truth a fervid “Verily I say unto you.” For to-night he felt the music not only as sound but as the epitome of wisdom.

In his subconsciousness was the image of himself, lulled by the sea, his soul borne like a melody over rhythmical waves. The theme of the movement was as noble as a ship; it was carried forward on waves of sound as unbroken as the waves of the ocean, with a momentum as irresistible as theirs, instinct with a like gentleness and sadness.

On and on—towards what? From the utter stillness Paul knew that his audience were asking the question.

Towards what? First of all towards dawn, and as he broke into the tenderly playful and speculative mood of the second movement he was imbued with a sense of omnipotence. For, by abandoning his soul to the task, he had been able to make a hundred men forget the world of beer and ribaldry and show them, perhaps for the first time in their lives, their kinship with the sublime "wisdom and spirit of the universe." Otto was going home to learn the technique of slaughter, whilst he, Paul Minas, *alias* Laval the cabin-boy, could bewitch men into becoming as little children.

The onrush of the third movement transformed the tranquil scene in his subconsciousness to one of elemental clamour and menace. As on the distant night of the hurricane, so now he caught himself "rooting" for the elements, inciting them to violence, that he might demonstrate the triumph of human resistance—*his* resistance, for throughout this final movement he became identified with the melody. This was the very theme of his life, and he made it exultantly sing, all the while assaulting it with the full fury of the world's opposition. He would not deceive himself by minimizing the strength of his assailants. Hostile voices should scream, roar, rumble, plead, wail and sigh as they had done on the memorable afternoon when Aunt Verona had broken silence. Her inspired domination of the piano was his precedent for to-night's performance. Above the inimical chorus he sounded forth the dauntless theme—his theme. At all costs he must keep it pure, soaring, triumphant. His fear of making slips with work-coarsened fingers vanished like a mist in the sun. The music was playing itself. So should his very life.

If Aunt Verona could only hear—oh, to be able to explain to Aunt Verona that he was vindicating their "method," that he was proving to hundreds of men, to the whole crude and hapless world, that truth and love

were indestructible, that hate and violence, for all their sardonic power, were futile! Aunt Verona had known. In the village, fools had whispered that she was mad, and she had disdained to explain. But to him she had explained—not in words, but in terms as subtle as those in which he was now exhorting a chance congregation. Aunt Verona had known; she had lived long enough to give him a hint; and now he was beginning to know. And he would go on learning, and some day the winds of knowledge would sweep him to the very shores of heaven. Meanwhile he was on the right course; he was catching glimpses of his soul, illuminating glimpses.

A long pause for the two deep octaves. Then a short recapitulation of the theme and a swift, exultant flourish, by way of proclaiming his final vindication.

His arms dropped, his nerves and muscles relaxed, and a great weariness came over him. He knew he had succeeded, but he no longer cared. He even forgot what he had been doing, and was surprised when the lights went up. He was mechanically bowing before a blur of heads. Thick-skinned hands and tough sea-lungs were acclaiming him. If he had begun by chastening his audience into a breathless entity, he had ended by inciting it to riotous approbation. Infinitely more decorous applause in the town hall of Hale's Turning had intoxicated him, but this noisy demonstration merely assailed his ears. What was hand-applause after that long pregnant silence! Even the pride in Otto's face moved him only to a momentary glow of pleasure. With a pang he realized that he had outgrown Otto and the *Clytemnestra*, as he had outgrown Hale's Turning.

For the sake of peace he played additional solos, then the concert was at an end, and he knew that Miss Green was waiting to invite him to have coffee and cake in the small inner room. At any other time he would have accepted gladly, but now he was too deeply buried in

himself to be reached by promiscuous amenities. Something had been conceived in his soul, and he wished the process of gestation to go on unhindered. For all that he had spent himself without stint, he felt there was no one among his hearers who could have understood what it meant to him.

He found his way out unnoticed, and walked slowly towards the town by a roundabout route. The air was warm, soft and strong. The sky was alive with stars. Dusty gardens gave forth faint aromatic odours. Far off, the ocean sighed and licked the beach. Once a group of tipsy loiterers bawled impotently into the welkin. As he was making his way to the high street, the bells of the town hall, a few squares farther on, broke into their chime: fuller and deeper for the darkness and hush of night. His emotions raced to his throat and eyes fighting for an outlet, then surged back, leaving him in a warm flood. With the bells one wasn't alone; with the memory of their deep tones one could never be alone. La-fa-so-do—sixteen notes, slow, even, majestic. A magic formula. And each note went singing forth in a circle of sound which infinitely widened, like the circles in a pool. The circles would follow him to the very ends of the earth, always. God was subtle.

To-night their message was less grim, more comforting. "*Courage, mon petit!*" Aunt Verona's words! "Have faith in yourself, and nothing on earth can prevail against you." Beethoven had known it. The fifth bell tolled the hour of eleven.

He wandered on till he came to a bridge over the railway tracks. The sound of echoing footsteps drew him from his abstraction and he walked more quickly. He had by no means outgrown his distrust for shadows, and was consumed with a desire to turn and see who was following. To do so would be a sure proof of timidity, yet in the end he couldn't resist.

He recognized the advancing figure as that of an officer who had been present at the concert. He was reassured, but surprised. Why should the officer have left his companions. Besides, there was a much shorter route to the end of the quay where the big liners moored.

As the stranger was overtaking him, Paul turned again and met a propitiatory smile. "Excuse me," began the newcomer with a German accent, "I tried to catch you and thank you for your playing."

Paul smiled diffidently. "*Danke sehr.*"

The stranger puffed out his cheeks, opened wide his little eyes, and raised his arms in kindly protest against the boy's modesty. "*Aber, es war schön, wunderbar—fabelhaft!*"

Paul was flattered in spite of himself. "I felt like playing," he deprecated. "That makes all the difference. I couldn't do it again, as well!"

The big officer, chuckling, linked his arm in Paul's and fell into step with him. The gesture was instinctive and Paul didn't in the least resent it, though usually he shrank from the contact of any but his most privileged friends. One afternoon in the paint locker Shorty had touched him and looked at him in a strange manner, and Paul had wriggled quickly away. In a flash his knowledge of the world had taken a long leap forward and endowed him with self-protective caution.

Along deserted ways they walked, speaking alternately English and German. The officer was curious, and asked paternal questions. He was thirty-five or forty years old, stout, blond, sunburnt to the colour of a saddle.

Fact by fact Paul related his history. Never had he been called on to give a chronological account of himself, and the necessity of reducing his past to a well-proportioned narrative pleasantly exercised his ingenuity, and also helped him towards an understanding of himself. Moreover, the stranger not only understood the motives

which had prompted his rebellious acts, but seemed to accept them as inevitable and normal. Paul felt all the freer to talk, inasmuch as his companion, in a few hours, would be on the high seas, bound for Germany, in the ship that was to carry Otto home. He took the occasion to put in a word for Otto, asked his new friend to be kind to his old one.

When they reached the *Clytemnestra's* berth, it was Paul who suggested that they should sit on a stack of lumber and prolong the interview. He talked of Aunt Verona, of the Bechstein piano, of the Sundays in Hale's Turning. He talked of his escape from school and his sea experiences, of his impressions of the new country, of its mysterious smells and sounds and sights, of his longing to smell all the exotic odours in the world, hear and see all the marvels, and know *everything!* He told of his conversations with the captain, of the letter from Dr. Wilcove, of his mood at the concert, his sudden feeling that the lights *must* be turned out, his yearning to convey some fine message to the assembly, his spiritual exaltation whilst playing, and his plunge into a bitter void when he had risen from the piano.

He had seen his mates straggling back to the ship. The cabin and forecastle lights had long been extinguished, and only the figure of the night watchman was moving. Faintly, from the direction of the town, came the ghostly sound of the chimes and the stroke of two. He couldn't tell his companion about the bells—their message was incommunicable. He shivered. He had got to the very end.

“And when do you go back to Canada?”

The question gave Paul a shock. It was so specific. His world stood still, as it had done one night on Mrs. Kestrell's back stairs. Again there came a blinding flash to point out his course. And in the blackness which ensued, as the world again became grey and cold and palpa-

ble, his gaze resting on the sharp crease of his long trousers, he announced in deliberate, almost scared tones:

“I’m not going back, ever.”

6

Without warning, a few days later, Captain Caxton presented Paul with a steamship ticket, a book of traveller’s cheques, and a certificate of honourable discharge made out in his real name. Taken aback by the completeness of these arrangements, Paul feigned acquiescence, but before embarking on the coastal steamer he had the foresight to bribe one of his casual acquaintances—an employé in a bookshop—to send a forged telegram timed to reach him on his arrival in Sydney. With this telegram he would counter any officiousness on the part of well-meaning gentlemen who had been invited to see him safely on his homeward way.

He had not the faintest intention of continuing on the prescribed route to Vancouver and thence overland to Halifax, but of his intentions, which were vague, he said nothing to the captain, who came to see him off. Paul, while grateful to the captain for his goodwill, was hurt at not having been consulted. That, he felt, absolved him of all obligation to confide his plans. The old man had put money—Paul’s own, as it now appeared—into his hands and shipped him off, had done his duty, according to his lights—for which he would find his reward in heaven! Henceforth Paul was answerable only to himself, and as he stood on the towering promenade deck of the *Kalgoorlie* looking over the roofs of warehouses and down at the figures on the quay—the “sisters and cousins and aunts” of his fellow-passengers—the boy smiled with a timorous exultation at the enormity of his plot. The great adventure was beginning with a vengeance.

The steamer drew slowly away from the dock and for a few moments rested in mid-stream. As the last hawser

was heaved aboard, the steam-winchs ceased clanking and a silence ensued, broken only by farewell "coo-ees." Then, faint but clear, over the patchwork of hot tiles, came the sound of bells. Paul's eyes sought out the tower of the town hall and a mist blurred his vision. The chimes—the magic formula. It was a final message in a code unknown to the old man and all the others, a message for him alone, a message of warning and comfort. "Have faith in yourself." Aunt Verona's words: "*Du courage, mon petit—ça ira!*" Yes, but it was going to be a lonely progress—*bitterlich!* For all their wisdom and fortitude, the bells were sad.

Poor red, sandy hot, bare little town! Up the river, beyond the bridge, he could descry the dingy "upstairs house" in which Miss Green lived. It was all but obscured by the branches of a fig tree. On the hill behind the town, near a clump of jarrahs, he made out the spot where he had stood on his first evening ashore—godlike on a sacred mount. He conjured up the smell of eucalyptus, and the shrill strains of "Cock o' the North."

The prosperous steamship was gliding towards the breakwater that extended beyond the mouth of the river. Somewhere a signal was clanging. Paul pictured the brass indicators. "And I polished up the handles so faithfully!" That unforgettable night at the theatre! Some day, somewhere, he would go to vast theatres, hear famous orchestras and operas: *Faust, Carmen, Parsifal!*

Beyond the steamers, far away at the end of the quay, were the tall masts and disordered yards of the *Clytemnestra*. Lightened of her burden, she stood high, her sides garishly daubed with vermilion. No more séances in the old sail locker, with its smell of manilla. No more smuggled tins of cherries and peaches; no more chocolate-coated biscuits; no more yarns in the galley and carpenter-shop. They had all seemed sorry when he said good-bye, and sheepishly affectionate. Strange how one could grow

to love a ship quite as though it were a person, yet also a home. Good old *Clytemnestra*! This great steamship was tearing him away from something he cherished more than he had known. He thought of a sentence he had read in a wise French book: "Life is a series of partial deaths." But, as he mourned the death of the precocious cabin-boy, he reflected that life was, by the same token, a series of creations. "*Laval est mort,*" he philosophized. "*Vive Minas!*" The mantle of the cabin-boy, complete with honourable discharge, had descended upon Master Paul Minas, first-class passenger. Gentleman Jim, to be sure. Shorty's taunts were only the vesture of envy. Poor Shorty didn't suspect the self-belittling effect of envy, and would go on taunting people till he had shrunk into nothing. Above all else, Paul wished to avoid such a fate. Mark Laval had taught him a lifelong lesson by showing up his narrow-mindedness. He had a morbid fear of setting out on any path that seemed easy. He even distrusted the magical book of cheques which he was carrying under his belt. By merely signing his name twenty times he could have as much money as Mr. Silva had paid for his little house in Hale's Turning, and that didn't seem right. He was sure Mr. Silva's personal worth had something to do with the fact that Mr. Silva had had to toil for his possessions.

Despite these moralistic reflections, Paul could not be indifferent to the luck that was making it possible for him to see cities bigger than Halifax: Adelaide, named after a queen; Melbourne, where Melba was born; Sydney, whose harbour, according to Miss Hornby, was one of the most beautiful in the world, and, according to Miss Green, full of sharks which gobbled up boys and girls who fell off ferry-boats.

And at Sydney? Well, anything rather than go aboard the liner waiting to take him to Vancouver. He would have to write a letter to Dr. Wilcove, exonerating the

old man. And he would tell Dr. Wilcove not to hold himself responsible for anything, if it was such a bother. After all, the trustees couldn't keep the moss from growing over the shipyard at Hale's Turning; besides, he didn't want it.

There was the island where the *Orizaba* had sunk. Deep under the green water were skeletons shut up in cabins and engine-rooms. An enormous propeller lay abandoned on the bronze rocks, and the sun beat scorchingly down.

A gong sounded and passengers precipitated themselves below deck. Paul was filled with curiosity as to the food. With an overwhelming shyness he made his way toward the dining-saloon. A steward in a white jacket would serve *him!*

PART III

VI

I

FROM ship to ship, from ocean to ocean, from land to land, waiting for ballast, tides, charters, and crews, wandering through jungles, loafing in water-side bars, rubbing shoulders with beach-combers, drinking tea with muslin-frocked ladies, inspecting temples and volcanoes, museums and graveyards, ambling through bazaars, riding donkeys and elephants, tossing pennies to naked beggar-boys from fragile jinrickshas, patronizingly interested in the monuments of bygone dynasties, abnormally condescending to lemon-squashes and mangoes, exploring, sampling, summing up—the cheek of it all!

For five years Paul had watched the world expand. New civilizations revealed themselves; swarms of aliens paraded for him, while he stored his mind with impressions. Then, days or weeks later, as his ship headed for the sea, the civilization last under inspection would dwindle into a grey shore-line, and only his own mind be left to bear witness that it even existed. The more he saw of the globe, the more he felt its unreality and his own incontrovertible existence in time and space. The one stable phenomenon in the universe was his ego, and that had merely the stability of a moon-drawn, wind-agitated ocean.

In the long periods of isolation he had read hundreds of books and spent hours in meditation. Year by year, he saw himself changing from a boy whom he intimately

knew into a stalwart man whom he was at a loss to understand. When the daily routine was accomplished, when he sat apart or walked in unexplored directions, he was conscious of crossing a threshold that no one but himself ever crossed, and entering into the chambers of his own identity. Having done this he would sigh, but not merely in relief at having eluded the world; the sigh breathed a hint of despair, for, as the shelves of his mind grew heavy with impressions he was aghast at the chaos.

Each book, each acquaintance, each glimpse of the world added its quota to the store-house; hence each introspective interval had to be devoted to the task of overhauling and re-sorting. He could find no comprehensive system in accordance with which to group his opinions, tastes, and bundles of information, for, no matter how carefully he tucked and patted and squeezed, there were stray ends and overlappings and bulges; the interior was colourful beyond description, but far from shipshape. It was a library without a catalogue.

Blindly he attributed the confusion to lack of schooling, and in weak moments rued lost opportunities. Then, in some casual encounter ashore, he would find himself able to correct school or even university-taught men who had little but skeletal theories with which to match his full-blooded facts. In the hope of reducing the facts to tabulation he would plunge again into text-books. These had their uses, but gave him no clue to the mental and emotional transformation going on within him.

Unhappily there was no one of his own age with whom he could talk upon any but the most elementary topics. When books failed, he could only resort to physical diversions, and at sea these were limited in kind. There had been a few friends, notably an apprentice from an English barque whom he had met in Hong Kong, and a young officer on a French steamer he had joined at Saigon. Their companionship had been precious; but he

seemed fated to outgrow his friends, and in retrospect saw that what he had taken for common ground was in reality no more than his friends' willingness to humour his excesses of imagination and idealism. In a sense this enhanced their worth, but it also added a drop of sadness to his cup, for he longed, at this period, to be interpreted rather than tolerated.

He was under no delusion that his mind was too great a thing to be understood; simply, it was too multifarious, too specialized. Most men presented a traceable pattern whereas he saw himself as a patchwork that defied analysis. Yet he felt there must be some principle of homogeneity running through it, some stevedoring technique at work in the loading of his inner chambers. In books he was continually reading of youths who found it difficult to weather the period of "storm and stress" but who came through all right. He supposed, he earnestly hoped, he was in their case.

2

In Sydney Paul had shipped on a Blue Funnel boat bound for Chinese and Japanese ports. At Nagasaki he had been left in the hospital with an attack of fever. During convalescence a pretty Englishwoman, the wife of an exporter, had brought him books and fruit, and, when he was well, invited him to her house, where he spent blissful days playing on a grand piano. Then the lady's husband rather determinedly found him a berth on a trans-Pacific passenger ship. Tickled at having aroused the jealousy of a middle-aged man, Paul eluded his benefactor and shipped on a dirty tramp trading with the Malay States, whence he wrote a most sentimental twenty-page letter to the pretty Englishwoman.

Thereafter he wandered from ship to ship, loathing his squalid surroundings, waging campaigns against animal-culæ—what quantities of Keating's powder!—and ward-

ing off the coarse encroachments of his mates, thirsting for new experiences, ever erecting new air castles upon the ruins of the old. Ordinary seaman, able seaman, steward, bugle boy, quartermaster, assistant purser, boatswain: he had acted in these and other capacities, and at the end of each voyage converted his pay-day into English gold and added his savings to the fund with which he had set out from Fremantle. The secreting and safeguarding of this hoard had been a precarious business. More than once he had done battle for it. But association with ruffians had taught him arts of self-protection.

For three or four years he roved the Southern Seas in steamers of varying nationality, touching at ports in Africa, India, South America. In none of his ships did he find the freedom, comfort and kindness that had prevailed on the *Clytemnestra*. None of his shipmates spoiled him as Captain Caxton and Otto and the Danish carpenter had done. Kicks replaced friendly pats, jibes were more common than endearments. The clean smell of tar and white sheen of canvas were exchanged for oily cotton-waste and showers of soot from smutty funnels. Everything was ugly, cramped and prosaic. Aboard the *Clytemnestra* one had made the world to suit oneself; wars might rage throughout Europe and Asia and nobody be the wiser. On wireless ships distracting rumours came to the ears. In retrospect his first voyage seemed like a story he might have read in *Chums*.

Often, when carrying out the orders of some weedy fourth officer, Paul had mutinous fits that got him into trouble. After conflicts of this kind he would stare into the sea and curse the folly that had taken him from home. He pictured radiant careers he had forfeited, then reminded himself that nothing rooted in Hale's Turning could ever be radiant. True, in Hale's Turning, for all its provincialism, he might have had the solace of music; and the deprivation of music had done more than any-

thing to feed his discontent. Month by month he kept promising himself a vacation which he would devote with all his heart and soul to reparation. In spare moments he exercised his hands—hands grown out of recognition—and whenever he went ashore he sought out the local “Bethel” in order to test his fingers and memory on the piano. But the piano was usually beyond hope, likewise his performance.

The moods of depression never endured, and he ended by resolving to see the whole squalid job through, complete his collection of discharge certificates, and then, when the right day came, go up for his Master’s papers. With this objective in view he was planning to join a British tramp in Melbourne when a French skipper offered him a post as second mate on a four-masted barque bound for California. The lure of sails and the fun of talking French decided him, and he signed the articles of the *Général Fronchard* at the office of the French consul.

On this ship there was red wine to drink, and a good cook. The galley smelt of olive oil, and Paul idly wondered whether national characteristics had anything to do with diet. The crew were lazy, but competent and jolly. There were cats and dogs to make friends with, and the homeliness he had missed on steam-driven ships. The captain was an indifferent navigator and trusted his subordinates to keep the vessel afloat whilst he played the gramophone and waltzed with a lady he called his wife. Occasionally the lady danced with Paul, and one hot night, somewhere in the latitude of New Caledonia, she stole out on deck during the second watch. “*On étouffe là-bas,*” she said, then, glancing over her shoulder in the direction of the quarters set apart for the captain, added, “*Il est saoul ce soir.*”

She talked of the Southern Cross and admired Paul’s knowledge of astronomy. How, *par exemple*, could he tell the difference between Venus and Jupiter? It wasn’t

as if there were some sign to indicate their sex. Now, if God had made one green and the other red, like star-board and port! She lurched slightly and Paul took her arm. She spoke of his strength, of his voice. He was, she affirmed, with a little emphasizing gesture of her head, "extraordinarily old for his age." Why didn't he let his moustache grow? It would be so *mignonne*. She liked to see him smile. She was going to give him a nickname: "*le sourire*."

A few minutes later she was in Paul's arms, where she had fully planned to be. In the darkness he was laughing cynically to himself, for she had imagined she was the first!

There followed indolent days during which Paul recaptured some of the romance that had tinged the long-outgrown moods of the *Clytemnestra*. Apart from books, there were few mental events to break the pleasant monotony. Madame's books were thin, and rather warm, fare; tales by Gyp, Pierre Weber, Willy and Colette. She came from Port Saïd, and the fact that she *adored* that pestilential haunt was sufficient commentary on her calibre.

Paul sat placidly among the objects in his mental stores, indifferent for once to the lack of order. It sufficed that a glint of colour here or a sinuous outline there beguiled his attention, while the external world slumbered on. Again the sails collapsed heavily against steel rigging, then swelled towards the blue like a small boy puffing out his cheeks. The sheets snapped taut or slackened with the clink of iron blocks, and Paul gave idle instructions in a newly perfected jargon to Italianate French sailors who made witty, if indecorous, conversation over their half-spliced manilla and their tubs of caustic soda.

Then after weeks of doldrums there rose up out of a lapis lazuli sea a quaint little island five or six hundred

miles from the nearest Fiji group—a coral affair that reminded the young *second* of a hat, with palm trees for feathers; an exotic dot on the ocean. Over it hovered birds, and he heard Madame from the break of the poop, shrilly wondering how they had ever got there. She passed down a telescope to him. Under stilted, coco-nut-thatched dwellings lounged a dozen natives. They tried to launch a boat, but the breeze was fresh and the surf too heavy—surf which burst and sent licking pools of translucent emerald over a mile of deep pink seaweed.

To test the chronometers, the captain sailed as close as he dared, and, without warning, Paul yearned, as he had never yearned in his life, to be set ashore, that he might for ever remain on this spot of land “in which it seemèd always afternoon.”

“Most weary seem’d the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.”

Most weary of all seemed the effort to live, the effort to project oneself into a troublesome future, the effort to go on exploring, the effort of knowing, of making decisions, of growing up. Once again his world stood still, and for an eternity he gazed on this little gem of creation. There one might retire, as into some cosy tomb, and the remainder of one’s allotted span would be a siesta.

But the captain ordered him to swerve off towards a thousand miles of blankness, and as the wheel spun to the command of “*La barre dessous, toute!*” he dutifully wore ship, in the grip of a fearful nostalgia. To an old sail-maker he confided his mood, only to be argued down by rampant tales of the “Barbary Coast” in San Francisco—tales which filled him with laughing disgust and threw him back more passionately than ever on his hopeless longings.

He confided in Madame, who was lolling in a deck-chair. On her lap was a guide-book, in which she had been gleaning facts about the island. Indulgently she listened, smiled archly when Paul—with belated, cynical gallantry—included her in his scheme of exile, then informed him that his island was infested with snakes.

In despair at the incomprehension of everybody, nerveless and dispirited, he went below. That poor little island, so low that an hour's smart sailing had sunk its highest tree-top below the horizon! And the sandpiper that had been blown off-shore to die of fright on a foreign, heaving deck!

That night he came to a decision. The life of the sea was not to be his life. His destiny lay ashore—on some quiet acre remote from the teeming life of the universe. The diminutive island had marked the beginning of a new variation of the endless theme.

3

After unloading at the mouth of the Sacramento River, Paul's ship was towed into San Francisco bay and thence up the coast to the port of Eureka, where she was to take on a cargo of redwood. Paul had decided to return in her to Toulon, whence he would make his way into Germany and recast his life in a more fitting mould. The prospect of this adventure reawakened a dozen enthusiasms, and stilled the unrest that had been growing for two or three years. His imagination leaped ahead and pictured him at some vast organ. Music might bring into his life the missing elements of direction and meaning.

His picture was clouded by an uneasy wonder: had the interval of silence and growth rendered him incapable of resuming musical studies where he had left off? It seemed half a lifetime since he had played Beethoven in

the bare hall at Fremantle, and a century since he had played voluntaries in the Baptist church at Hale's Turning. Was it possible that he, weather-beaten young giant, could ever have been that rather girlish lad who had reached so cock-surely down to built-up-pedals, overweeningly satisfied with being able to play "Praise God" by heart? He laughed, with a trace of embarrassment and of wistfulness, at the thought, and sang out an order concerning a refractory *filin*. Just as he had once been an organist up to the hilt, he was now up to the hilt at being a sailor—a sailor, so to speak, in French.

In the thoroughness of his adaptation he had even seemed to take on the appearance, as well as the character, of his present rôle; for with his brown throat and arms he might have passed for a Marseillais. His accent, owing to daily contact with the Southerners, was reminiscent of the Midi. Only the fineness of his skin under its tan, the precious contours of cheek and lips, the elegance of waist and hip, and a literary turn of phrase, set him apart.

And having exhausted the possibilities of his present rôle, he characteristically projected himself into the next: the rôle of musical disciple—*ces soirées de Munich et de Vienne*. He rehearsed it in warm June afternoons as he kept his men employed on deck, whilst the enormous saws of the mill screamed and purred their way through twenty-foot logs. In the evening twilight he wandered alone through the woods skirting the village of Samoa, picking berries in the bushes, or mowing off the heads of yellow poppies with a switch. Often he crossed the low strip which separated the bay from the sea, and seated on a dune amid tufts of reed, let his thoughts roam down the track of the moon, as they had done a thousand times in a thousand corners of the world.

Eureka, the up-to-date little city across the harbour, had no attraction for him. He had explored its park,

spent an hour in its library, bought some necessities in its shops, walked in First, Second and Third Streets, likewise in A, B and C, and in its leading theatre witnessed an appalling melodrama called *The Algerian Princess*. His mates had found their way by instinct to a street whose houses flaunted red lights at their portals.

On the Fourteenth of July, the captain declared a fête in honour of the taking of the Bastille. Paul obtained extra leave and boarded a jaunty little train which ran through forests of gigantic redwoods carpeted with fern, past gorges and gulches, to the village of Trinidad, perched on a precipice and serving as a centre of the logging industry. There he hired a buggy and drove along a superb coast, in the direction of Crescent City, over a narrow road which in places was merely a ledge on the cliffs. Above him stretched walls of rock; below, steep grassy slopes, riotous with bushes of mountain laurel, while far beneath lay the green sea, streaked blue in a manner that recalled the "blueing" he had once employed to "whiten" his duck jackets.

In the early afternoon he arrived at a cove about which clustered a few farms. Roses and geraniums spilt over unpainted fences. Before the prettiest cottage he stopped and called out to a girl who was feeding chickens. She shaded her eyes with one hand, held up her apron with the other, and advanced wonderingly. She was uncouth but comely, with silky yellow hair, strong teeth and sculpturesque limbs. Her figure was revealed by a tight blue cotton blouse; and stout, iron-toed boots could not entirely disguise the neatness of her feet.

"Is there any place near here where I might get something to eat?" Paul inquired.

There was not. "At least no regular place—like," the girl amended.

"What would you be wanting?" she asked, at a loss

to understand the requirements, much less the motives, of outlandish venturers into these unfrequented regions.

Paul laughed. "Well, when you haven't had anything to eat for hours and hours, it doesn't much matter what, does it? I half hoped I'd find some sort of inn."

"Inn?" she echoed, as though she found the word "affected." Perhaps it struck her as biblical, Paul reflected, for she must have heard the famous sentence, "There was no room for them in the inn." He remembered now that the word was not current in North America; his own vocabulary comprised the currency of twenty countries.

In the end she invited him to take pot-luck with her. The men-folk were in the fields. "There ain't much," she concluded, "but you're right welcome."

Paul thanked her and got out of the carriage.

"Not much used to horses, are you?" she commented, as he looked doubtfully from the reins to the fence.

"No. My first impulse was to anchor the beast, but I suppose the thing to do is moor him with this bit of line."

Blushing and giggling, the girl came through the gate to take over the hitching operation, and Paul thoroughly enjoyed his sense of dependence.

"Come in," she commanded, in a tone which added, "Mere man that you are."

"If you want to wash, there's a pump round at the back, with a basin and soap."

On entering the kitchen a few minutes later he was greeted by the odour of frying meat. "Fee-fo-fi-fum!" he exclaimed.

"It's a bear steak," she informed him. "But you're not to tell anybody. Bear's out of season. Pa killed him for stealing our honey."

She ran into the garden and came back with a handful of roses, which she arranged, diffidently, in a heavy

white pitcher. Paul crossed the room to smell them, and she returned to the stove.

Something in the form and colour of the flowers, something in the smooth yellow sheen of her hair, had awakened an old memory. The fragrance of the flowers identified it. He was a boy again, poaching on the Ashmill grounds, with the image of a little fair-haired girl in his mind. The darkness of the night, the air of excitement, mystery, danger and love-sickness came back to him. What odd trifles one remembered!

"These are tea-roses, aren't they?" he asked.

"No! Marshal Neys. I grew 'em from a slip a lady gave me in Arcata."

"Oh, really!" Noting that the girl wished not to be thought provincial, he conceded that Arcata was a charming town.

She turned over the sizzling steak. "I take butter down there every week. I dessay *you* think Arcata's little," she said half defiantly. "I dessay you've seen a mort of big cities."

"A good few," he admitted. She gave him a glance which was meant to be disapproving—to cover all contingencies—then smiled in spite of herself, and brought the frying-pan across the room, transferring its contents to his plate.

"It's all there is—except berries and cream, and bread and butter and cheese and milk and honey."

"It's nectar and ambrosia," he protested. "Though perhaps you don't know what they are."

"We don't have much time for schooling out here," she retorted. She seated herself on a window-sill, folded her arms, and turned her eyes from his face, to the golden-green fields.

The food, the shady room, the glimpse of sun-bathed flowers out of doors, the distant hum of bees, the girl's fresh colouring and clean apron, the sound of her voice,

the shrewdness of her instinct and *naïveté* of her opinions, all conspired to charm Paul. He sat back in his chair and smoked, utterly free from care.

Through talking about school they reached the subject of music.

“Do you play?” asked Paul.

She nodded her head.

“Have you a piano?”

“Only an organ.”

He rose. “Then come in the other room and play for me.”

She required coaxing, but ended by sitting on a horse-hair stool and pumping out a monotonous version of a waltz called “Myosotis.” Every now and then she remembered to change the bass. Paul concentrated his attention on the line which undulated from the nape of her neck to her round elbow, then thanked her and asked permission to play.

She relinquished the stool, and in a few moments he had forgotten his surroundings, as he strayed from one composition to another, improvising where memory failed, adjusting his performance to the crying limitations of the instrument.

The smell of roses came in through an open window. In a corner of a mirror on which daisies had been painted and half washed off he could see a glint of golden hair. Before he realized it, he was in the midst of a Bach prelude—in church, playing with an exalted faith in the music, and Phœbe Meddar was his audience. Wistfully he recalled his old conception of music as a universal language that should enlighten and unify the world. What a disparate thing the world had become since those naïve days! Yet there *was* a unity; his present mood and setting were strangely reminiscent of others. Out of a long submerged set of associations came the memory of afternoons when he had posed as a grown-up virtuoso

performing for the edification of Mademoiselle Meddar. He was now grown-up, but the virtuosity, alas, was missing, and for audience he had a farm-girl who fidgeted with impatience—all of which was about as near the mark as anything one could hope to realize.

When finally, with a deep sigh, he turned from the organ, it was to see an astonished pair of men staring at him through the window. The setting sun gave a halo to their silhouettes, which were set off by a gay garden hedged with sun-flowers. Far in the background was a luminous sea. The stupid rusticity of the men projected against the unparalleled splendour of nature made Paul burst out laughing. The girl, from the doorway, echoed his laugh, believing it to be merely his reaction to the wonderment manifested in the faces of her father and brother—a reaction she could share. She explained as they entered the house, and the elder man, somewhat distrustfully, pronounced a hospitable formula, whilst the brother gaped.

Paul spoke of returning, but was told that he could not reach Trinidad until a late hour, and it was more than foolhardy to drive over the ledges at night. In the end he accepted their offer to put him up, and went to superintend the stabling of his horse.

After supper he invited the girl to accompany him on a walk toward the cove, where a lagoon was separated from the sea by a narrow strip of sand formerly used by stage-coaches, but abandoned since a storm, many years since, when the surf had pounded away the road and engulfed a party of gold prospectors.

They sat on a high knoll whilst shadows crept along the coast and a faint breeze ushered in the night. Paul, strangely tranquil, yet with senses alert, was living in the past. In all his wandering he had come across nothing quite so familiarly homely as this little Pacific coast farm. It was exotic, yet it brought back long-

forgotten scenes in Nova Scotia. Another decision was taken: he must one day revisit Hale's Turning.

The girl seemed to be fascinated by his abstracted air, all the while resenting it. She repeatedly tried to draw his attention towards herself, and it repeatedly strayed. Mechanically, yet with a definitely tender instinct, he had placed his arm about her waist. She had at once pushed it away, but seemed complacently to expect his insistence, and when his arm was at last installed, a similar game of protest and acquiescence was gone through apropos of his kisses. In the end they returned silently, hand in hand, arms swinging. Just before reaching the gate, the girl stopped, peered up at him and waited. He took her in his arms, whilst she pretended to struggle. She broke away, ran a few steps, then stood facing him, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. In a flash she was back again, hugging him and kissing his neck—then like a frightened, mischievous child she fled up the garden path.

Paul was suddenly aflame. He found it impossible to make conversation with the old man, and soon all three retired. In his room Paul listened to the others. The old man slept downstairs, the boy in the attic, and the girl occupied a room on the same floor as himself. Long after the men had settled for the night he could hear discreet sounds. His door was ajar, and he stood, holding his breath, whilst a fury of erotic desires possessed him. So far no woman who had thrown herself into his arms had escaped unscathed, but so far only women who were not immaculate had overtly challenged him. He had only to take a few steps, tap on her door, turn the handle—she would not cry out, for she was subtle, for all her uncouthness—and the rest he would know how to manage—but!

He closed the door swiftly and went to sit on the edge of his bed. He hated to be faced by a choice between

strong desire and a sense of fair play. But above all things he hated vacillation. The girl was his for the taking—why hesitate? The risk for her? There were ways of obviating that.

He put the odious consideration out of his mind and began to undress.

But in a moment he found himself at the door again, listening. Flinging the last scruple to the winds, he left the room, tiptoed along the passage, listened at her door, then gently opened it.

The moon had risen and its beams made a pool of light on the carpet. He saw walls decked with magazine-cover girls, and a heap of garments strewn on a chair. Her face, turned slightly away from him, looked plump, like a baby's, and one hand was thrown out. She was fast asleep, and the room smelt—rather too much like a bedroom.

Silently as he had come, he regained his room, and sat on the window-sill to laugh. As if by magic his ardour had vanished, leaving him comfortable, yet out of sorts. Gradually the spell of the night wrapped itself round him. For a long while he sat gazing towards the silvered sea, drinking in the fragrance of unseen flowers and dew-sprinkled earth, a fragrance that made him home-sick for a home that didn't exist. Early in the morning he would set out for the ship. To his shipmates he would say nothing of the adventure. How should any sailor understand his anomalous blend of depravity and squeamishness? To think that virtue could be suspended on such tenuous filaments!

A distant clock struck the hour, and an alien odour crept into his nostrils—the odour of eucalyptus. He scarcely noticed this phenomenon, and like a true sailor fell asleep as soon as his head was pillowed. In his dreams, however, he heard the old chimes which had gained such an uncanny hold on him. Their message

this time, put into words, might have been, "So you see, you're not as chaotic as you thought. You *have* a method, and it's no less wise for being instinctive. Fastidiousness is next to morality—it often serves you better."

4

Before putting to sea Paul laid in a supply of books. For some time past his reading had been haphazard, if voluminous. At Eureka he provided himself with the pick of what the leading bookshop had to offer, and at the last moment had the salesman include a little green paper-bound play by a certain G. B. Shaw, whose name he had often seen quoted, as though this writer were a "character" in the world of letters.

Not until he was nearing Toulon, after a fatiguing, storm-ridden voyage did he dip into *Man and Superman*. Then occurred a mental event of the first importance—an event more memorable than the mutinous day when he had longed to be set ashore on his coral island. After the first few *répliques* he felt the stirring of a mighty revival of heterodoxies. Issues he had in his first youthful rebelliousness dismissed wholesale trooped back retail for a rehearing. A sun of intellectual emancipation made a rift in the adolescent haze obscuring his vision.

He recalled his boyish struggle to keep his soul intact from the designs of the officiously pious, the fury and exasperation with which he had talked down zealots who had decoyed him to "Bethel" meetings in remote seaports. Since those days he had been a constant foe towards all forms of blind orthodoxy, but it had been difficult to find words for his iconoclasm. Well, here they were! Paul drank them in; felt them settling into him, stiffening his resolutions, giving him that rare gratification: the discovery, after the event, that there exist sound, assertable reasons for acts committed on

impulse. Shaw cut capers for him, and Paul laughed with the hysterical abandon of a child who has had to be violently diverted out of a long fit of moping. Shaw gleefully rattled the skeletons Paul had refused to reverence but had not known how to dispose of. Shaw cried his healthy, heathenish cause from the rooftops; championed him, and put him forward as a champion. And at the end seemed to say, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" And Paul cordially agreed, in blissful forgetfulness of his own mortality.

"Your friends," said Don Juan to the Devil, "are the dullest dogs I know. They are not beautiful: they are only shaved and starched . . . not generous, only propitiatory; not disciplined, only cowed; and not truthful at all—liars every one of them, to the very backbone of their souls!"

At one stroke the adolescent cobwebs were swept away. In the store-house of his mind Paul had been trying to range parcels that had been delivered there labelled "virtue," "vice"—or whatever—but containing suspiciously incompatible lumps. Off with the wrappers! That was Shaw's way. And the process of classification went on apace, almost automatically.

From the dry deck to which Shaw had caught him up, Paul surveyed with an ineffable sense of safety a seaful of floundering limbs and debris where he had been desperately keeping his own ego afloat. At a bookshop in Marseilles he found little green copies of other plays, and put them into his handbag to read in the train which was to bear him towards Germany.

VII

I

FAMILIAR as he had become with the process of disillusionment, Paul was not quite prepared for the stony reality of Munich, for the icy rain that soaked his hat and filled the gutters with despairing tears, nor for the blundering tram-way guard who forgot to set him down at Ohmstrasse and carried him to the outer rim of Schwabing. Neither was he prepared for the ironic *Führ di' Gott* with which an octogenarian *Portier* waved him into the world again after informing him that Frau Stiglmayr had been dead fifteen years—a certain Frau Stiglmayr whose name and address had somehow persisted in his head since childhood. Damp to the very soul he sought out a cheap hotel near the Hauptbahnhof, made his way to the Hoftheater to hear *Fra Diavolo*—of all operas the least meet and fitting—then tossed for hours in a narrow bed, under an absurd feather *Decke*, sleepless and disconsolate.

Romance, he had learned, was not a property of strange lands and situations, but a magical lens through which one viewed utterly unmagical objects—a spurious beautifier. Nevertheless it was disheartening to give the lie to certain beguiling fictions. However absurd it may have been for a small boy, on the strength of a doddering musician's inscription, to envisage Munich as enchanted ground, however absurd it may have been for him to

count on culling from Frau Stiglmayr's lips secrets that had gone up in smoke through Aunt Verona's kitchen chimney, Paul passionately regretted the necessity of disabusing his mind of the small boy's gracious fallacies. If it were merely a question of setting the small boy to rights regarding specific facts, the matter would have been simple and painless. But the correction threatened the very structure of life, its melodic line, its rhythms, and the supporting harmonies. It implied that the boy, thanks to false romantic premises, had been directing his life towards untenable conclusions. Yet, despite his nineteen-year-old conviction that reality was one thing and romance an illegitimate other, he could not quite bring himself to admit that the boy had been wrong, that his engrossed pursuit of will-o'-the-wisps had been the misapplication of energy Reason now made it out to be. After all, Romance had made life appear to be worth exerting oneself for. But for the lens, would it not have seemed prosaic and uninviting? Perhaps not. Perhaps if one had envisaged life as prose instead of poetry, a truer sense of values would have been developed in accordance with which life would have held forth more substantial lures. As it was, he reflected with the morbidness of youth, lifelong addiction to romance had undermined his constitution; and his craving for *chimères* was none the less strong for his knowledge of their debilitating effect.

Among the frequenters of cafés and concert-halls he tried to pick out people who might, thirty years ago or more, have sat tense and eager at the feet of Aunt Verona. In carriages and motor-cars he scanned faces for some sign of the aristocracy that had petted her. But all he found was a collection of folk who resembled their kind the world over. To think of Aunt Verona in their midst—whether the weird, broken Aunt Verona or the *admirable artiste* of the old musician's inscription

—was a violation of all verisimilitude. Aunt Verona was merely the memory of a woman who had been seen through the magical lens by himself and a few choice spirits, while the cities which had been her glorious setting were memories even less tangible.

Munich, in short, and Vienna—to which he repaired—were dead, just as Aunt Verona was dead. Surrounded by students of divers nationalities, listening to subsidized performances, giving heed to masters who upheld the traditions of Brahms, Bruckner, and Mahler, he was as far from the fabulous *soirées* as he had been at the age of twelve—even farther, for he had lost the faith in their fabulousness which had inspired his boyhood. Another bitter drop in the cup was a guess that the poor old composer had been in the same leaky, romantic boat.

True, viewed as a mere example of reality, Vienna, like Munich, presented historical and artistic splendours. But these partook of the nature of shells. Again it was a question of his unbridled hopes. Music, he had persuaded himself, was a medium for the conveying of ineffable messages, a universal language designed to bring balm to the hearts of a humanity befuddled by words. Yet in Vienna, this most eclectic of shrines, where renowned masters and brilliant pupils foregathered, his notions were regarded as hallucinations, albeit of an amiable faddist whom it was easy enough to humour. The naïve wisdom of Mr. Silva counted for nothing among men who knew all there was to know on the subject of music. After Paul had aired his views the conversation fell back on an exchange of personalities. There was praise for so-and-so's manner of "rendering" a certain fugue; condemnation for so-and-so's "interpreting" of a certain *étude*; but no apparent comprehension of the spiritual influence exercised by Bach and Chopin. Certain factions maintained that the fingers

should be raised high and the keys struck; others heat-
edly advocated the production of all effects through the
graduated weight of the arm. Even methods of pedal-
ling were discussed with an earnestness that would have
done credit to state legislators.

The students seemed to Paul a collection of precocious
babies; their masters mere coaches whose picturesque
senility was mistaken for a sort of godhead. Virtuosity
was the game, music merely a ball for athletic *virtuosi*
to kick. For five, six, seven hours a day one was ex-
pected to engage in digital acrobatics; each composition
was examined, phrase by phrase, like a strange machine;
its soul, vaguely indicated by such marks as *espressivo*,
andante doloroso, was reduced to terms of metronomics
and pedal pressures; the objective of the whole process
being to come upon a platform and evoke thunderous
commendation from auditors who would judge the per-
formance not by its success or failure in conveying the
composer's sooth—of which the great majority of them
would be as egregiously ignorant as the performer—
but by its approximation to or divergence from the per-
formance of some current "genius," whose title had been
bestowed in accordance with similar standards of judg-
ment. True, among masters and pupils there was end-
less talk concerning interpretation, but the point, more
often than not, was lost in a haystack of pedantic quib-
bling.

In the composition classes a like spirit prevailed.
Students were not encouraged to express, in musical
terms, some heartfelt conviction; they were required to
compose a hymn on Monday, a minuet or a canon on
Thursday, in conformity with grammar—a certain mar-
gin being allowed for breaches "in good usage," which
was to say, solecisms made by robust rebels like Wag-
ner and Berlioz. Between exercises of this sort the
lecturer struck intervals on a concealed keyboard and

asked members of the class to name them, by ear. All which, while constituting a reality, of its kind most excellent, was not the pot of gold.

For weeks Paul went faithfully to classes and concerts at the Musikvereinsgebäude, in the hope that illumination would break through the fog of drudgery. Away from the studios, at a hired piano, his soul went on rare excursions, but these were in the nature of truancy. The rest was school all over again—school of the *j' ai-tu-as-il-a* variety; and as he had once fled the droning chorus of verb-conjugators to vivify the verbs in books, so now he retired to make music that should *tout simplement* sound forth proclamations otherwise inexpressible. He was no longer the mutinous boy chafing at drill; he was the man realizing that his goal was not the goal of his neighbours. For him the prescribed exercises were a mockery. The faster his fingers flew, the more sardonic became the laughter of scales and arpeggios, the more maliciously they echoed the truth of his bitter discovery. Music had once been the channel for everything mystical in his nature. He could lose his soul in it and gloriously “find” it in the process. But in the long interval since he had “nearly been able to play the Liszt sonata” his soul had perforce sought other vehicles. It was too late to harness musical steeds for its journey. Musicians evinced an interest in his talent; he might, with application, become a virtuoso. Yet though he mastered every trick and played with a comprehension surpassing that of all his contemporaries, a deep importunate part of himself would still remain mute. Audiences might listen spellbound and applaud to the echo; yet at the end of his most exalted performance he would stand before them—as he had stood that night years ago in Fremantle—unhappy, almost ashamed, conscious that they had taken the shadow for the substance and mistaken the superficial message of a sonata

or a concerto for the message that lay far beneath it, writhing impotently and clamouring for expression.

All this came to him one hot summer's evening as he sat in the Volksgarten staring at the foam in his glass and hearing an orchestra wind its way through the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The suave undulations lulled his mind, drove away all distracting thoughts, and left him a strange clairvoyance. With a numb heart he took stock of his latest disillusionment. Music, the last stronghold of his romanticism, must be abandoned. He must marshal his forces again and seek higher ground. His message, whatever it should prove to be, was not for the casual souls who imbibed music as their bodies imbibed beer. Whatever it was, it was serious—as serious as religion, and of the nature of religion. It might never be manifested to himself, much less to the world. In that case what a fatuous farce life would have been! Better never to have wondered and hoped and ventured. But dignified dumbness was preferable to cheap sound. Rather than turn himself into a public entertainer he would withdraw to some coral island—and live in seclusion.

Suddenly, and for the fourth or fifth time in his life, the world stood still. He had heard a rustling sound beside him and a familiar voice calling, "Paul, Paul!"

Only a fat man with a fat and foody family were near him. But for a moment he had been in the presence of Aunt Verona. The illusion of it was still with him as he rose and made his way between tables and miniature trees. He was thrilled, dazed, un-nerved.

Once outside, he found himself in a bog of doubt. The city was a stony waste peopled by the living dead. Aunt Verona, thirty years before, had turned her back on it, and later, from the depths of her retreat, made

one more despairing attempt but ended by burning her record. "Futile" was the word she had used for it.

He walked on and on through the streets—afraid.

2

For two years Paul lived in Vienna, supplementing his savings by sums earned as accompanist for violinists and singers. His tardy discovery that music was an art rather than a philosophy was followed by the realization of his abysmal want of knowledge. Disappointed in the studios, he was arrested by the libraries. He was bewildered by the scope of human erudition and appalled by his own nescience.

Only when he reminded himself that, like differently prepared foodstuffs in a grocer's shop, all knowledge must be reducible to a comparatively small number of ingredients, did he have courage to take his education in hand. Then with feverish zeal he gave himself over to the task. Works on every subject, from sex to sunspots, in German, English and French—he tackled one by one. His most momentous finds were in the realm of speculative thought. Schopenhauer, Marx, Taussig, Bergson, and a dozen minor thinkers, he weighed in his balance. Each battered at the wall of truth from a different angle; each made breaches; none got through. Yet despite the accretions he was stuffing into his mental store-room, there was no longer a sense of chaos. A reliable principle of selection was quietly at work, ranging facts and opinions on shelves from which they could be readily reached down in case of discussion.

Of discussion there was plenty, for he inevitably came into contact with men who were artists and philosophers by virtue of their youth if not their talent. Their elders, weary of trying to know everything, had in most cases adopted some theory upon which, as upon string suspended in water, they could crystallize all the facts they

were capable of taking into solution. One old man in particular interested Paul, a university professor whose pet theory was that Jean-Jacques Rousseau constituted a sort of head waters from which flowed all the streams of present-day literature, art, philosophy, education and national policy. He had written articles tracing Rousseau's influence on Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Danton, Tolstoi, Novalis, Ruskin, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, Wagner, and a dozen other men of genius.

Paul accompanied him one day to an exhibition of impressionistic paintings hoping that, for once, the theory would be left in the *Garderobe* with the walking-sticks, but no sooner were they inside the gallery than the professor began, "All this, *lieber Freund*, is foreshadowed in Rousseau. These impressionists feel they are unique in their feelings and must express this uniqueness by discarding rules. Jean-Jacques, you'll remember, said, '*Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vu.*'"

The quotation brought Paul up with a start. Ever since he could remember he had been saying something quite like that to himself. Like Rousseau, and a whole world full of tiresome souls, he had been priding himself on the fact that he was unlike everybody else. Suddenly it seemed to him that there was no particular distinction in being unique. Certainly if uniqueness led to nothing more distinguished than the turning out of messy green, yellow and pink canvases there was little to be said for it. His reaction to writers like Nietzsche and Max Stirner had been a revulsion from superegoistic doctrines. Once more he saw the advantages of being a "quite ordinary boy."

On the other hand, he was oppressed by the swarm of people amongst whom he was moving; he often longed to retire into himself and "shut upon his retreat the floodgates of the world." Once, in the crowded, smoky atmosphere of a café, he caught himself under-

lining the following verses in Shelley's *Julian and Maddalo*:

"I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be."

He found he was getting a surfeit of books, a surfeit of discussion. His daily habits became more haphazard. He took longer walks into the suburbs. He fraternized with irresponsible students and returned the glances of still more irresponsible young women. One of these, Lottchen, upon whose favours he was believed to have an option that amounted to a proprietary right, gave him, through a chance remark, a clue to his state of mind. She had asked about his plans for the future, and he had replied half-heartedly that he would probably return to the sea. "Oh," she exclaimed, "you must look a perfect darling in uniform!"

He had a bantering smile for her femininity, and while Lottchen assured him she adored everything that wore a uniform, "even the messenger-boys," his mind wandered on to its own circuitous conclusions. All life was an effort to effect some satisfactory reconciliation between uniformity and one's complex individualism. For all women, and most men, uniformity was an end in itself. For him most varieties of human uniformity ignored or did violence to his passion for self-development, for the broadest sympathy and comprehension. In "that untravelled world" of which he was for ever catching glimpses that lured him on, was a sublime sort of uniformity for which, more and more ardently, he thirsted.

He knew Vienna held nothing further for him. He was not at all reconciled to the thought of a career on

the sea; but there one could at least take a dead reckoning of one's progress, and plan some course for the future.

3

By way of Berlin and Hamburg, the famous old Hamburg—but not at all conspicuously stocked with Bechstein pianos—Paul journeyed to Holland and England. Dwindling funds restricted his movements during the following weeks, as well as preparation for nautical examinations. When the certificate of Master Mariner was handed to him he had little more than enough money for his fare to Liverpool, where he was to join a cargo ship bound for Bombay. A stroke of fortune had brought him face to face in Fenchurch Street with the former apprentice he had known in Hong Kong. This young man was now second officer of a smart passenger liner and had found Paul a berth as third officer in a cargo ship belonging to the same company.

Although Paul cherished a retrospective fondness for his chum tinged with a new goodwill for the friendly assistance, he was at a loss to understand what had brought them, in the beginning, so closely together, and was relieved when the time came for parting. For other reasons, however, the parting left him forlorn.

"You'll be all right now, old man," his friend said in farewell. "You've a good berth, and the company'll do you well if you stick. Good luck and *bong voyage* and all that sort of thing!"

Paul accepted these good wishes in the spirit in which he had accepted his berth: gratefully, but without elation. For just as he had outgrown his boyish attachment to the debonair apprentice—he recalled now that he had, with a trace of femininity, secretly adored the apprentice's uniform: shades of Gritty and Lottchen!—so, he felt he had outgrown his berth. It seemed absurd to indulge

such misgivings before the ink was dry on his Master's papers; but the misgivings were all the more ominous on that account.

They returned with strange emphasis when he boarded his new ship. "Been up to London, have you, Mr. Minas?" began the captain, by way of breaking the ice.

"Yes, sir," replied Paul—then whimsically added the familiar phrase from the ribald sailor song, "To see what I could see."

"Ay—and what did you see at all?"

It was at that moment that the misgivings returned; for how was he to tell a hearty skipper that he had seen a play by Barrie, caricatures by Max Beerbohm, quasi-lords and ladies bouncing upon tame steeds in Rotten Row, and—God save the mark—the Wallace Collection!

4

After two years consulting of and catering to a tyrannical set of tastes, desires and principles, Paul found unexpected refreshment in the simple routine of the sea, where superior officers shouldered the burden of making decisions. The sense of freedom he experienced as the *Cranmore* churned her way out of the Mersey was, in view of his duties, circumscribed, but he concluded that the sense of freedom in any one plane of being was contingent upon imprisonment of faculties in other planes; there was always a string to the kite. Abstract liberty, like the geometrical point, was merely a *façon de parler*—an unstable sea upon which only Peters were rash enough to walk, and from which only Peters were rescued. Shelley the poet, enamoured of liberty, impersonated a cloud and offered himself to the West Wind, but Shelley the citizen came croppers. Poor old Jean-Jacques, chained worshipper of liberty and reprehensible amateur of morality, while indulging in speculative *vertiges*, took care to keep his feet on the ground. "*J'aime beaucoup*

ce tournoiement," he confessed, then spoilt—or saved—the situation by stipulating, "*Pourvu que je sois en sureté.*" Paul knew, in short, that he was imbibing an intoxicating draught, and was fully aware of the effect of intoxicants.

On this occasion the effect endured about five days. At the end of that period he saw the coast of Spain, and discovered that Spain, which he had not visited, meant more to him, literally and figuratively, than Bombay, with which he was familiar. He was standing on the main deck, supervising the lashing down of a row of stalls containing polo ponies. The boxes had become insecure during a siege of bad weather in the Bay of Biscay.

His eyes rested on the dim shore-line, and his thoughts, mounted on a leisurely Rosinante, ambled inland. Castles in Spain—Castilian women of an exotic blondness, like blood-oranges — Carmen — Lazarillo — Figaro—amber grapes, bull-rings, acrid cafés where livid, moustached women and tight-trousered men danced to schottisches in which rhythms swished like flaming petticoats under the enveloping skirt of the melody. He pictured John Tanner in the Alhambra, enjoyed Granada with a Shavian relish, then snorted at the incongruity. He was a romanticist despite his Shavianism, and he began to suspect Shaw of the same wretched defection. One must be anti-romantic to be Shavian, and anti-Shavian to be Shawlike!

He turned from the rail with a sigh. As usual the daydream had ended in an intellectual paradox.

And that poor, caged pony! A Lascar deckhand had hit it over the nose to punish it for trying to kick the back out of its box. Why shouldn't it kick the back out of its box!

As a deputy of Providence it was Paul's duty to reprimand the Lascar in sharp pidgin-English for abusing a

thousand-guinea horse; that duty done, he proceeded, as a fellow-prisoner, to explain to the pony, in terms of pats and cluckings, that freedom was a relative quantity, not to be attained by vicious hoofs. If the pony had retorted, "Do you call it freedom to be delivered into the hands of some harebrained cavalry officer whose notion of what conduces to my welfare is to make me gallop over a dusty field after a little ball he merely wants to *hit*?" Paul would have replied, "On the whole, yes. You'll be better off, for instance, than your ninety-second cousins on Dartmoor. Notwithstanding which, throw the silly ass if you can—and a clean getaway to you!"

As the *Cranmore* lurched through a bright blue, early-autumn Mediterranean, Paul's spirits reflected the sea's suppressive calm. He had learned the ways of the ship, weighed her crew in the balance, found it wanting, and settled down for the voyage. It was depressing to acknowledge how easily he had established his footing. It meant that during the remainder of the voyage there would be nothing but books, the caprices of the weather, and passing landmarks to provide stimulation. And on subsequent voyages the prospect of slow, monotonous promotion. One day he would be put in command of a ship; then of a bigger ship. By that time his hair would be grey, or gone. And the rest of the men seemed to think—but what mattered what they thought! His mental processes never tallied with those of his neighbours, never had, and never would, on land or on sea, world without end, Amen! Why trouble then to look back or forward, why do anything but accept life as it was, and sleep whenever possible!

At Port Said the *Cranmore* was to coal and unload a marble statue for a pasha's palace. Paul obtained leave, drew some money, dressed in civilian clothes, and went ashore to look for a sextant and other articles which lack of funds had prevented him from buying in England.

Down the gangway; into a clumsy bumboat painted red and blue; through hordes of fruit, cigarette and postcard venders; towards the breakwater near which brown-legged fishermen stood up to their knees in water hauling at nets; past a towering Orient liner from Australia; along teeming quays—the red tarbooshes, the Arabic inscriptions on signboards, the solicitations of dirty dragomans—the whole miscellany welded together in a brassy light which sharpened lines and angles, all under a pearl and turquoise sky. Already, at this wicked portal, Paul had recaptured the smell of the East.

As he left the quay a ragged urchin came running up to advertise the attractions of a bawdy house prepared to cater to the most exactingly perverse. The proffered enticements, each more indecent than the last, Paul declined with a shake of the head, but let the boy complete the catalogue. There was something piquant in the contrast between the tender years of the child and his monstrous sapience. “Hi, Mist’ Ferguson, you wan’ see ——” and the diminutive tout put forward a final bait.

Ferguson was a generic name for Englishmen, interchangeable with Disraeli and Cornwallis-West. Paul had heard enough.

“*Ecklahburra!*” he cried. “*Kaleb!*”

And at the sudden menace in his tone the boy scuttled off.

Fascinating, putrid land! Its very babes were born wicked. Paul had a new conception of what was meant by the doctrine of original sin. As a boy he had supposed “original” sin signified some specially ingenious form of iniquity.

The book shops as usual lured him, but he coveted so many objects that he ended by buying none, and wandered on. In two more hours he would be back on board, bound south through the canal, an automaton in the

service of automata. A satiric comment, which he had heard sailors repeat on stormy nights, was running through his head, "Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea!"

A craving for isolation sent him walking away from the central streets, beyond the railway station, down a barren road towards infinite flat stretches of sand. In a grubby shop by the wayside he stopped to drink Turkish coffee and eat sweet Syrian pastries. Then he returned to the glaring waste and continued his aimless walk. He was a small boy again, playing hookey. Outwardly he trembled, but an unwonted inner calm, like that of a top at full spin, was stealing over him. Some conflict was being waged between two parts of his nature. He had no desire to take sides; was not even curious as to the outcome.

At length he sat down for sheer weariness in the shade of a peppercorn tree by the side of a deserted camel track. On all sides the wilderness extended. Far to his left were the only signs of civilization: low walls and a huddle of roofs. At long intervals, a few hundred yards before him, ships passed, as though slowly cutting their way through banks of sand. There was no trace of the ribbon of water that floated them.

The conflict was at an end, and the strange inner calm had enveloped him in a physical numbness that left his mind pellucid. In planes of existence infinitely remote, clocks must be ticking, pens recording, throats laughing and cursing, engines grinding and propelling. Here, inertia reigned, unchallengeably.

An odd procession of young Minases trooped before him: timid, cocksure, lonely, eager, disappointed, ecstatic and morose boys—all authentic versions of himself, and all dead.

A vision of the future succeeded. The boyish Minases were sent scurrying by sadder, wiser ghosts, constitut-

ing a less definite and less diversified company. Some suspicion of the futility of their existence characterized and related them, and at the end of the procession trudged a weary old man, shabby, hungry, disdainful.

Paul looked "before and after," but without pining. The emotions which stirred within him seemed as impersonal as the delicate rustling of leaves overhead. His very life he shared with the tree, for he drew it from the same infinite source. The universe was a mint. He was a coin; the tree another. When the right time came each would be withdrawn from currency, to be remelted, restamped and reissued. It little mattered how one were invested, provided one kept in circulation. Even if one stepped out of circulation voluntarily, the resources of life would be none the poorer.

He lay at full length on the sand, and slept. When he awoke, the shadow of the tree extended far beyond his feet. He sat up and shuddered, for in his dreams he had been present at his own funeral. Miss Todd had sung "Abide with Me" and *flatted*. And the chimes of Fremantle tolled his knell.

The sounds he had heard in his sleep were the siren and bells of a passing ship. He watched her for a few moments, then turned his gaze far down the canal, in the direction of the last warehouses outside the town. There a big black, top-heavy steamer was approaching. His heart beat faster, and he sat back against the trunk of the tree, instinctively straightening his coat and necktie as if in anticipation of an encounter.

Slowly, slowly, the *Cranmore* advanced. He could hear, across acres of sand, the pulse of her engines, the breathing of her funnel. She was alive; he was fond of her; and she was carrying with her all his old life, carrying it away beyond recall.

On the decks he made out figures and identified them by their positions. Behind the house were the rows of

stalls. The restless pony would miss him if none of the men did.

The port-hole of his own cabin! His bags were there—his books and music and letters, his clothes and the photographs of six or seven women, mistresses of a night or a week or a month.

The disciplines of the passing life were in their way good—necessary for those simple fellows on deck, but not meant for him. His disciplines must be self-imposed. This very act of running away—instinctive, unpremeditated as it had been—his mates would judge lawless; but it was in reality a stern and imperious duty.

When the ship was a mere speck surmounted by a scarf of smoke, Paul rose and set his face towards the north. The exalted calm had basely deserted him, and there had been tears in his eyes. He felt "like a motherless child, a long way from home," and dreaded to re-enter the sinister town. Two years ago he would have been heartened by his hoard. But that was gone, and in its place he had a paltry meed of experience gained in the two years which had seen him over the threshold of manhood. One ingredient in that experience was unworldliness; another was doubt; another indifference. Three traitors in the camp!

Twilight overtook him and he reached the streets as they were awakening to their evening gaiety. A cool breeze stole through date palms in parched courts, and life whispered meaningly from shadowy doorways. Snatches of laughter sought him out, and pungent odours. From the inner harbour came the music of a marine band. Some magical agency was conspiring to throw a glamour over the sordidness of his surroundings.

On reaching the water-side he came into view of a liner ablaze with lights. A hundred noisy coolies were passing sacks of coal into her side. Small boats clus-

tered about the gangway which swarmed with gayly dressed women and men in dinner jackets—Dutch men and women gleeful at the interruption in their long journey to Java.

The sight caused Paul another swift change of mood. He envied those people on the gangway: envied them their easy *camaraderie*.

He swung on his heel and walked towards the breakwater, turning to the left when he reached the deserted beach. The brown shallow sea at his feet hissed like water spilt on a stove. To his right the statue of Lesseps stood black against the indigo curtain of night brocaded with stars. Nearer, beyond the breakwater, was a tangle of masts where moored fishing-boats creaked like cradles. To his left the beach and the surf-crested rollers stretched unendingly. From the town behind him came stealthy echoes of civilization: the clanking of chains and winches, the rattle of wheels, the cries of boatmen, the sighing of dry leaves. The evening breeze made him shiver.

If only one had the courage to walk to the end of the breakwater and disappear for ever! Who would even wonder what had become of him? He was "half in love with easeful death." He knew just what Keats had meant.

A white-robed figure was running towards him from the direction of the road. "Hi, hi, Mist' Ferguson—you wan' see hoochie-koochie girl?"

"What! You back, you little blighter!"

The boy gave him a propitiatory grin.

"Here—here's a penny. Now hop it, or I'll bloody well drown you!"

The boy decided to cut his losses and sell out, as Paul turned back once more towards the port which struck him as a sort of overgrown pest-house for lost and infected souls

VIII

I

AT the station he found that a train was about to leave for Cairo. He boarded it and booked a seat in the dining car. Since breakfast he had had nothing but two Syrian pastries and a tiny cup of coffee. Until dinner was announced he sat staring through the window, as the train sped beside the canal, which was revealed from time to time by the searchlights of lonely steamers feeling their way to or from Suez. The other occupants of his compartment were swarthy, prosperous men, whose noses and eyes reminded Paul of illustrations in the family Bible at Hale's Turning.

When he took his place at the table he found opposite him a robust young man of thirty-two or three with fiery hair and alert blue eyes. His appearance, manner and apparel proclaimed him Irish-American. Paul suspected him of a desire to make talk and addressed himself to his food. Casual conversation could only be built on a foundation of self-confidence. The stranger, having enough and to spare, overrode Paul's reserve.

"I wouldn't eat that if I was you, friend," he began.

Paul, on the point of lifting a slice of tomato to his mouth, paused and looked at the speaker.

"Why not?"

"It ain't safe to eat uncooked vegetables in this part of the world. You're new here, ain't you?"

Paul laughed, and went on eating his salad. "Yes, but hungry enough to take risks."

"Then don't ever say I didn't warn you!" The American spoke with his mouth full of baked potato.

"Thanks," said Paul, at a loss to handle the other's abrupt goodwill.

The American read encouragement in Paul's hesitation. Pointing with his fork to an untouched slice of tomato, he announced, in genial tones:

"I fired one o' them at a priest once—in school."

"Good for you!" Paul exclaimed. "Did you hit him?"

"*Did* I? Say, listen, I can see the juice runnin' down Father Mulligan's neck to this day."

"Did you get caned for it?"

"Caned! I got *canned*. They kicked me out o' school so hard I'm still goin'!"

"A bit drastic," Paul commented.

"They was tryin' to make priests of us. Can you imagine *me* bein' a priest?"

"It does take a bit of imagining."

The American was reliving his past. "What didn't hit Father Mulligan kept on goin', see. It was in geography, and there was a map of the world on the blackboard. After bustin' on his jaw the remains of the vegetable landed just about here," and he waved his hand toward the black wilderness outside the window.

"About here?"

"It finally struck the middle of the world—get me? Egypt roughly."

"Oh—I see. So you, being Irish and consequently superstitious, took it as an omen—came here in accordance with that fateful indication? A sort of dickory-dickory-dock decision."

The American's eyes flashed blue. "That's about the size of it. After I'd put Egypt on the map, so to speak, why I felt like I sort of owned it, see, and finally come over."

"Had any luck?"

“Well, friend, I been here three year now, and I guess I’ve livened the old place up some. If you’re not busy to-morrow drop around and see my joint. There ain’t another like it in the known world.”

“I’ll bet there’s not,” said Paul with conviction.

Over coffee and cigars the American talked of his youthful struggle, his experience as grocer’s clerk, book agent, and drummer for furniture and hardware. Eventually he had persuaded a syndicate of manufacturers to send him to Egypt.

“I got the agency now for two hundred and forty-nine lines,” he exclaimed. “Everything on God’s earth from stone-crushers to corn-plasters. I been wearing samples, riding on samples, brushing my teeth with samples, and feeding samples to the dog, see.”

“And who buys your wares—natives or Europeans?”

“Both—but natives mostly. I’ve just sold five hundred pair of rubbers, and it hasn’t rained here since Moses was a baby. Soon I’ll be sellin’ ’em snow-shoes!

“I got a native staff for unpacking and shipping and gettin’ me in a mess generally, and an Armenian girl typist and bookkeeper to get me out again. Gee, she’s a wonder—talks every known tongue bar Choctaw.”

“Don’t you find it pretty strenuous?”

“You said it! I been up to Port Said to tell the American Consul to watch out for a good man. Englishmen won’t peddle chewing gum round the native quarters. I like ’em, mind you—but I can’t work with ’em. They want to sell goods like thermometers and spy-glasses, which don’t pay like chewing-gum. Gum’s *infra dig*, but it brings in the kale.”

“I suppose Cairo is full of human oddities,” Paul remarked. “Strange minglings of tribes?”

“Most of ’em don’t know their own selves what the devil they are.”

“Then I ought to fit somewhere.”

"Staying for good?"

"It's time I stayed somewhere permanently. I've been nearly everywhere, you know, temporarily."

"Then that'll account for your accent."

"It accounts for many things. Or, to put it the other way round, many things account for *it*—for my nomadism." He felt he was being too precious for his audience, but went on. "I mean that accidents of birth, circumstance, and temperament send one roaming over the world." He had almost said, under the influence of the other's idiom, "the *known* world."

"What's your line?"

"I haven't decided yet. I'm looking for ideas."

The American puffed hard at his cigar, then leaned forward impulsively. "Say, listen!" he exclaimed. "Mebbe you and me could join forces!"

Paul wondered whether he had enough strength of character to peddle chewing gum.

The American accompanied him back to his compartment and expatiated upon social and commercial conditions in Egypt.

"Where are you stayin'?" he asked, as the train drew into the terminus.

Paul briefly explained the situation.

His companion pursed his lips, slapped Paul on the shoulders, then said:

"Listen here, son, you're comin' right along with papa, see. I got two rooms at Shepheard's. I only live there because it's good for trade. Got to keep up the bluff, you know. I'll sleep you on a sofa. My name's Coyle—Patrick Coyle."

Paul gratefully took the hand extended to him. "Mine's Minas," he said. "I'm sure it's most awfully decent of you to——"

"Aw, keep the change," briskly interposed his new friend.

Paul was awakened next morning by a cold nose and a pair of clumsy paws. He was being earnestly smelt and he could hear an unwieldy tail, somewhere near the floor, thudding forth the time to an inward scherzo. He pulled the puppy on the sofa beside him, dodging its familiar tongue.

Encouraged by this reception, Aïda, by means of sniffs and writhings, sudden rigidities, sudden collapses, and a *crescendo* of tail-waggings, descanted on the joys of outdoor life. She had already roused her master, and there were sounds of rushing water from the direction of the bathroom.

Paul sprang up and went to the open window, shivering at the chill of the morning air. The thin November sunlight had splashed its way into the garden at the back of the hotel, casting lacy shadows on the orange sand and picking out gay colours in the flower-beds.

Breakfast, consisting of coffee, rolls, shredded wheat—in sample cakes—and cream, was brought into the sitting-room half an hour later, and Aïda, with a deep, explosive sigh of resignation, collapsed before the closed door.

“What’s *her* nationality? She looks a mut like everybody and everything else in this land, where even the breakfasts are Turkish-American.”

“She *is*,” Patrick assented. “A lady that was staying here for her health had a prize female cocker spaniel which got loose one day. The old dame hoped for the best, see, but the worst happened, and the spaniel up and had Ada—I named her after the opera. Mrs. Thingamatite was mad as a hatter and ordered the litter drowned. I happened along as the guy was takin’ ’em to the Nile in a bag, and rescued this one, not realizing it was a *her*. I had nothin’ to feed her with but a

sample fountain-pen filler. One night she got rambunctious and bit the glass, and I near strangled her tryin' to make her spit it out, see. After that I put rubber over it and all was well.

"You're a homely hound, ain't you, Ada? Just a plain she-dog, just nothing, see."

Aida had constructed this as an invitation to breakfast, and came towards the table, to be affectionately mauled.

Paul was touched by this domesticity. "There's a great deal to be said for internationalism, even in dogs," he philosophized. "Aida may be impossible socially, but she's very human—probably more so than her prize mamma. Lines of racial demarcation will gradually get blurred as the world goes on. They'll have to, or the world *won't* go on. It's a pet theory of mine that we'll all end by being a world-wide family."

"You wouldn't like your grandchildren being half Chinese, would you?"

"I shouldn't mind. As far as that goes, there's no telling what our great-to-the-*n*th-power grandfathers may have been. It's highly probable that you and I and your Arab servant are related, if one could trace back far enough."

"Thanks be to God we can't then, for I'd brain that nigger if I found he was a relative of mine. He nearly started an Egyptian revolt when Ada stepped on his prayer-rug. She makes Abdul, my chief clerk's, life a merry hell with her poor wet nose. Don't you, old girl? Yes—we're going day-days now."

They called at a neighbouring garage for Patrick's most practical sample, a motor-cycle with a passenger seat at the rear and a basket attachment in front for Aida, who was grovelling and baying her ecstasy in tones which, had her mother been there to hear, would have served as a mortifying reminder of her guilt.

"I'll ride you round the old burg," said Patrick, when

his guest was safely perched behind and Aïda's tail had been tucked in.

"Everybody's used to me and Ada now," said Patrick. "At first the natives collected in crowds. It was free publicity for the byke. Not that I ride it for that. I'm just naturally odd. I'm me own trade-mark; I got a commercial personality."

By this time the engine was in an uproar, and two minutes later the trio were speeding past the deserted terrace of the hotel.

True to his word, Patrick whizzed the length and breadth of Cairo, past mosques and palaces, bearing down on groups of red-slippered natives, for the fun of seeing them scatter. "It amuses the child," he sang back after one close shave.

At the summit of the Mohattam Hill they paused. Paul looked down at the huddle of roofs and streets surmounted by a hundred minarets, and thought of the biblical illustration of the temptation on the mount. Far away beyond the valley of the river, the pyramids were silhouetted like tents against the sky.

The world before his eyes resembled an iridescent bubble. For the incomparable panorama, for the boundless spaciousness of earth and sky, for the living antiquity of it all, the solidity of the stone and the delicacy of pale lights and colours that played over it, he felt emotions too deep for utterance. The prosaic commentaries of his companion he scarcely heard. Relieved from the immediate care of having to find a livelihood, he was free to absorb impressions. Every object, every colour and sound, were registering themselves on the sensitive plate of his mind, and he had to make an effort to respond to the other man's announcement that it was time to turn back.

Patrick made straight for the heart of the native quarter.

"They said I was a fool to think of coming down here," he explained as he steered a precarious course through the narrow, swarming Mouski. "So I just clowned around to let 'em keep on thinkin' I was one, see. I even half thought so myself, till some of the wise guys from the European quarter come down and tried to buy me out. Then my shares went up in me own eyes. It pays to think big, believe *me*. Well, this here's the joint."

They entered a narrow doorway and mounted dark stairs, past store-rooms filled with packing cases, to a dapper office furnished in mahogany and brightened by flowers. Patrick introduced Abdul and Mademoiselle Arzoumanian, the typist, a pallid young woman of thirty-odd, with a flat white nose, disconcertingly large black eyes, and a mop of rust-coloured hair. She wore a black frock and high-heeled shoes. Her hands were as broad as they were long, and her fan-shaped nails showed traces of having been bitten. Paul had the sensation of being in the presence of a moral dwarf.

He wandered forth to inspect the unparalleled assortment of commodities, while his friend dictated contracts couched in grandiloquent terms, gave instructions in bad Arabic and bad French, and interviewed prospective buyers—Greeks, Turks, Syrians, Armenians, Arabs—Mademoiselle acting as interpreter. At 1.30 Abdul closed the office door, and Patrick leaned back in his swivel chair. Mademoiselle had gone into an improvised kitchen to cook luncheon, and Abdul was producing linen, crockery, and silver.

Places were laid for four, and Paul, who had just left a ship on which the Lascar crew were regarded as some species of lower animal, was a little shocked when Abdul sat down with them. But he covered his surprise as successfully as Abdul concealed his horror at the pork chops the three infidels were preparing to devour. There

were great slabs of unleavened bread and a variety of sample pickles and jams. Abdul was encouraged to talk, and waxed eloquent in weird English. He spoke of a riot in the streets which had made his legs tremble. "It was very shame!" he concluded, with tragic eyes. By "shame" he meant "terrifying," just as by "famous" he meant "agreeable to the palate." The divergence of his vocabulary from the English norm was as wide as that of journeymen from that of metaphysicians; yet, Paul mused, one could with a little imagination reconcile any verbal discrepancies. One listened to a specialized vocabulary until one had heard it in a sufficient number of connotations to commence transposing. If this sort of thing were conscientiously done, one might end by discovering that every human being was saying exactly the same thing as every other. Every utterance, when balanced by the sum of circumferences which had brought it into formulation, was simply part of the One utterance, the eternal verity, just as every colour was simply a part of the spectrum that constituted light. Once we were intelligent enough to take this fact into reckoning, we should enter for the first time in history upon an era of civilization. He was sure Babel was the stumbling block in the way of human progress.

After luncheon they mounted to the dazzling white roof. The old city sent up a thousand muffled sounds. Against patches of light and shade moved a living kaleidoscope: olive and copper faces under scarlet tarbooches; flowing gallabias of purple and garnet; vermilion and lemon-coloured slippers; lilac cotton tunics and jade silk scarfs; pasty black-gowned women with coquettishly transparent white veils. And through the tortuous thoroughfares passed donkeys laden with emerald-green fodder. Paul was lazy-minded enough to wonder how the beasts dared eat it uncooked.

"We got to celebrate," said Patrick, "seeing it's your

first visit," and he called out in Arabic to a dirty little girl behind a dirty Nottingham curtain.

One by one the windows of neighbouring houses filled with the faces of women and children who showed a deep indulgent interest in the proceedings.

After a whispered consultation with her family the little girl thrust her brown legs over the sill and dropped to the roof, advancing half boldly, half diffidently while Aïda went forward with an official air to smell her. Abdul fetched boxes for the two men to sit on, and the girl tossed back her hair, pulled at her greasy pink frock, wriggled her bare toes, and over her shoulder exchanged pleasantries with her sisters.

Then from the window, Mamma began to beat a tom-tom, which had an automatic effect upon the girl. Her little flat stomach and flat lips swayed; her slender arms rippled from shoulder to finger-tips.

The festive spirit spread beyond the windows and rooftops to the street, and a blind, strolling nut-vender, singing topical ditties to attract custom, was induced to mount the stairs with his boy guide and contribute his talent. Abdul procured additional performers, and soon an assortment of Arabs, Turks, and hulking Sudanese niggers were performing strange dances whilst others chanted strange tunes, and all old Cairo rested from loafing to watch.

The nut-vender sang of a notorious fat beauty of the town. Patrick, his hat pulled over his eyes, sat bolt upright on his box, earnestly bossing the show. "Qua-eesh!" was his expression for approval, sparingly vouchsafed. By way of honorarium he distributed samples of chewing-gum and toothpaste from a large open box. From time to time he tossed packages to the thronged windows and balconies, and the "celebration" became, in true Irish-American fashion, a capital "ad."

Paul courted the midday sun, felt his nose getting red

under it. His box was tilted back, and he was lost in an indolent dream. He saw Aïda striving to scale a wall and "adjust" a cat who merely blinked at her efforts. He thought, what a privilege to have been born a Sudanese nigger with gigantic hands and steel thighs, unable to think or even be distressed by the vague weight of unthinkability, unable to do anything but work and grovel and grin, with a flash of white teeth and husky gurgle, and do it from morning to night. He recalled the image of Becky States, and in imagination heard her melodious, growling baritone. Becky and that enormous coon! She would straightway have behaved like the prize spaniel.

The tom-tom beat unceasingly. The little flat stomach never flagged. A toothless Turk pranced around the girl, uttering ribaldries that sent a rustle of merriment from window to window, and the niggers, lithe and powerful under their dingy pinafores, capered with unbelievable grace, to the droning accompaniment of cracked old throats.

Paul was losing all hold of fact. His body was anæsthetized. His faculties had been distilled into an essence which pervaded the scene. He *was* the scene; he was the blind nut-vender, the dirty little girl, the puppy staring covetously at the cat, the gold and turquoise of air and sky, the pearly sheen of a minaret; their identity was his

Until a voice said in his ear, "Say, listen, Minas, what do you think of Mademoiselle?"

Paul came slowly out of his trance. For a moment he could attach no meaning to the words, and had to piece them together. What did he think of the Armenian typist?

"I've barely made her acquaintance," he temporized. "Why?"

"She's my fiancée," announced Patrick.

Paul sat up with a start and involuntarily cried, "No!"

Then he realized he had wounded his friend, and set about to transform the implied protest of the exclamation into mere surprised interest. Patrick accepted this, along with Paul's perfunctory congratulations, and loudly praised the young woman's qualities.

"She's a wonder," was the refrain. "Speaks every known tongue."

Paul had observed that Aïda avoided Mademoiselle. That told him more than Pat's loquacious eulogies. His next mission then loomed before him. He must prevent Patrick Coyle from running untrue to type.

3

Within a few days Paul was appointed salesman, with a small salary and liberal commission. It was decided he should occupy himself with dealers of European origin, leaving his employer free to concentrate his attention on the natives. From the first Paul felt hostility behind the ingenuous smiles of Mademoiselle Arzoumanian, and knew his appointment had been made in defiance of her counsels. He concluded that Pat counted on him to win the confidence of merchants who were put off by brusque Irish-American methods, and he smiled at the thought that he should be chosen to beguile the conventional: he whose whole life had been an ode to vagrancy! Yet it flattered him that the man of business had detected, through the welter of the mariner's personality, some guiding current, some consistency definite enough to warrant his being placed in the category of men capable of meeting conventionality on its own ground.

His new status obliged him to take stock of his qualifications. Business experience was lacking, but his knowledge of men was fairly sound. He had discovered that the best way to gratify one's curiosity about people

was to catch them off their guard; consequently he had cultivated disarming manners. His life at sea had not blunted the eminent presentability of his starched and combed childhood.

He was conscious of the favourable impression he made during his first weeks in Cairo. When he had come to terms with Patrick Coyle he had ordered a wardrobe and engaged a small room at Shepheard's. Lounging in company with his friend, he noticed that acquaintances of Coyle's lingered to be introduced, and that their manner towards himself was an appreciable shade more deferential than toward the Irishman. This bred in him a slight contempt towards strangers that served to increase his prestige. Pat, swallowing his pride one evening, made an admission which confirmed Paul's observation.

"Say, listen, sonny," said Patrick, when a prominent official had stopped to chat with them in the foyer of the opera house, after a performance of *Carmen*. "That guy used to cut me till you turned up. Gee, the way you got 'em all guessing is a treat. The more *I* try to be classy, the more of a low-life bum I look, and I guess I'll never learn any different."

Paul laughed and linked his arm in that of his employer. "Rot," he said consolingly, though he was glowingly aware of the glances cast upon him by beautiful women. "It's all humbug. That ass who stopped to talk just now hasn't a warm drop of blood in his veins however blue it may be. He's a nabob because he has a title and a diplomatic post; but he has the soul of a remittance man. It's no credit to me that I'm able to meet wasters like Lord Henry Shroton and women like his wife on their own terms. There's not a man here whose friendship I should consider half as much a privilege as I consider yours. And to prove it, I'm going to avenge you. So far I've warded off their overtures on

your account. If they didn't invite you, they couldn't have me. But to-night I've a new idea. Lady Henry S. has asked me to call. Quite regardless of my estate. For that matter she wouldn't be bothered with a crown prince who squinted. But she's intrigued by your humble assistant's 'dark hair and lovesome mien.' *Eh bien, mon vieux*, I'll grace her bally tea table! She's the thin end of the wedge. Before I'm through with her, his lordship will have dropped a potent word in the ear of that climbing draper man, Markwick, and if Markwick, via Lord Henry, via Lady ditto, via me, doesn't send you a thumping order, then I'll forfeit my salary for the next six months. We'll make them pay through the nose for their snubs. I'm no hand at sticking up posters in the bazaars; that's American publicity, and *your* pidgin. I'm beginning to see the English idea of business through connexions. We're Jack Spratt and his wife—and betwixt us both, by God, we'll lick the platter clean."

Pat's imagination was kindled, and his eyes flashed nervously. "Listen here, sonny," he said. "If you can land a thousand-pound order from Markwick's as a starter, I'll make you a partner."

"Pooh—a paltry thousand! I thought you thought *big!*"

Pat looked dubious. "Markwick's the kind of a mean son-of-a-gun who'd look in your mouth to see if your back teeth were filled with zinc. He's conservative and has always done his buying in England, like his old man before him."

"Mrs. Markwick would give an eye-tooth, though, to be invited to one of Lady Henry's crushes."

Pat stared. "I don't get you. Are you going to make love to her too?"

"God forfend! Besides I can't tackle her direct, for she wouldn't even condescend to put up her *lorgnette* to

look at me. Being a mere *bourgeoise* she has to be particular whom she knows."

"Then how the devil——"

"But when she finds out that I have the *entrée* to Lady Henry's——"

"How *did* you get the *entrée*?"

"Just because I didn't seem to want it—as I didn't."

Pat was exasperated, as well as bewildered, and Paul explained. "This afternoon I dropped into the Savoy. The Shrotons were there with some people who were on their way inland to shoot big game. One of the ladies noticed me, and by and by old Henry strolled over. Wouldn't I come and be presented to his wife? So I had to. She asked me a few test questions. Did I shoot? Did I play polo? What did I think of the new American dances? Then somebody wondered what the orchestra were playing, and I said they had all but given the *coup de grâce* to Schubert's Unfinished Symphony."

"Unfinished?"

"Yes, it's all right. Don't interrupt. Lady Henry—Cora, as they call her—at this sign of intelligence on my part, felt justified in having picked me up, and said, 'I suppose you are very musical, Mr. Minas; you look musical; do you play the piano?'"

"Do you?"

"Naturally."

"Well, I'm damned!"

"So she asked if I'd play for her some day; she adored music—'really good music.' That's what they all say."

"But whoa your horses. That's a long ways from Markwick's order."

"Not nearly so long as you imagine. You didn't see Cora's eyelids when she said I looked musical."

"Murder!"

They had made their way back to the hotel. Another idea had leapt into Paul's head.

"What a pity you're so happily engaged to be married," he threw out, with a feeling of guilt at the insincerity of the remark.

"Why?"

"Because Lucia and Beatrice and Ivy Markwick have all to go off. Lucia's overdue."

"There's your chance, then," said Pat irritably. "You once told me you were an adventurer."

"I am, but a most quixotic one, and young women aren't my game just now."

"What the devil is your game?"

"My game is rushing into places where even you fear to tread, old fellow, and rushing in to get bacon for you."

"God knows I don't want Lucia Markwick."

"Nor Beatrice, nor yet Ivy," asserted Paul. "I merely said, what a pity you're so happily engaged."

"I didn't like the way you said it."

"I'm sorry."

Patrick was still ruffled when Paul accepted an offer of whisky and soda in his rooms, where they were rapturously received by the imprisoned Aïda.

"You don't approve of Mademoiselle," Pat ventured bluntly.

Paul weighed the answer. "I approve of her as a shrewd little Armenian."

"But not as my future wife? I thought you didn't believe in drawing the line between nationalities."

"It's a question not of nationality but of personal quality. An ambitious man has to make his way in society as well as in business, and society judges him through the front his wife is able to put up. Would Mademoiselle feel at home at a reception given, say, by the American Consul-General? And could Mrs. Consul-General invite your in-laws?" Paul felt the thrusts cruel and found a way to mitigate them. "My attitude may

be influenced by the fact that Mademoiselle distrusts me."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, she does, Pat—as you must know. If it weren't so damned nosy of me, I'd ask you to make a compact."

Pat waited.

"That you refrain from making any definite arrangements towards getting married till I prove Mademoiselle's distrust of my capacities unfounded. Give me time to do that, then I'll have a better right to butt into your private affairs."

Pat reflected deeply. His irritability had gone, and a depression quite foreign to him taken its place. "Done!" he finally surprised Paul by announcing.

As Paul was leaving the room, Pat made a further admission. "I've been awful lonesome in this burg." Then with a whimsical, lugubrious humour he added, "I had to propose to somebody, didn't I?"

Paul just prevented himself from saying, "And Mademoiselle saw to it that she was the somebody." He waited silently for more, and Pat, holding open the door, went on:

"Do you think you can stay in with that crowd?"

"The Shrotons? I have no such intention. From them I'm going on to the really useful nabobs—the commercial ones—the Jews and the Beys and the Pashas."

"How for the love of Mike?"

"I don't know."

"It's easier said than done, believe *me!*"

"Of course—otherwise it wouldn't be worth attempting."

"You're ambitious too."

"In a quixotic way."

"Listen here, sonny, do you realize what makin' up to frivolous women involves?"

Flippancy, Paul felt, was what his friend needed to bring him out of his despondency. "A sailor doesn't set a very high value on his virtue," he laughed.

Pat, he knew, did—but Paul could respect a point of view he didn't share.

"Well, I don't want to cramp your style any—only don't get yourself talked about."

"That—from you! What about your antics, the topic of the town!"

"It's a different kind of antics and a different kind of talk, see. My reputation's A-one."

Paul was tickled at the literalness of Pat's interpretations. "I promise that the firm won't get into bad odour through me," he said.

"Don't go losing your head, then."

"Nor my heart nor my money—at bridge. I'll try to make on all three scores: head, heart, and pocket. You'll see."

At last Pat rallied, and suddenly laughed. "Doggone, I half believe you," he confessed.

"I should hope you did! This time next year you and Aïda will be dashing around in a shiny car, fairly *smelling* the poor people."

"It'll be a partnership car."

"I've told you I'm not out for a partnership."

"What the devil are you out for?"

"I don't quite know. Certainly you wouldn't understand if I tried to tell you—even though you are a romantic Irishman."

"Then good night, and to hell with you," growled Patrick.

"Ditto to that," said Paul. "May I take Aïda to bed with me to-night?"

"No, you got a damn sight too many Fraus as it is," and the door closed with a snap.

In his own room Paul recalled the old Viennese quan-

dary: his eternal suspense between a romantic and realistic attitude toward life. For the moment, he mused, he was pursuing a quixotic goal, making his way towards it by an avenue paved with solid realities.

An air from the fortune-telling scene in the evening's opera came into his head, and as he undressed he softly hummed it:

“Et maintenant, parlez mes belles; de l'avenir donnez-nous des nouvelles. Dites-nous qui nous trahira; dites-nous qui nous aimera.”

He was buoyed up with youthful confidence. Why consult cards to ascertain who would fall in love with one, and who betray? Every creature was a potential lover and a potential traitor. One had only to inspire the love and forestall the treachery as the case might require. An unfair game? Not unless one deliberately cheated. There were well-recognized rules, with a certain margin allowed for insidious graces. Besides, if the end were a good end, one gave oneself the benefit of the doubt where means were concerned. Paul was convinced that the end, in this case—which consisted in helping to solidify the welfare of a man who had gone out of his way to rescue him—was an end worth attaining by any means at his disposal.

In bed the music of the card scene kept running in his head:

“Dans le livre d'en haut si ta page est heureuse, mêle et coupe sans peur; la carte sous tes doigts se tournera joyeuse, t'annonçant le bonheur.

“Mais si tu dois mourir, si le mot redoutable est écrit par le sort, recommence vingt fois, la carte impitoyable répètera la mort.”

It was grim. Now that the lights were turned out and the resplendent dress suit put aside, he felt less sanguine. What could a single man's fanciful darts avail against the stone walls of worldliness! And when that

man was—of all the indeterminate men in the world—Paul Minas!

Mais si tu dois mourir—why should that phrase come back again and again, with its accompaniment of solemn, muffled chords!

He thrust it from him and snuggled his head on the pillow. After all, everything *was* on the cards. Let them reveal what they might. If one was doomed, one was doomed.

4

It took Paul three months to break down the Markwick defences. The period was a nerve-racking one, for apart from the delicacy of the negotiations he had to breast the undercurrent of Mademoiselle's enmity and keep reassuring Pat that the time he spent out of the office was not being dissipated. To catch glimpses of his salesman, elegantly garbed, setting out for gymkhanas, or to hear from his lips chit-chat brought back from clubs and drawing-rooms, was a drastic test of Pat's faith. A tension marked their relationship until the letter arrived containing a big order from the refractory merchant. Paul stood with his hands on Patrick's shoulders while they read it through to the paragraph which ran: "If you can deliver the above in satisfactory condition by May fifteenth, at the latest, we shall be pleased to confer with your representative regarding orders for autumn and winter stock."

"Well?" inquired Paul, with suppressed triumph.

Pat rose with a smile of relief. "Congratulations!" he said. "You put it over great. How you done it I don't know."

"But I *did*," said Paul, like a child claiming full credit for having been good.

"What's the next move?"

"Alexandria," Paul unexpectedly announced.

“Why, have you cleaned out Cairo already?”

“By no means. But there’s a conclave in Alexandria next week, and I’ve scared up some useful letters of introduction. And incidentally some cotton tips.”

A little piqued, he decided not to explain his plans in detail. But he was amply avenged three weeks later when he was able to walk into the office with a bunch of contracts which surpassed the total orders obtained by his three predecessors. Pat was won over. “Say, sonny,” he concluded, “I guess I got to hand it to you this time.”

Thereafter Paul decided to forego a regular salary that he might feel free to absent himself from the office whenever the mood seized him. Its atmosphere was becoming distasteful. His first success had made Mademoiselle realize the necessity of changing her tactics. Distrustful glances had given place to glances of a propitiatory nature, and her smiles had grown more disarmingly naïve. On one occasion, when Paul had driven a splinter into his finger whilst helping to open a packing case, she had held his hand in hers far longer than necessary. And to add to his disgust, he knew Pat had observed her.

For a year he solicited orders in his own devious ways. From time to time he journeyed up the river, often as a guest, and disregarded no opportunity to foregather with influential groups. For the first time in his life he was playing a definite social game, and, while he chafed at its insincerity, he found it instructive.

Although it was a game of blandishments, it required pertinacity. Along with the diversion, there was a vast amount of annoyance and boredom. He played the game within the rules of his own standards of honour, even though it involved occasional intrigues which violated the tenets of a strict morality. Conventional morality, he concluded, was an ideal beyond the attain-

ment of the most conventional of men. Certainly he had met no perfect exemplar of it. Compared with the illicit traffickings of those with whom he competed, his own intrigues seemed childlike and straightforward. His whole policy had been to obtain, for himself and his friend, as high a price as possible for whatever he could persuade people they needed. He studied the idiosyncrasies and ambitions of utilizable men and women, then set about gratifying them; for which service he induced them to buy, or constrain their sycophants to buy, Patrick Coyle's reputable commodities.

During the second year of his association with Patrick Coyle, notwithstanding the impetus given to their activities by the acquisition of a car and other tangible signs of prosperity, Paul found the social round growing irksome. The exhilaration of being sought after by fashionable hostesses gave place to ennui. The pleasure of knowing himself able to cut a dash gave place to disgust at the pettiness of dash-cutting. Wide acquaintanceship involved myriad obligations and drew his energies into silly channels. Fate had ordained for him a life of meditation, and he began to resent the daily incursions on his privacy. Not even in Vienna had his environment been so cumbered with people. From a source of stimulation, the multitude became a source of confusion. He was losing sight of truth under the stress of play-acting, and only the determination to fulfil his compact kept him in his rôle.

Whenever the babel became too insistent, he fled from the city, hired a donkey, ferried it across the river, and took refuge in the desert. There, after an hour's riding, he would rest, and by yielding his soul over to the desert, which like the sea symbolized eternity, achieve a sense of his own puniness compensated by an exalted sense of relationship with the cosmic intelligence. Then his life, and all forms of life, took on the aspect of reflections

passing across the face of a mirror; and he captured a sense of permanence in the thought that the reflections were inextricably related to some vague source which, like a spiritual sun, was responsible for their projection.

After excursions of this sort he came back with renewed energy and a clarified focus. But more exhaustive analyses of the social amalgam revealed hitherto unsuspected proportions of hypocrisy, and as the months went on he found it necessary to inoculate himself with correspondingly increased doses of cynical wisdom. His contempt for worldliness grew with his skill in handling the world's weapons. He became taciturn. With Pat alone could he throw off restraint, and from time to time let himself be borne along by the American's infallible common sense, just as in days gone by, he had ridden on Otto's broad shoulders.

As in the case of his other quixotic tilts with the world, he had had to face disillusionment. It had been unreasonable to assume that Pat would rise superbly to the openings he was able to make for him, yet he could not deny that Pat's matter-of-factness was discouraging. Imagination of a kind Pat had in abundance, but he was not given to ascending pinnacles for the sake of picturesque views. He was a true friend and a staunch bargainer, but not an artist; and Paul, in spite of himself, exacted of his friends that they should be artists. Vaguely he had expected that Pat would develop under his guidance, and acquire some of his own sublime disdain for the world, as his business waxed. Instead of which Pat's respect for the world increased with his deposits in the bank.

But Paul played on, for lack of grander games. His nomadic nature had begun to reassert itself, goaded by a conscience which reminded him that he was neglecting the deep, unknown message he had been put into the universe to deliver.

Once more he buried himself in wise books; once more he delved into his mind for some clue to his mission. Solitary trips to the desert became more frequent; and every day he sought poise and direction by suspending all thought for a half-hour in a sort of waking trance—a trick he had learned, after long practice, through contact with the followers of adepts in ancient religions.

For some months his only definite aim had been to make his friend see, by subtle contrasts, the unwisdom of linking himself irrevocably to the Armenian "dactylo." After a good deal of scheming, he had introduced Pat into the houses of most of the people whom it was to Pat's advantage to cultivate. In these houses Pat had dined and danced with English, American and French girls with whom he must inevitably have compared his clever but unpresentable little fiancée. The subject of his marriage was never discussed, but Paul had intuitively known that the plans were not going forward smoothly.

Then one day he arrived at the office to find Pat bearing the brunt of a stormy scene. Mademoiselle was sitting pale, hard-eyed, silent, unhappy, while Pat, in his most unbridled American, parried thrusts levelled at him in broken English by Mademoiselle's exasperated father and brother and uncle—an unappetizing crew.

Paul withdrew hastily to the domain of Abdul and the Sudanese porters, but remained in the building until he heard the angry visitors descending the stairs. To his surprise Mademoiselle followed them. In her little black dress and coquettish high-heeled slippers, she looked old and defeated. Paul pitied her, but still resented her hold over his friend. Except for the hat she wore, she might have been mistaken for a venturesome Turkish woman abroad without a veil. The flabby white skin, the coal-black brows setting off her unpleasantly large eyes, the childlike steps and bearing, were suggestive of a harem.

Paul hurried back to the office. Pat was standing by the swivel chair, his hands in his pockets, gloomy and disgusted. Aida looked towards the intruder for an explanation.

“The bastards!” exclaimed Patrick finally.

“What did they want?”

“Want! They had the nerve to try and bone me for more money, on account of postponing the wedding.”

“More?”

Pat paced the floor. “You see I had to pay the old son-of-a-gun a lump sum, to get his consent in the first place.”

Paul refrained from exclaiming that the old man ought to have been glad to subsidize the marriage. He was reputed to be well off.

“Did you pay up?”

“Not on your tin-type. They tried bluffin’, threatened to sue me.”

“And Mademoiselle?”

Pat came to a halt, his blue eyes blazing with indignation. “Would you believe it, Paul, she stuck up for ’em—for them mangy sons-o’-bitches! She wouldn’t actually accuse me of wanting to get out of it, see, but she backed ’em up by noddin’ her head—like a frightened kid. That’s what finished me.”

“Finished?”

“Finished! I gave her a month’s salary on the spot and fired her. To hell with ’em.”

IX

I

ONE mild fragrant evening in April, Paul was seated on the terrace of Shepherd's making idle talk with an army officer. At the wicker tables were groups of men in regimentals and women in flimsy frocks. The Saturday night dance was enlivened by the presence of two hundred Americans who had arrived the previous day from Alexandria, one of the principal stops in a superbly vulgar "Mediterranean cruise."

Whilst the dining-rooms were being cleared for dancing, the terrace overflowed with tourists comparing notes on their impressions of the pyramids and the price of amber. Paul and his friend exchanged smiles at incongruous remarks which floated toward them in eager, transatlantic tones. "Well, what *is* the caliph?" inquired one dauntless debutante. "Darned if *I* know. Besides I *despise* tombs. Gee! I can hardly wait till to-morrow to see the snaps; I know I looked like I'd been shot at and missed."

From another direction came less flippant sentiments, voiced by a dowager out of the west. "Our dragoman's name was Moses," she was saying. "The poor fellah, I felt s' sorry for him. His dotter died only yesterday and he told me about the funeral. It was something pitiful. He showed us where she was buried and all, and you should have seen that poor man's eyes! We all gave him a little extra. I s'pose it was silly, but you just couldn't help it."

Paul listened with lazy amusement, when suddenly his friend touched his arm and exclaimed:

“Gad, there’s a stunner!”

Paul looked towards the door and saw a slender young woman of twenty-three or four daringly gowned in pale orange and deep daffodil hued velvets and tulle. Her arms were bare. A long row of pearls gave employment to one over-manicured hand, while the other held a fan of yellow feathers and tortoise-shell which reached nearly to the ground. There was a specious sheen from the waves of her hair to the slippers that peeked from under trailing draperies. She was not beautiful, but there was a glint of pert humour in her wide eyes and tilted nose, a hint of generosity in her mouth, a self-assurance in her carriage that gave her a striking attractiveness. She had, in an amazing degree, the faculty of making other women appear dowdy, and it was obvious to Paul that she was boycotted. This was partly explained by the presence at her side of a fat, gouty-looking German-American Jew whose pearl shirt-stud and expensive cigar, while super-excellent of their kind, seemed to add vague injury to his companion’s vague insult.

The young woman glanced nonchalantly but deliberately at the tables, and then turned toward the door again, displaying a low-cut bodice which created a silence on the terrace—half shocked, half admiring. She struck Paul as being splendidly but a little pathetically isolated; splendid, because she was so incongruously harmless. He was sure of that. He knew that type of face—it was the face of a “damn good sport.” He seemed almost to know that particular face; it aroused some vague recollection. At any rate he meant to see it again, at closer range. He was all the more interested in her on account of the boycott; he entertained a perverse partiality for people who were snubbed.

Before the young woman disappeared through the

doorway, Paul had time to notice that all the men, English as well as American, had rejoiced in the sight of her—whether they were willing to admit it or not. Two young Americans of a pattern which he supposed to be “Yale” or “Harvard” had covertly watched her, and he guessed that their mothers and sisters alone had restrained them from flocking about her on the cruise.

He became restless, and found an excuse for leaving the terrace. Inside he searched the corridors. The vague recollection was growing insistent. In the inner lounge he caught a glimpse of her and advanced. She and her companion had found chairs in the centre of the room.

Her wide blue eyes rested on him just as she had finished adjusting a scarf of tulle. The pertness disappeared from her expression, which changed to a puzzled stare. Then her lips parted slightly, and her hands strayed tentatively outward.

Recognition was simultaneous. Paul stepped forward with an exclamation of delight and, without a thought for the scores of onlookers, took her violently into his arms as she sprang up from the seat.

“Paul Minas!” she cried, holding him off for a better view.

“Gritty! As I live and breathe!”

She glanced up and down for joy, with a return of the old tomboy spontaneity.

“Why Paul, you great big huge man! I’ve never been so floored in all my life.”

“Nor I. Good Lord, old Gritty! Who would have believed it?”

“I know—in Egyp’—and everything!”

“Tell me all about it this instant!”

Gritty’s companion was languidly interested. She turned to him and said: “Joe, I’ve discovered a long-lost cousin.” Her eyes threw Paul a glance which he

took as a signal to observe the cousinship, and he advanced to be introduced to Mr. Krauss.

When Paul looked at Gritty again, his eyes told her that he accepted the situation as unquestioningly as Mr. Krauss had accepted the "cousin," but that he would not be answerable for his private conclusions. Gritty covered the awkwardness with a frank, ringing laugh.

"We can't talk here," said Paul. "Let's find a sitting-room."

He included Mr. Krauss in the invitation, and the three moved off, Gritty hanging on Paul's arm with an eagerness that warmed his heart.

In a deserted corner the trio found chairs. Mr. Krauss ordered drinks and offered Paul a cigar. As briefly and sketchily as possible, Paul satisfied Gritty's curiosity as to his activities during the last twelve years, then demanded an account from her.

"But I don't even know where to begin!" she exclaimed.

"Begin at Hale's Turning. When did you leave?"

"As soon as I was able to bully my folks into letting me go to Boston."

"What did you do there?"

"Made cocoa and dusted the mantelpiece every day for a cousin of Ma's who kept telling me what things were like when *she* was a little girl. Gee! They were terrible! Then I went out and got a job in a dry-goods store—cash-girl, Cash! Cash! And was never around when they wanted me!"

"Then what?"

"Ran away to New York."

"Why?"

"I was lured there, dearie." She peeked up at him and laughed.

"And then?"

"I worked for a dressmaker who made clothes for a

actress who got me a job in the chorus of a musical show that was playing in a great big theatre, and that's the house that Jack built—this is Jack!" She pointed to Krauss. "He's what you call a magnate, he is. Wouldn't you adore being a magnate, Paul, with a profile like that?" Gritty let the tip of her finger alight upon the older man's waistcoat.

"And then?"

Gritty drew back with simulated ladylikeness. "My darling," she reproved, "I can't tell you everything; I don't know you well enough."

Paul laughed. "To make a long story short, then?"

"Well, after many vicissitudes, as the story-books say—vicissitude upon vicissitude—I got a really-truly part, and then bigger parts—and one fine day Joe Krauss here, who runs a dozen theatres—by the way, it was me that taught him not to say theayter; I'm bringing him up that *genteel!*—what was I saying? Oh yes, Joe, he decided that my light didn't ought to be under a bushel any longer, so he blazed it out into the middle of Broadway—bingo!—and there you are!"

Paul was duly impressed. "But Cairo is a long way from Broadway," he finally commented.

She explained that Krauss had been ordered abroad for his health, and she had come along to nurse him.

"A most resplendent nurse!" Paul commented with a significant smile.

"If I knew what you meant," rebuked Gritty, "I'd leave the room!"

There was much to talk about, but both felt constrained in the presence of the silent, ailing Jew, and Paul decided to postpone further questions. The dancing had commenced, and Gritty's head was keeping time to the distant strains.

"Come along," Paul invited. "You'll excuse us if we dance won't you, Mr. Krauss?"

“Go ahead, go ahead—don’t mind me. I think I’ll go up to bed. Order what you want and put it on my bill.”

Paul bristled, but Gritty seemed not to notice the man’s crudeness. She left Krauss at the door of the lift and accompanied Paul to the ball-room.

“Oh, Paul!” she squealed. “Isn’t it the most exciting old world that ever was!”

He patted her arm and made a passage for her through the throng. He remembered the day when Gritty would have elbowed a way through for him. In the doorway he met Pat, recently returned from a much-needed vacation in Luxor, and introduced him as his “boss.” Gritty granted the astonished and delighted Irishman the “dance after next.”

Public interest in Gritty had been enhanced by the scene in the lounge, and Paul suddenly realized that he was dancing with a woman whose name must be well known in the theatrical world, a woman, moreover, who, knowing she would be recognized, had been defiant enough of public opinion to travel abroad with her manager. How like Gritty! The same old tomboy at heart. Now he understood the boycott, and chuckled. He thought of some exclusive functions that were to be held within the next few days, and resolved to take Gritty to them. What a pat gesture for his farewell to Cairo! He revolved his plans quite in the spirit in which he and Gritty, twelve years previously, had waggled their fingers at the parson’s back.

He had never danced with a woman who moved so easily. Her body was compact and flexible, like a sheet of steel. She was obviously a professional dancer, and he thrilled at his privilege. Here and there he caught faintly derisive glances from ladies of his acquaintance who would never have bared their own backs.

To punish them and to punish the transatlantic

dowagers who were at a loss to find partners for their "dotters," the dowagers who had boycotted Gritty on the boat but were ready to squander pity and piastres on syphilitic dragomans snivelling about fictitious bereavements; to teach the lesson to them and to the college youths who had not dared to cut their apron-strings, Paul collected three or four officers in especially ornate uniforms and an Earl, Freddy, a nephew of Henry Shroton, and brought them to Gritty's side, while the pretty little American debutantes looked on.

Gritty was transformed from the mannequin who had stood on the terrace into an agile doll. She radiated jollity. When Paul presented the bashful Freddy—with pompous emphasis on his title—Gritty clapped a hand to her forehead and exclaimed in mock dismay, "My God!" Then she extended her hand. "Shake on it, old top. I been dying to know a honest-to-God nobleman all my life but never have, not one. I was afraid they'd be terribly up-stage!" Gritty smiled with an odd grimace, her frank eyes fixed on the young man as if to sympathize with him for the embarrassment she was causing him.

"At least," he stammered good-naturedly, "I'm glad I'm not that, whatever it is!"

"Oh, you're just too sweet for words," she assured him. "I hope to goodness you're going to ask me to dance, for I just gotta make a entry in my diary—April 10th: rode on a camel and danced with a Earl!"

The others pressed nearer, and the youth, overcoming his shyness in the friendly throng, ventured a further suggestion. "What about another entry, on April 11th or 12th: had luncheon with Freddy?"

"Mercy, no!" exclaimed Gritty. "My diary would never stand for such goings on as that!" And the others slapped the discomfited Freddy on the back and laughed as heartily as though Gritty had told a naughty story.

Suddenly Paul looked over his shoulder. He had

heard a precise little voice say, "No, I'm afraid I don't!" He caught in it a hint of adverse criticism directed against the new-comer who had taken the army under her wing, and who at this moment was saying, "Hey, don't bother me, can't you see I'm talkin' to a Earl!" The precise little voice had belonged to Beatie Markwick, and she was skilfully steering Pat Coyle away from the American Circe.

"*Ça colle!*" said Paul to himself exultantly. "*Ça colle!*" Pat's future was in safe hands.

2

Gritty Kestrell exemplified an attitude towards life which compelled Paul's admiration. At sea he had lived amongst men for whom morality was a mere question of lack of opportunity. In Vienna he had rubbed shoulders with Bohemians whose conventionality consisted in conscientiously damning morality. In Cairo men and women wore their morality in public as Moslem women wore veils. As for Gritty she seemed sublimely and refreshingly immune from moral cares. She could be dainty and she could be gross. Her acts were the reflex expression of whatever urge happened to be in the ascendancy. The subtle standard of expediency that served most women in lieu of a code formed a quite negligible part of her impedimenta. She had apparently come to the conclusion that honesty was the best policy, and she had the strength of character without which an honest policy is suicidal. She was immoral, but not frail.

If Gritty had glossed over certain phases of her career on the first evening of her reunion with Paul, she made no bones of it during the pleasant days that followed. She accepted the superficial philosophy summed up by the heroine of a smart play she had seen: "A girl is not a sinner just because she's not a saint." But for that mat-

ter, if you had conclusively proved to Gritty that she *was* a sinner, she would merely have smiled with one of her odd grimaces, levelled her eyes at you, and said, "Well, dearie, what you going to do about it?" Womanhood had put a fine edge on her juvenile heartiness and it was the contrast that gave her her most piquant charm. She was too tender to be diabolic; too vulgar to be elvish; but her quality was both mischievous and elusive. She was a pagan, and a "fetching" one.

Out of regard for her companion's health, Gritty had foregone the sight-seeing trips arranged by Cook's man for two hundred "cruisers," as she called them, and had taken rooms at the Mena House, far away from the noisy city. There Paul found the pair on the eve of their departure to join the holiday ship, which was returning to America by way of Greece and Italy. He was to spend the night in the hotel.

"I just hate going," Gritty wailed, when the tea-things were taken away. Through the open window of her sitting-room she and Paul were watching groups seated at tables on the lawn. In the road beyond, a straggling party of tourists, trying to look as though camels were their customary means of locomotion, were ascending the hill towards the pyramids.

"I was plumb disgusted with those things," Gritty rambled on, "when we first come out here. They were so bare and hard, and I'd always thought of 'em in connection with moonlight and palm trees and Oriental music off-stage, like in a Sothern and Marlowe production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. When we motored across the Nile on a steel bridge I darn near bawled—honest I did. Naturally I thought it was gonna be Nile-green, like my new *négligé*! I felt like I'd been had. I could no more picture Cleopatra glidin' down that stream of cold tea than I could picture her crossin' to Hoboken from Thirty-Fourth Street. But since then the whole place's kind of

got me—an' now I know we're going I'm sorry. You can't help but feel leery to think that, when you have been planted as long as Cleopatra has, people will still be trapesing up that doggone hill to stare and wonder. Joe says it's mental cruelty to bring a invalid out here and put him in a room overlookin' tombstones. His dad wasn't a undertaker like mine. Joe just hates the flesh-pots of Egyp'. He can't get used to not being in his office with people runnin' in to tell him the star's drunk and the theatre's on fire. It was killing him, but he's crazy to get back. Gee, life's funny!"

Paul had watched Gritty's change of mood during the past ten days, and was pleased to discover her capacity for being chastened by a grandeur of which she had only the dimmest conception.

"I'm glad you like it," he said. "Have you been out there at night—by moonlight?" He pointed towards the eastern horizon.

Gritty looked up with an eager appeal in her eyes. "No, will you take me—to-night—my last night here?"

"Will Mr. Krauss let you come?"

"This is the twentieth century, darling—A.D.—not B.C., and I'm me own boss."

They dined in Gritty's sitting-room because Mr. Krauss was disinclined to dress. The privacy suited Paul, for Mr. Krauss had an inelegant way with a fork. Half-way through the meal a note was brought in for Miss Kestrell. Gritty read it in silence, borrowed a pencil from the waiter, scribbled a reply, got up to fetch an envelope, sealed the missive and sent it forth while Paul kept up a patter with his host.

"Who was it from?" asked Mr. Krauss when the waiter had left the room.

Gritty had returned to her food with the unconcern of a child. "From a very nice boy," she replied, as if to close the discussion.

"Another one?" Mr. Krauss seemed mildly amused.

"No, the same. Eat your nice fish, darling. It's rude to ask personal questions, isn't it, Paul? Say yes."

"Yes. But I'd try to find out in other ways what I wished to know. Is it rude to wish to know?"

"Fierce and rude!"

"What I'd like to know, if it wasn't rude," Paul teased, "is what you replied to the nice boy, also what Mr. Krauss would have said if it hadn't been the same one but another."

Gritty dashed off at a new tangent. "Out here he only lets me have one at a time. Home he brings them to my dressing-room in legions and cohorts."

Paul looked up for an explanation, but none was forthcoming. "Oh, well," he remarked. "There's safety in numbers."

"Not where Gritty's concerned," interposed Mr. Krauss.

"No," she retorted, "but there's money in numbers, and Joe Krauss engages us poor girls for what we can lure into the house. He's got box-office morals."

"What kind have you?" Paul inquired.

"None, thank God!"

"You say it vindictively."

"I got a right to, dearie. If you only knew how I'd had morals drummed into me as a kid——." She suddenly remembered whom she was addressing. "But you *do* know!"

"Don't I just!"

Gritty laughed and explained to Mr. Krauss. "Hale's Turning, where me and Paul was born, is the home of the original moral germ. You'd never believe what a innocent, dear, sweet little lamb he was, Joe—Gee, when I think of him with his Eton collar and patent-leather hair heading the Lily Class at Sunday-school concerts! Lordy, what ages and ages ago it seems!"

"Do you remember the night we fled the wrath to come, Gritty—down the hill from the revival tent?"

Gritty put down her knife and fork and burst into a fresh peal of laughter. "I'd clean forgot!" she cried, then gave the older man an account of her frustrated conversion.

"After that we went on strike and refused to go to Sunday-school ever again," she concluded. "Ma hasn't got over it yet."

"The beginning of the end," Mr. Krauss commented.

"Don't you believe it!" Paul corrected. "Gritty's end began the day she was born."

"It never did," she defended, with an air of contentment. "*You* made me what I am to-day, by preventing me from getting religion—and you know you did, you bad boy. Besides, the moon's up and I gotta see the sphinx."

"What about the nice boy?" Paul inquired.

"He minds his own business," she threw back, as she went away to change her shoes.

A few minutes later she returned, enveloped in a woolly cape. She made Mr. Krauss comfortable before the fire in his bedroom, then followed Paul downstairs.

The night air had a nip in it and Gritty snuggled into the high collar of her cape, passing a hand through a slit to take Paul's arm. They drew away from the hotel gate and walked up the long hill towards the desert, leaving the murmurs and lights of civilization to fade slowly into the distance.

At the top of the hill, where the road spread out and lost itself in the desert, they paused. The first pyramid towered before them, one jagged angle palely silvered by the rising moon, the other side merged into a shadow that extended over acres of sand. Far away, on their left, were tiny points of light leading towards the distant city. On their right was an indigo wilderness of low hills

and hollows, over which the moon cast a ghostly shèn.

"It's the very same moon," whispered Gritty. "It thinks I'm Cleopatra and you're Marc Antony."

Paul hummed Omar's words:

"Ah, moon of my delight that knows no wane,
The moon of Heaven is rising once again.
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same garden, after me, in vain."

Gritty was holding his hand tightly. Finally she turned her back on the moon and pointed toward the empty horizon. "I want to go that way," she said. She had forgotten the sphinx.

They made their way over hubbles of rock and sand, skirting the edge of the black shadow cast by the pyramid, until they had left even the shadow behind. From time to time they paused to rest. Paul was thinking of Thaïs and Paphnuce.

"It's awful spooky," Gritty whispered. "Aren't you scared?"

Paul shook his head.

"I am—a little," she confessed.

Suddenly she withdrew her arm. "I'm going on alone to see how far I can get without dying of fright. I'll hold up my arm when I want you to come and get me and you'll see it against the sky. Do you remember the story Miss Hornby read us about Rumpelstilskin, the boy who knew no fear?"

Paul tried to dissuade her, but she eluded him.

"Don't you dare budge," she called back.

For some time he stood, watching her figure get smaller and smaller. Once, when she descended a depression, he lost sight of it, but it reappeared on the next ridge. Then it vanished, and he waited, his nerves uncomfortably tense.

In the end he could not bear the suspense. There was nothing against which to press one's back. He began to follow in her path, with anxious haste. Once he thought of calling out to her, to command her to stop, but he dreaded to hear his own voice reverberate through the silence.

Then from a deep hollow he saw her form, a tiny blot against the sky. Her arms were raised, and he stumbled on towards her with relief, though still unable to dispel a clutching apprehension. He was afraid she could not make out his figure from the higher ground on which she was standing, and his fears redoubled when he saw her arms frantically waving. He paused to shout, but in the act of putting his hands to his mouth he caught a faint cry, and strained his ears. She was calling to him, and he sang out, in tones which had pierced through many a blast, "Coming!"

Suddenly the little figure crumpled, and there was only a faint dark hump to indicate Gritty's position. He hurried on, trying to fix his gaze on the point where he had seen her stand, afraid he might arrive to find the hump merely a boulder. His heart was pounding and his eyes smarted from the strain of peering into the darkness.

Finally he caught sight of her, only a few yards away, huddled on the sand. He gave a shout and she looked up.

"It's a fizzle," she said laconically. "I ain't a bit scared."

"Gritty, you little madcap!" he scolded in tones that made him realize what a fright she had given him. He was trembling and perspiring.

"I *would* of been scared if I hadn't known you were there," she complained.

He was furious. "Well, I'll see that you come alone next time."

She caught his tone and rose to her feet. "Why, did you get scared?"

"Damn scared!"

"Oh, goody-goody!"

"Don't be silly. Come on back." He took her hand and they turned toward the three monuments—now more than ever like sinister tents. For a long while they kept silence. Then Gritty said, with a sigh:

"I'm glad I came, anyway."

Paul had regained control of himself. "Why?"

"It was wonderful. Just the feeling of being alone, of going toward nothing—oh, of just *being*. Don't you ever forget yourself and just *be*?"

With a shock Paul realized that Gritty had intuitively attained experiences for which he had had to strive. In the sense that Gritty meant, he had never "just been." He had come near it a few times at sea, and on the day when he had sat and watched his ship pass through the canal without him. But these occasions were acutely exceptional. As a rule his sensations were described to him by a watching and recording faculty whilst he was in the act of experiencing them, whereas Gritty, by virtue of some spontaneity of soul, untroubled by an analytic mind, "just was," as a matter of course, a good portion of the time. He supposed it was part and parcel of her femininity, and said as much, to belittle her. But Gritty had already outlived her interest in the matter.

"I'm tired now," she plaintively announced.

"You would be," he retorted.

"And cold," she added, to reinforce her claim for sympathy.

"And thirsty, no doubt," he suggested.

"Yes."

"Well, you must have patience."

"But I don't *want* to have patience."

"What do you want to have?"

She stopped. "A kiss, please, mister."

He gave it to her. "Now stop being perverse, or I'll run away and leave you to *just be* to your heart's content."

She shuddered, and took a new grip of his arm. The mere threat intimidated her.

Paul had food for thought during the rest of the journey. He could have roamed all over the desert alone without being afraid, because alone he could imagine himself unhuman. In the desert with Gritty just beyond reach, he had been terror-stricken. On the other hand, Gritty, provided he were in the vicinity, could not experience a fear she had courted, whereas alone she would have collapsed. He concluded that he was not as weak as he had been on the point of believing.

When they reached the hotel the lounge was deserted, but voices came from the direction of the card and billiard-rooms. Paul gave an order for coffee and sandwiches, and they sank into deep chairs.

"Now play something," Gritty begged.

"It's too late."

"But it's my last night. I want to hear some nice Oriental music to complete everything. Why, I haven't heard a bit since I been here. That's another way I feel I been had. At Shepheard's they played things like 'Alexander's Rag-time Band'—and it's old at that!"

Paul opened the piano. At least, he mused, if he couldn't *just be* in the routine of life he could in terms of music. Left to himself he would have chosen music which would have conveyed very little emotion to Gritty Kestrell. But to-night Gritty must be humoured. He began to play a piece by Emile Blanchet: "Au Jardin du Vieux Serail."

"That's it," Gritty murmured, in response to the weird opening cadences, and she sank deeper into her arm-chair, tired and contented, as the music went on, muffled,

tranquil, melancholy, working up a strident climax, and falling away again, whimpering, sighing. It was as though some gorgeous pageant had passed beyond the garden walls, with a din of barbaric trappings. There was in it the sound of high-pitched, exotic flutes, and the monotonous thud of camels' hoofs.

"You're a funny old dear," Gritty acknowledged, by way of thanking him.

Paul went on playing. The music attracted members of a bridge party who were dispersing for the evening. A tall, grey-haired woman in black velvet looked into the room, recognized Paul, and advanced slowly with a faint smile on her drooping lips.

Without interrupting his performance, Paul bowed, and the intruder came trailing across the room. Then she caught sight of Gritty curled up like a kitten, one hand hanging limp over the arm of the chair, a filament of smoke rising from her cigarette. Paul watched from the tail of his eye. After a graceful, elaborate feint, the intruder turned to address a waiter who was bringing the laden tray.

"Oh, waiter—I was just looking for my book. Have you seen it? It's a green book."

The waiter searched in vain, and the lady slowly retreated, saying that she might have left it upstairs after all. Paul went on playing.

Cora, he reflected, had never "just been" in her life. She was doomed to go through life trying to be. And she was putting up such a good bluff, as Pat would say, that she could afford to contemn anomalies like Gritty.

When Lady Henry was out of earshot Gritty sent him a muted, tomboyish whistle between her teeth, and he turned to see her jerk a thumb toward the departing figure.

"Who's she?"

"Wh?"

“Nothing—only she made a face like I smelt bad, the old trout!”

“Don’t mind her, my dear. She can’t help sniffing at any woman who isn’t strictly guaranteed.”

“I’ll bet she’s not so hostile toward men.”

“No, with them she requires rather a different sort of guarantee.”

“What sort?”

“They must be warranted to say discreetly flattering things in public and make love to her in private, to put cushions under her feet, imply that she is young and fresh, instead of middle-aged and faded, amuse and bully her, compliment and insult her, and accept her manifold favours with grateful thanks.”

“And do you pass the acid test?”

“*Now* who’s asking personal questions?”

Gritty watched him over the rim of her coffee-cup. In her regard there was a trace of maternal solicitude.

“Why don’t you drop this game, Paul?” she finally said. “You’re a darn sight too good for it.”

“What game?”

“Oh, I’ve got eyes. Why do you let yourself be squabbled over by third-rate women?”

Paul laughed at the vindictive sincerity of her tone. “I’m making excellent use of them.”

“What do you get out of it?”

“Introductions, market tips, food, drink, and miscellaneous information.”

“In return for?”

“Carefully weighed and measured doles of my external personality.”

“And what good does the information do you?”

“The same kind of good that food does you when you’re hungry. I’ve always been a glutton for experience, and experience is like Mohammed’s mountain.”

Gritty was not satisfied, but her eyes had been drawn

toward the doorway again and an odd grimace came over her face. She glanced quickly at Paul and he turned to see a tall young man entering the room. It was the bashful Earl whom he had brought to Gritty on the night of the dance.

"I guessed right about the nice boy," Paul had time to whisper, before Freddy joined them.

"But only half right," she returned enigmatically.

"I'm looking for a stray aunt," Freddy said, covering his embarrassment with an inconsequential tone. "Have you seen one?"

"She's gone upstairs," Paul informed him. "She was looking for a book, I believe—a green one."

"Why will they persist in reading *green* books?" said Freddy, to make talk.

Gritty laughed. "Why, are green books bad for you here, too, then, like green vegetables?"

A few minutes later Gritty rose. "I got to go tuck Joe in," she said. "He wouldn't sleep a wink unless I said good night."

She shook hands with Freddy, whose eyes dwelt on her with a strange sort of devotion. "It's good-bye, now," she said. "For I'm off in the morning. Good-bye and good luck."

Paul thought she was carrying the sham unnecessarily far, until he scrutinized Freddy's face. Beneath the casual mask he detected unhappiness. Then he glanced at Gritty, as she ran up the stairs. Like all women, she had a way of springing surprises.

Freddy lit a cigarette and came to the side of the piano. Something was troubling him. "I say, Minas," he began anxiously, "I hope I didn't intrude just now."

Paul turned back to the keyboard. He had been fumbling over difficult passages in a Debussy prelude: "La lune descend sur le temple qui fut."

"I knew Gritty before she was old enough to have

freckles and throw stones," he explained. "We're still children in each other's eyes. So you haven't intruded in any sense, I assure you."

Freddy sat down in the chair abandoned by Gritty.

"She approves of you most emphatically, if it interests you to know," Paul added.

"Really?" Freddy's face lit up. "She's a splendid woman," he testified, with an air of experience which, like his evening clothes, merely accentuated his boyishness.

"Oh, Gritty's a peach," Paul agreed.

"Peach! Peach? You people have an amazing vocabulary." He got up and announced his intention of turning in.

"Good-night," said Paul, and smiled discreetly.

Freddy gave him a sidelong glance, then shook his head. "Hasn't she told you?" he asked. "I imagined, from what you said, that she had."

Paul was puzzled. "I've done a bit of guessing, that's all. Rather nosey of me."

Freddy took a note from his pocket. "No harm to let you read this. Only shows what an ass I've been."

Paul hesitated, then took the note.

"Poor Early-bird—that didn't catch *any* worm," he read. "It was horrid of me to tease you the other day at tea, and very bold of you to come back after you promised not to. Of course I like you a lot but don't you see that's just why I *can't!* Take my tip, Freddy dear, and don't chase after girls like me. You're such a pet, and it would *spoil* you. I mean it.

G.K."

Paul handed back the note. He was ashamed of himself for having misjudged Gritty's intentions.

"Were you hard hit?" he ventured to inquire.

Freddy's boyishness fell away, and a wry smile crossed his face. "Well, as a matter of fact, I was, rather. Makes a man feel an infernal rotter to get a decent note like this after having assumed—well, you know."

Freddy had taken Gritty at her own easy valuation, and his superior worth had put her on her mettle. It had been a good lesson for both, Paul mused.

"Splendid woman," Freddy repeated, and said good-night.

Suddenly Paul felt more poignantly alone than he had felt for years. Twice in the course of a few hours, Gritty Kestrell—that little baggage—had revealed qualities that chastened him. He thought of himself as a shell, stuffed with words, words, words, light as a meringue.

The doors of the hotel had been fastened. He went to the switch and turned down the last lights, leaving the lounge in darkness except for the red reflection of the dying fire and the blue moonlight at the windows. He had an impulse to put on his top coat and wander back to the desert, to wait for sunrise. But as he walked to the windows his feet, against the sides of his shoes, ached in protest.

Instinctively he moved toward the piano, and for the first time in years dropped into the tranquil rhythm of the old sonata he had played in Fremantle. As he played he was conscious of the phenomenon concerning which he had philosophized earlier in the evening: that a watching faculty stood aloof and described his lonely mood for him, a faculty which there was no escaping. It told him his life was still aimless. The theme had not changed, but he had missed opportunities of developing it, had been content to luxuriate in mere tone-colour. Others went on year by year lending their voices to the great chorus, while his life remained a feeble solo, at times inaudible even to himself. On a few occasions,

when there had been a lull in the chorus and the world had held its breath, his solo had welled up clear, spontaneous, full, until he had throbbled with the conviction that it dominated the universe. But almost immediately other voices had risen to drown it.

Even the theme of the third movement of the old sonata—a theme he had once identified with his own ego—was only musically and poetically valid. At any rate valid only for a Beethoven, never for a Paul Minas.

He closed the piano, went to sit by the fire, and lit a final cigarette. He thought of his haphazard acquaintances and what they were making of their lives. He wondered, once more, what would have become of him had he never run away to sea. Suddenly he yearned to see the village where he had lived as a child, yearned to revisit the old kitchen, the old playroom, and the fields where he and Gritty had looked for moss-beds they called "secrets." In the firelight he recaptured the old sights and sounds, heard the skates clinking on his shoulder and voices echoing across the frosty marsh. He saw the cherry-tree white with snow, and again white with blossoms. He heard Walter Dreer's familiar whistle and felt his heart beat faster at its summons—a summons he couldn't accept, because he had to practise. He saw Phœbe Meddar standing in the pale morning sun, ivory and gold and lavender, saw her stoop to pick up a bunch of tea-roses. And he yearned to see Phœbe again, the Phœbe whom Gritty had found—on one of her triumphal re-entries into Hale's Turning—teaching school. For his idealization of Phœbe, Gritty had mocked him a little, but tenderly. "At least," she had admitted, "Phœbe's the only girl left in that God-forsaken hole with a nickel's worth of brains."

Gritty had turned up as a sort of "distant" sister. She had shown a disposition to mother rather than flirt with him, which was as it should be. And now she was up-

stairs, perhaps a little lonely herself, whilst, a few doors away, Joe Krauss slept the sleep of the complaisant. In a few hours Gritty would be on her festive way, and Freddy, in white polo togs, would gallop back to the stern business of life!

And somewhere overhead. Cora, poor amateur courtesan, Cora who was almost lovely, almost brilliant, almost a lot of things, Cora whose life just perceptibly *flatted*, but whose timbre was quite above the average, Cora was sitting up in bed—perhaps reading a green book. Her door would open if he chose to knock—but he did not so choose. He had no more thresholds to cross in Egypt.

He went direct to his room and sat on the window-sill watching the moon, as he had done one night four or five years before in a tiny farm cottage in California. As on that occasion his mind was tinged with memories of the village where he had spent his childhood. The time had come for the prodigal to return.

His decision once taken, Paul set about making definite plans to bring this latest phase of his career to a close. Again he experienced the sensation of taking a new turning in a maze. Into his mind came an echo of a phrase long-forgotten: Aunt Verona's sigh of "God, what a labyrinth, labyrinth, labyrinth!" He was grown-up now, and could say "God" as much as he chose. He could even find it in his heart to wish he had some one to place an occasional check on his weary licences, some one to hold up a finger and reproach him with a "Why, Paul Minas, if you say things like that I shall stop my ears!" That was what Beatie Markwick said to Pat, and Pat doted on it.

Gritty, by flitting across his path like a golden moth, had roused him from one day-dream—a day-dream that had lasted now for two and a half years—and focused his attention on another: a day-dream whose setting was

the far-away village whence Gritty, like himself, had fled. He would go back to Hale's Turning and pick up the threads left hanging there. The next movement in the unending symphony would be written over the first, but less naïve, more experienced, "like the same person *thirteen* years later."

Breaking the news to Pat was a painful ordeal. He could advance no reason but caprice for his impending desertion; for that matter caprice had prompted his acceptance of Pat's offer at the outset. And, although the Irishman could understand a sentimental desire to revisit one's native land, he could not understand Paul's readiness "to throw up a sure thing" on such frivolous grounds as mere "fed-upness." Pat began by arguing, and ended by preaching, his text being "Success, and what you must do to achieve it in this most practical of all possible worlds."

"We got a chance to make a wunnerful thing out o' this here concern," he concluded. "You've helped do the spade work, and if you don't stay to help reap the harvest, why, you're plumb crazy, son, that's all I got to say."

Paul laughed, but with a nice regard for the affection that underlay Pat's fulminations. "I told you in the beginning I was crazy," he reminded his friend. "The word I used was 'quixotic,' but it amounts to the same thing."

Pat groaned. "Well, for the love of Mike, stop bein' it, while there's still time."

Paul grew suddenly grave. The words called up out of the past an echo of some admonition made by Dr. Wilcove to Aunt Verona. Something about shirking the issues of life, and about giving life a trial before it was too late. He let the comparison drop, and Pat went on preaching.

"Take a holiday if you like. Go home and see your folks, but come back and we'll run the joint together—

see—we'll double the staff and put it on a real money-making basis."

"Money bores me," said Paul.

Pat exploded. "Be a bloody pauper then—and to hell with you!"

Paul sat staring into space.

"I hate to let you be so doggone fat-headed," Pat came back to the charge. "Gee, if I had your style, why I'd just about run Egypt. There ain't a thing we couldn't pull off here, if you stuck around. Where do you think you'll finally get off at if you go on chuckin' up chances like you been doin' all your life? Why nowhere—that's where it'll be. It's plain suicide."

"If life consists in wheedling orders out of tight-fisted merchants," Paul proclaimed, with a return of his cynical humour, "then I *prefer* suicide. Failure is more interesting than success; for there's only one way to succeed and there are a thousand picturesque ways of failing. . . . Besides, you have Beatie now. She'll take my place."

Pat had an idea. "Listen here sonny," he said, as though offering a bait that no sane man would resist. "Why don't you stay and marry Ivy Markwick? Beatie and I were talking about it. Ivy'd jump at it."

"I don't want to be jumped at," retorted Paul with a trace of petulance. "Nor clung to."

Pat's efforts were in vain, and a month later he drove Paul to the railway station in the shiny car. "Well, if you change your mind any," said Pat in farewell, "just send me a cable."

Pat's debonair bearing had given place to dejection. With a pang Paul realized that Pat's attitude, ever since the moment he had warned him against the raw tomato, had been, however clumsily, protective. He would surely miss Pat's remonstrances and rebukes, his prudence and indulgence, his thoughtful attentions, his brotherly coun-

sel, his abusive banter, his honest gaucheries. Another phrase from the past came back to him. Life *was* a series of partial deaths; and as one grew older it would be less easy to create new enthusiasms to fill the gaps left by the demise of the old.

In his ears was the solemn accompaniment to the fortune-telling scene of *Carmen*.

PART IV

X

I

PAUL was well provided with funds, but as a tribute to his abandoned avocation he resolved to work his way to America. Through his dealings with exporters in Alexandria he obtained, after a short period of waiting, a berth as substitute officer on an oil tank bound for New York.

Thence, after calling on Gritty Kestrell, who was in the throes of rehearsals for Krauss's summer production, he proceeded to Boston, crossed by boat to Yarmouth, and made his way to Hale's Turning in an ambling train whose old-fashioned lamps and yellow plush seats called forth a legion of forgotten associations.

Schooners in muddy creeks, glimpses of the sparkling Bay of Fundy, white-washed wooden houses and red barns, trees heavy with green apples, stations with their quotas of staring, gaping, hard-voiced villagers and canopied carriages, broad dusty roads shaded by maples, the compactness of the turf, the carpets of clover, daisies, buttercups and dandelions, the cobalt blue of the sky, the cotton-white of the clouds, the leisurely pastoral quality of the whole passing scene, caused him an exquisite pain. As he drew nearer to his destination—the squalling sticky-handed children, the smell of oranges!—his throat grew dry and he caught himself biting his nails in nervous agitation. He longed to see his home, could scarcely wait—yet dreaded it, dreaded it. He felt shy.

It was the first of July, 1914—Dominion Day—and all along the road were signs of celebration. Houses were decorated with flags, families from outlying districts thronged the streets of the villages in festive attire. Paul had an indulgent smile for the cow-hide boots emerging beneath muslin frocks, up in front and down at the back after the manner of soil-tilling women the world over. Kind-faced, shapeless mothers carried picnic baskets on their arms and solid umbrellas, and fat boys in duck knickers, with hat elastics under their chins, blew gaudy horns, sucking peppermint sticks between fanfares.

Paul thought of the days when he awoke at dawn, excited at the prospect of marching in the First of July parade. He saw no sign of the "brownies" and burnt-cork "minstrels" who had been a conspicuous feature of former parades, and a lamentable modern touch was added by the prevalence of Ford motor-cars, of which the world had been innocent in his childhood.

A poignant sense of his foreignness was borne in on him. When he had to consult the conductor, whom he unthinkingly addressed as "Guard," he felt as though they spoke different languages. Certainly the conductor scrutinized him as something out of the ordinary in passengers.

To cast off his depression Paul tried to think himself back into his childish state of mind, only to be faced with the truth that he had been a stranger even as a boy. He was suffused by the familiar sense of being in the wrong, of being unlike his school-mates, of being in the same camp as Aunt Verona, who was condemned as anti-social.

His school-mates! He wondered how many were still in Hale's Turning, and how many would remember him, even by name.

When the train drew up, he timidly scanned the figures

on the platform, and his heart leaped as he recognized two or three which had long been consigned to oblivion. In a distant group was a man who squinted; with a shudder of compunction Paul recognized Bean-Oh, whose eye he had damaged with his umbrella, twenty years since. And there, walking down the platform with a mail bag on his bent, green shoulders, was old Silas, the postmaster—spitting tobacco juice at regular intervals. Old Silas who kept a shop where Paul and Walter Dreer had spent their weekly allowance on chocolate “dudes” and liquorice whips, old Silas who had pumped the organ in the days before Dr. Wilcove had persuaded the congregation to install water power, old Silas who had seemed venerable and hoary thirteen years ago, but who couldn’t be more than sixty even now! Paul stood beside his hand-bags, and the postmaster moved on without a hint of recognition in his watery eyes.

A lanky fellow, in overalls, “one of the Wigginses,” to judge by a generalized family likeness, was standing beside an empty cart.

“Can you take these bags and my trunks to the hotel for me?” Paul asked.

“What hotel?”

“Mr. Fraser’s,” Paul replied. The name came to him along with the familiar sights and smells. “I didn’t know there was any other.”

“Cance Fraser’s been dead two year,” said the youth in a tone which made Paul feel the weight of his ignorance.

“Then what’s happened to the hotel?”

“Nothin.’ Only Fred Matthews runs it now. Stayin’ long, Mister?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“What you sellin’—books?”

“No.” Paul resented the familiarity, though he recognized in it a token of respect. The yokel’s way of show-

ing approval was to ask personal questions. "I'll walk ahead, if you'll bring the luggage." He turned down a broad road into the village, avoiding the eyes of passers-by. It was late afternoon and he felt he could not face his townsmen until twilight had fallen. He needed an hour or two behind closed doors to get used to being at home.

2

At the hotel, which was merely an overgrown private dwelling, Paul signed the register as "P. W. Minas." The name evoked no sign of interest on the part of his landlord, who seemed bored at the necessity of attending to a guest. Paul realized that, for the first time in his life, he was being incuriously taken for granted "as one of them Minases from Bridgetown way," and he mounted the stairs to his linoleum carpeted room with a whimsical sense of anticlimax. He had, he mused, a positive genius for anticlimax.

Dinner turned out to be a humble early meal called "supper," which he ate in solitude. He had washed off the grime of his travels and, for the sake of comfort, changed into a tweed sport suit. Daylight still lingered as he left the broad veranda of the hotel and passed through the gate into Prince William Road, which stretched up the hill under a luxuriant roof of maples toward an orange and scarlet sky.

Avoiding the knot of people before the combined post office, barber shop and town hall, he walked slowly along a footpath overrun with clover. At the widely-separated gates, bushes of syringa, laden with cream-coloured blossoms, gave forth a sweet, heavy perfume. Amongst the grass he detected long-forgotten flowers, nameless purple clusters which Gritty, with her melodramatic imagination, had once sworn were "poison," and a little

yellow and orange blossom which they had called "butter and eggs." There was also a vague scent of strawberries, wholesomely exotic in nostrils attuned to tropical gardens.

A black dog, scandalized by Paul's English tweeds, came running out to protest against his existence, and Paul could only concur, which sent the dog away in snorting disgust. The faces of the small girl and boy who admonished him with unheeded orders of "Lie down, Smut," were dimly familiar. Finally he placed them as "some of the Hornbys." Perhaps Miss Hornby had got married and "had" them!

His heart beat fast and his hands grew cold as he approached the end of the road. Then suddenly it stood before him: a square house, sadly in need of repair, set far back in an unkempt garden. A sentinel elm—the one in which his kite had fouled—had been struck by lightning, and a dead bough hung, half severed. Tears blurred his sight, but consternation dried them. For this house was almost little, and for thirteen years he had thought of it as "Aunt Verona's big, bare house." Bare it most assuredly was—but, oh, pitifully, not big!

Only one tiger lily was left to bear witness to the old profusion, and long grass grew to the very walls. Windows were boarded up, fences half rotted.

He walked to the side of the house and was surprised to see a neat pile of cordwood and other signs of habitation. The face of a woman whom he recognized as the village yeastmaker appeared at the kitchen window.

He knocked and learned that Mrs. Barker was employed to live in two rooms as caretaker for the owner, who was in foreign parts.

"Paul Minas?" he suggested, and she agreed that that was "the party."

"Did Dr. Wilcove place you in charge?" he asked.

"No. I come after the doctor died. The other trustee,

Mr. Kingsley—he lives in Halifax—come down to fix it all up.”

So Dr. Wilcove was dead. Paul was saddened at this news, for he had looked forward to paying off his long moral obligation to the guardian whom he had ignored. He had also looked forward to asking Dr. Wilcove numerous questions about Aunt Verona—questions that hadn't occurred to him as a boy. He stood ruminating, as Mrs. Barker held the door half open, with an air of distrust mingled with deference and curiosity.

Paul couldn't leave without having entered the house. “I'm Paul Minas,” he announced. “Don't you remember me, Mrs. Barker? Miss Windell used to send me to buy yeast from you.”

She was startled, then gave a cry of recognition. “Glory be! Why, if you ain't the very dead spit of old Captain Andrew! Well I never! And me takin' you for a summer visitor from Boston.”

She invited him in, and he sat for a while in the old kitchen, ruined for him by Mrs. Barker's fussy attempts to make it comfortable. She was the sort of body who saved newspapers and bits of string in case they might “come in handy,” which they didn't. And she adorned every object with knitted woollen mats or bows of “baby-ribbon.”

It was the first time he had set foot within the kitchen since Aunt Verona had left it, and he felt her loss more poignantly now than he had done in the beginning. Life in Hale's Turning without Aunt Verona to interpret it was like music played on a dumb clavier.

“Nobody could find out where you was,” Mrs. Barker finally explained. “Some said you was dead. So they decided to store all the stuff in the parlour and dining-room. I make a fire in there every off and on and keep it dusted. The roof's bad, and the chimneys ain't up to much.”

Paul was bitterly disappointed. He had unreasonably counted on finding his bedroom walls adorned with the old prints of Queen Victoria and Sir John Macdonald. He craved the musty smell of the rag barrel and the box of lump sugar in the attic. Even the playroom was desecrated. The piano had been moved out to make room for Mrs. Barker's bed.

He walked away from the house, turning up the road. Mr. Kestrell's windmill creaked faintly in response to the evening breeze, and a light shone at the kitchen window. He had a desire to run in and greet the mother of the famous star—but refrained. He must make a complete tour of the village before paying calls.

The schoolyard showed traces of the "programme of athletic sports," and the "greased pig contest" that had been held there in the afternoon. Peanut shells and empty popcorn packets abounded. Eager children were already beginning to gather for "the grand fireworks display." As he passed he heard one urchin whisper: "Hey, skinny, look at the dude!" He was amused to learn that the supply of young "skinnies" had not given out. He presumed there were still "fatties," and "Scot-ties," and "shrimps."

A dusty motor-car in front of Walter's gate bore witness to the continued prosperity of the Dreers. The dark-red Ashmill house far beyond the hedge of rusty cedars was provincially august.

Finally the Baptist church, wooden, whitewashed. Its spire had once appeared to him the loftiest point in the world! He walked up the gravel avenue. A branch of an old acacia tree still brushed the window next to the Meddar pew. In imagination, he could smell the stale odour of leather-bound hymnbooks and red rep cushions, could hear the thud of the organ lid as he pushed it over the keys, the muffled rush of air as old Silas turned on the water power. He could even remember the num-

bers of some of the hymns: 103, "Crown Him"; 99, "When He Cometh!" Gee-rusalem!

As he turned into the road again from the churchyard, which smelt unmistakably of trampled strawberries, he saw a white-clad figure coming down the hill. It was a woman of fifty odd, slender, neat, a little dowdy, but exuding an air of timid *allégresse* that appealed to him. He would have recognized her had he met her in Zanzibar, for she had not changed, except to grow dryer. She was imperishable. One day a wind would, *tout simplement*, bear her away out of life, and she would primly draw down her skirts as she soared. She might have been made of tissue-paper. He took off his cap and stood barring the way, and she looked up, myopically, with a blush mantling her faded cheeks. She scarcely came up to his shoulder, and he remembered a Sunday morning when she had had to kneel down to knot his plaid Windsor tie for him.

"You don't recognize me, I'm afraid, Miss Todd."

She narrowed her eyes with diffident deliberation, then said: "No, I'm afraid I don't seem to."

"Of course," Paul sympathized. "On Dominion Day one sees such quantities of strangers."

"My memory is bad, I fear."

"Oh, don't say that. For if *you* fail to remember me I'll run away again and die of grief. And we were such good friends once. I had a habit of playing your accompaniments too fast, but you were very sweet about it."

Miss Todd stepped back, hesitated, then broke out, "You're never little Paul Minas."

"No—big Paul." To prove it he lifted her, kissed her gently and set her on her feet again.

Gurgling Gertrude was speechless, then voluble, and Paul stood answering her questions for several minutes. He found it more difficult to give an account of himself

than he had anticipated, for nothing he might say could explain to Miss Todd how he had acquired the finish which, as he could see, stamped him in her eyes as high-toned to a degree. That she approved of him was evident from her way of saying:

“Well, I always declared you’d grow up a perfect wonder.”

In reply to his inquiries Miss Todd informed him, with becoming modesty, but undisguised elation, that she hadn’t missed a day at Sunday School for fifteen years. She had been presented with a red-letter Bible in token of her faithfulness.

“Good God!” exclaimed Paul, then caught himself. The “swear word” had slipped out despite his instinctive effort to attune himself to the piety and sobriety of his surroundings. More than ever he realized the force of Aunt Verona’s admonition.

She suggested that he should accompany her to Mrs. Dreer’s where there was to be a “party,” but he excused himself, agreeing to call on Miss Todd the next afternoon and “stay to supper.”

“What hot weather we’re having!” she remarked as they parted. She would have been horrified on arriving at Mrs. Dreer’s to think that she had forgotten this evidence of *savoir-faire*.

“Yes,” he agreed. “But if you’re used to living in the East, the heat is rather pleasant.” By “East” he meant “The Orient,” and after saying it he realized that for Miss Todd “East” connoted “The Maritime provinces.” Already he had found that his mode of thinking, as well as his vocabulary, would have to be overhauled for navigation in these backwaters of civilization.

Miss Todd bowed and smiled, then walked on, a shade more primly, a shade more tremulously, but with an ineffable and appealing jauntiness. She was still wearing her Jubilee sovereign.

The village was re-awakening for the evening festivities. Farmers in for the day were removing nose-bags from horses' heads, whilst their wives tucked baskets into the clumsy waggons. To avoid them, Paul walked towards the marshes, crossed the trestle and made his way to the waterside. Ravaged by the ardours of the July sun, the sky was drawing blue veils across its pallid face. At the deserted shipyard, which presumably belonged to him, Paul sat on a broken keel and gazed across the river towards the mill.

Not a vessel was in port, though a clumsy tug, taking advantage of the tide from the Basin, was puffing her way around the bend with two empty white scows to be laden with gypsum. Poor little mud-red river, in which his forefathers had cast anchor on portentous arrivals from Saint Nazaire, Cienfuegos, Rotterdam, Madras. They had all "sold their farms to go to sea," and for their pains had died of yellow fever, or foundered, or become obliterated in far ends of the earth. Like himself that ghostly legion had been familiar with forepeaks and caustic, scraping irons and oakum, lime juice, salt "horse," and icy shrouds that rattled to the *macabre* tune of Atlantic gales. From them he had inherited a dauntlessness of spirit, a need to navigate the bounding main of thought and feeling, a hatred of staying put. But from vague sources that had persisted from the days when Nova Scotia was Acadie, a fraction of what Voltaire disdainfully called (and it was rather a *gaffe*) *quelques arpents de neige*, he had inherited traits of a different order. To him, as to Aunt Verona, had been bequeathed artistic heirlooms, and he was at times chilled with the fear that he had inherited a share of the fatalism that had blighted his aunt's career.

From the keel on which he was mounted he could see in the clear air of gathering night a sharp silhouette of Evangeline's Blomidon, and it was an easy boat-run

to the beach on which the sentimental lovers were separated. His French ancestor, though dispossessed, had returned—for what? To be disillusioned, as usual. He sat musing until it was dark, then made his way stumblingly toward the abandoned wharf.

Near the overhanging bluff, after a sharp ascent, he came opposite the cottage of Phœbe Meddar. He walked around it from a safe distance, as he had done eighteen years before, when his inamorata lay mortally ill of an overindulgence in cucumbers and milk.

Some one was coming out of the cottage, and he turned away, striking out across the fields towards the village.

In his cheerless lodging he was unable to compose himself for sleep. After a vain attempt to read, he rose and paced the room. Finally he sat down, with some vague notion of writing to Pat Coyle. Loneliness pressed him with hard knuckles. He longed to pour himself out, and there was no human being in whom he could entirely confide. He acknowledged now—now that he had come a journey of many thousand miles—that he was basing high hopes on Phœbe Meddar. He acknowledged it, and in the same breath upbraided himself for his folly. It was an expedition as hare-brained as a search for buried treasure.

He longed to see Phœbe, yet feared the encounter. For a moment he had a wild plan of rehearsing her in the romantic attitude he expected of her—if he could only have done it anonymously! He wanted to write. "Do, please, be imaginative enough to rise to the occasion. Do understand that Paul Minas is a quixotic creature with a highly intellectualized sentimentalism, that he has chosen you—you on the strength of old, tenuous associations—as the embodiment of a hundred indeterminate desires. So, don't for goodness' sake be commonplace—or at least, don't let your inevitable human

commonplaceness obtrude too bluntly. Don't stab his illusions; let them die of inanition if you must. Do, in short, understand him. He knows you can't really—nobody can, not even himself; he knows it, he knows it—but for the love of heaven, try, oh, try!"

Then he called himself an idiot, threw down his pen, and undressed. His thoughts were still revolving about Phœbe, and as he extinguished the lamp, the words of an old ditty came into his head:

*“Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu.
Ouvre-moi ta porte,
Pour l'amour de Dieu.”*

That was it: Phœbe must give him a new light on himself, must help him discover his destiny. For he was still obsessed with the idea that he had a message for the world, even a sermon to preach. So far, like Aunt Verona, he had merely collected texts; it was time to sort them and make a synthesis.

From his window he saw rockets careening into the sky over the tree-tops. The village had trooped *en masse* to the school-yard, to enjoy its annual fête. By this time his arrival was known. Mrs. Barker and Miss Todd would have seen to that. Perhaps Phœbe knew. She would be certain to take an interest—if only by reason of the dearth of interests in Hale's Turning. On that thought his mind fastened and reposed.

3

For a month Paul was occupied in carrying out repairs on his house. Like a self-respecting ex-second-mate he mixed the paint himself, and even wielded a brush when he could spare the time. He had conferred in Halifax with Mr. Kingsley, the lawyer, who, after administering a well-merited scolding, had handed over to him deeds

and securities which placed him—from the Hale's Turning point of view—in the class of the well-to-do.

Although reinstatement in his native land had been accompanied by sharp disillusionment, although the people seemed ignorant and their aims petty, although Hale's Turning was little more to him than a plot of ground surrounding Aunt Verona's grave, nevertheless Paul derived a strange satisfaction from being at home. For the first time in his life he could review himself from a trustworthy angle. From his present self to the boy of twelve the lines converged in a perspective that gave a definite proportion to all his deeds. He saw in his tortuous development an instinctive plan of which he had not been clearly conscious during the process of developing. When he contrasted it with that of his former mates, he felt more than consoled for the loneliness and doubt of the intervening years. But satisfaction in his own accomplishment was tinged with bitterness. Why should one have attuned oneself to superfine reactions when life was preponderantly uncouth? Like a racehorse he could easily score on points, but not on utility; the world needed cart-horses.

Re-union with his schoolmates revived aches which he had lived down, reminded him of days when he had stood with a bat in his hand, despite his hatred of organized sports, in the hope that by hitting an exasperating ball he might win from some playmate a reciprocal show of interest in his mental games—an interest which had not been forthcoming. He acutely remembered the jeers that had greeted his failure to hit the ball, his sense of humiliation, his dread of being always in the wrong. And in the interval, how many, many times had the situation been re-echoed!

For twenty years he had manufactured anæsthetics to deaden the smarts caused by disregard of senses raw and exposed.

Walter Dreer—not Mark Laval—John Ashmill, Wilfrid Fraser, Skinny Wiggins had found the world laid out for them. Their pastimes and professions were at hand like their clean shirts and stockings. Like the children of the grenadier's song, each had been "born into this world alive, either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative." Paul had been born heir to an "obstinate questioning of sense and outward things." His most familiar sensation was still that of yearning; his only means of making up to himself what the world failed to provide had been to strengthen his self-reliance. He had come to rely solely on the dictum: "Have faith in yourself and nothing can prevail against you."

His first taste of self-vindication had come to him on the day at Port Said when he had wandered away over the sands instead of rejoining his ship. His first taste of real security came in the succeeding years, when, remote from every companion of his youth, he had discovered that he was nearly impervious to further incomprehension, indifferent to public opinion. It was an unsocial and perhaps unnatural kind of security, for one of its ingredients was disdain; but more natural kinds had eluded him; every attempt to identify himself with the world—schools, musical institutions, marine disciplines—had been ill-fated.

As a child he had judged himself abnormally weak. As a man he found himself in abnormal ways strong, the strongest personage he knew, except for artists and thinkers, whom he knew only through their expression. If he were, after all, strong, why couldn't he, too, like artists and thinkers, express himself, and thus patiently reduce the emotional havoc wrought by years of disproportion. It had been humiliating to slave in ships for enough to eat; but no one had been able to impair his integrity by so much as a finger-mark. The world he had envisaged as a pack of wolves which barely tol-

erated him when he howled his feeble quota in their interest and which were prepared to devour him if he took off his uncomfortable wolf's clothing; a mob which indulged in meaningless squabbles outside the walls of his stronghold. He had long since become a hermit in order to survive and now he found himself more isolated than ever. *Bon!* The world should see what a thorough-going hermit he could be.

Walter Dreer, who was cashier in the Bridgetown bank, had begun by hailing him as a priceless acquisition to the life of the community. But when Paul had failed to find satisfaction in the bucolic merriment of evening parties at which Walter was the scintillating *jeune premier*, Walter's attitude became resentful. Through the inevitable roundabout channels Paul learned that his old chum spoke of him as "a smart-Alec." This criticism was weakened by the fact, obvious to the village at large, that Walter aped him.

John Ashmill, his former oppressor, was more satisfactory. John's very grossness gave him a tolerance which approximated breadth of vision. He had gone into the lumber business with his father, and in hours of leisure his sole ambition was to be entertained. From far and near he collected cronies whom Hale's Turning considered "fast." He had disgraced his people by eloping with Bessie Day, a girl whom Paul still regarded as dirty and bold. The pair lived in a house on the hill above the Baptist Church, played cards, drank and danced. They had even been known to engage in these pastimes on Sundays, and Miss Todd, over her garden fence, had seen Bessie smoking! When Paul, according to clamorous invitations, accompanied John and Bessie to Halifax on a riotous week-end excursion, he was voted, by members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, "Not so nice as he seemed."

Wilfrid Fraser, a good young man who had become

a Master of Arts and was wavering between a natural bent for school-teaching and an urge to "go in for law," giggled at Paul's most serious remarks, for he had been told Paul had a sense of humour.

Skinny Wiggins, whose profession was uncertain but who disappeared at intervals to "work on a tug," addressed Paul with a casualness that was meant to cloak honest stupefaction. For Skinny, Paul's transformation into a man who could dominate him with smiles, swift speech and even, as he suspected, muscle, was in the category of things unfathomable. In the end Skinny took to passing him with a nod, his hands thrust into his pockets, his cap over his eye, his cheek filled with chewing tobacco.

Mark Laval was the greatest disappointment. Throughout his youth Paul had thought of the French lad as a genius. He had looked forward with intense curiosity to seeing what Mark had made of himself. On his second day at home he met Mark at the post office, and it was evident his drunken father had made good the promise to "kick all the nonsense out of him." There were even signs that he had taught his son the delights of the bottle. Mark was down from camp with a split finger. He had grown into a giant. It was easy to see that he had never worn a presentable suit of clothes nor come under any refining personal influence. On recognizing Paul, however, his remarkable eyes gave forth a reflection of the wistful enthusiasm of former days. Not once did he complain of the ill fortune that had denied him an education, a home, a hundred desired boons, yet every vibration of his voice and every gesture proclaimed a brutalized, murdered longing for opportunities to discipline the creative forces that had welled up in him. It was with genuine reluctance that Paul, after a half hour's conversation, concluded that Mark's failure was due to absence of organizing ability. There

was no lack of detonating material; simply there was no gun.

“You was always a smart little feller,” said Mark, as they were parting. “I knowed you was a wonder—and so y’are.”

And so he was. A wonder even to himself! And all they could do was to let him go on being a wonder and go on wondering about it.

He completed the renovation of his house, labouring with a new determination. The profane world had failed him; he had in self-defence retired into his own. He must abide by the consequences. Better, at any rate, to be an intelligent hermit than a sheep—especially in the light of all this war-talk.

4

The *Halifax Herald* had reported diplomatic embroilments abroad, but Paul was not interested. Like most sailors he had not acquired a taste for newspapers. Ever since the days when he had argued with Otto, he had regarded everything connected with war as a misapplication of energy. War? Why, it was a phenomenon he had discussed out of countenance with army officers in Egypt and cast off as an antiquated institution, a thing to be placed in a museum beside the mummies.

But it had gone to the heads of the people like rum.

John Ashmill was going to enlist, in spite of old Dave’s protests. At the age of twenty-seven John had outgrown every other form of excitement.

In Halifax, when Paul went to buy furniture for his house, men jumped upon soap-boxes and ranted. Never had the world seemed so colossally bad-mannered. Never had the walls of his fortress been so aimlessly battered; never had it seemed so impregnable.

There was a “mass meeting” in the town hall of Hale’s Turning—a bare room over the post office where Paul

had been wont to play Clementi sonatinas at school concerts. He left in the middle of the first speech and wandered up the road towards his deserted house, carrying away two impressions: the image of a red-faced speaker, Mr. Dreer, who gave "facts" about Germany which were phantastically inaccurate, and a face for which he had been on the lookout. Phœbe Meddar had returned from her summer vacation, and he had seen her as he passed down the aisle. To his kindling interest she had responded with a polite little bow. He had been prepared for disappointment on the score of beauty, of imagination, of intelligence, but not of taste. The Phœbe whom he had recognized in the motley gathering was undoubtedly pretty, imaginative, intelligent—but she was "ladylike"; conspicuously and provincially so, like Flora Ashmill and Miss Todd. He had wanted Phœbe to be natural—not boisterously natural like Gritty Kestrell, but sweetly and gently natural. Yet his disappointment was mitigated, for Phœbe had been as distinct from her neighbours as a flower from its leaves.

The phrases of the sensation-monger still rang in his ears as he entered the dark house. He resented Mr. Dreer as he had long ago resented the evangelist. Both endeavoured to convert by fair means or foul; both were vulgar.

Mrs. Barker had been installed as cook-housekeeper, with a bedroom upstairs, and the playroom had been restored to the dignity of music-room. Here Paul had placed the few Persian and Egyptian objects he had brought from Cairo. The piano was still a brave instrument. He lit candles and sat down to obliterate the vexatious mood. The sound ran across the floors and echoed in far-away corners of the house. During lulls he heard the rustling boughs of the cherry tree. The candles flickered gently to airs that came in from the orchard, and over his shoulder Paul saw his own shadow

stretching eerily towards the blackboard on which he had been drawing a picture of a locomotive when Aunt Verona startled him with the strange word: "labyrinth."

That was life—a labyrinth, a never-ending spiral.

The rooms had been redecorated and Paul had begun to distribute the best pieces of Aunt Verona's furniture. Some had been removed to the woodshed whence they were to be transported to auction rooms in Bridgetown. On his way upstairs, he paused to rummage in drawers which had thus far escaped attention. In one he came on a lacquer box which seemed familiar, although he could not place it among his possessions. It was locked, and there was no key. Curiosity prompted him to force back the cover.

His eyes fell on a humble bunch of dried flowers: daisies, clovers, buttercups. He was puzzled. A faint odour of coco-nut cookies gently assailed him and vanished. Then he remembered.

He closed the lid of the box and replaced it in the drawer. The girl of seven who had unconsciously set his emotions a-twitter for the first time and then succumbed to her dear little greediness had actually been the elder sister of the conspicuously ladylike young woman to whom he had bowed this very evening in the town hall. Perhaps, one day, he would bring Phoebe to his house to show her the box; its story could not fail to touch her.

As he undressed, the phrases of the speechmaker kept recurring. "A high duty to perform," "A sacred privilege to exercise," "An opportunity to devote oneself to a great cause."

What great cause? The cause of the herd that had made existence so difficult, against whose exquisite forms of oppression one had had the perseverance and ingenuity to render oneself proof? Not at all; it was the *great* cause, *pardi!* Nobody knew wherein the greatness lay;

everybody was too passionately carried away by all this greatness to inquire!

A high duty to take part in a savage "free-for-all" and take it seriously! A sacred privilege to go back into a dusty stampede! The answer was a snort. The Bridgetown Quakers were as unsympathetic, in the mass, as their conscientiously belligerent brothers in the mass. No mob's programme could be his; that was the essence of his experience.

After getting into bed he heard a sound which he took to be a knock at the door. He was startled, listened tensely for a moment, and concluded it was the wind. Then he remembered he had left the playroom window open. He had meant to close it, for there was an encampment of gypsies outside the village. He lit a candle and went downstairs. A puff of air extinguished the light, and he felt his way across the playroom.

Something in the atmosphere made him uneasy. A trace of his old dread of the dark assailed him, and he stood, back to the window, exhorting his nerves. The restlessness only increased, and he started violently when Mrs. Barker's clock in the kitchen whirred, preparatory to striking the hour.

Its tones recalled the exotic chimes, and the solace which was ever associated with them came to his aid. He could make out the position of the piano, for a corner of the polished lid faintly gleamed. His attention was suddenly but calmly riveted on this glow, which, whilst he looked, became more and more diffused, till it seemed to outline a human figure.

Paul breathlessly waited.

The figure died away, and no glow was left to mark the position of the piano. For some moments he stood rigid, then turned and left the playroom, numb, exalted, reassured—armed as with an invisible coat of mail.

XI

I

IT had become second nature for Paul to avoid his kind. As a sailor in port he had invariably slipped away from his mates. In the cafés of Europe he had preferred to sit at remote tables. Even in Cairo his real self had never mingled with his throng of acquaintances. Consequently he was in no sense disconcerted by a new estrangement. However lonely he might feel, he was in a situation with which he knew how to cope.

There were days when he spoke to no one but Mrs. Barker, Mr. Silva, or Becky States, who still came to scrub and iron and chant unearthly melodies in her cracked, growling baritone. He developed reclusive habits that reminded him of Aunt Verona. He had already begun to collect texts—from such books as Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*. "When," he sardonically mused, "shall I begin writing my futile history!"

Each new manifestation of the belligerent spirit intensified his disdain. His views were understood in no quarter and tolerated in few. Current patriotism struck him as being a glorification of the spirit in which Skinny Wiggins had been wont, with his bony fist, to prop a victim against a wall and reduce him to submission with the self-righteous query, "Did I? Did I? Say I did and I'll bust you in the eye!" Skinny certainly *had*; but had his heart been pure, his attitude was insulting and ill-bred—and patriotism was both. "My country, right

or wrong!" cried the patriot, and the mob cheered. Well, let the mob not be surprised if he, Paul Minas, found the sentiment singularly fatuous. He listened with new ears to the National Anthem. Even poor, timid, quavering little Miss Todd could, with a holy zeal, sing:

"O Lord our God, arise!
Scatter his enemies,
And make them fall!
Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks;
On Thee our hopes we fix,
God save us all!"

He drew endless comfort from the picture of his deluded fellow-citizens, packed into the town hall, singing that last line with all their might!

Occasionally he lost his temper, under the stress. Once when Mr. Kingsley implied that his attitude was based on sophistry, Paul broke forth in an impassioned counter-charge. "Christliness," he concluded, "the most civilizing of all attitudes, assumes that men are brothers. The War Office assumes that they are members of opposing camps, all but one of which contain 'bloody foreigners.' I feel no urge to assert the superlative virtues of my particular nation and kill a lot of foreigners to prove the fictitious assertion. Why should I accept the mob's version? I've never accepted its opinion on any other issue. If I did I should have to accept its disapproval of outlandish traits that are a vital part of my own nature, which would be spiritual suicide. Forget 'honour' and 'righteousness,' cut out the hypocrisy, the drooling jingoism and sentimentality, and call on Mars. He's your man—not God. I should imagine by now your God is bloody well fed up with the whole of creation. I know I am. Do what you like with it—you and the people who understand its interests!"

The following winter, with its blizzards, ice and slush, seemed interminable. Paul read, and made music, oppressed by a sense of his dilettantism. It was maddening to be a mere fly on the cake of life—but even worse, he mused, to be a real currant, embedded in its dough. During the long transition weeks, when partial thaws alternated with frosts, when bleak winds and icy rains tore at the trees and fields in a final effort to frustrate the revival of life, Paul's isolation was relieved by conferences with old Dave Ashmill, who, in response to the increasing clamour for ships, had formed a syndicate to take over disused yards and, with lumber from his own mills, build wooden vessels on government contract. Paul had agreed to sell his waterside properties, and accepted the post of secretary of the Hale's Turning yard.

There were many papers to prepare and arrangements to make for the installation of plant and procuring of supplies. Old Ashmill, like his son, cultivated a coarse heartiness which resembled broad-mindedness, and chuckled whenever Paul gave vent to subversive remarks of the sort which had stamped him, in the eyes of Hale's Turning, as an "atheist"—the most damning epithet in its bestowal—or "odd," the epithet that had attached to Miss Windell.

Mrs. Ashmill, who was prepared to receive him coldly, owing to his reputation, he had won over in one stroke by arriving at her house in a dinner jacket and addressing the parlour-maid as though she were a maid rather than a "hired girl." Flora Ashmill, a virgin of forty and quite the most genteel object in the country, was deliciously appalled by his authoritative manner of contradicting her on her best topics: painting, music, horticulture.

Regarding his resistance the two women maintained a pregnant silence, making their knitting needles click with

symbolic purport. They were bound to respect his views, for Mr. Ashmill had given out, with a hint of sardonic humour, that "Young Minas" was "indispensable" to him in his government shipbuilding project. Old Dave was universally suspected of a penchant for cheating all forms of orthodoxy on the sly, while conspicuously upholding them.

As befitted the leading family of Hale's Turning, the Ashmills patronized education. Mrs. Ashmill awarded an annual scholarship, and her daughter gave an annual "strawberry social" at which objects were sold for the purpose of raising funds to buy plaster models of "The Winged Victory" and lithographs of the Colosseum for the schoolhouse. The teachers were also invited once a year to dinner, and it was this rite that brought Paul into contact with Phoebe Meddar. So far he had only exchanged casual phrases with her at the post office where the villagers repaired every evening, ostensibly to collect letters, inostensibly to gossip. The ladylikeness which had vexed him on his first glimpse of Phoebe he now put down to constraint. It was most marked in the presence of Flora Ashmill, whose method of establishing her own superiority was to place everybody else at a disadvantage.

"How do you ever manage to keep it up year in and year out, Miss Meddar?" Flora murmured, referring to Phoebe's position in the village school.

"Oh, really, Miss Ashmill, it isn't so bad," Phoebe explained, hesitating between natural shyness and a desire to be hearty. "I actually enjoy it."

Paul leapt to the rescue. "Of course she does. You ladies who've been sheltered like beautiful greenhouse roses"—he paused a second to let Flora revel in it—"often miss one of life's best thrills: the thrill of fulfilling a responsibility."

Flora, who was plain and unloved, let her soul linger

over the word he had so deftly tossed to her—"beautiful," and Phœbe sent across the table a glance acknowledging his protection. Her cheeks were like petals. "I wonder if you're really as remarkable as the addle-pated girls of Hale's Turning make out," her nice blue eyes seemed to say.

After dinner Mrs. Ashmill proposed music. Would Mr. Minas care to play? Paul welcomed the suggestion. In this hideous plush drawing-room, many years ago, he had played for guests of Miss Ashmill driven indoors by a shower which had blasted the booths at her strawberry social.

"And you were so small," Flora archly reminded him, "that you couldn't reach the pedals."

For the first time since his return Phœbe favoured him with a directly personal allusion. "Oh," she laughed, "he was the sort of child who would simply *imagine* he was pedalling and somehow produce the same effect."

Paul shot her a look of delighted surprise. It was shrewd. And, for Hale's Turning, original. But for the stiff presence of the Ashmill ladies and the silly stare of Myrtle Wilcove he would have been tempted to reply, "Exactly, and if you only knew it, Phœbe, he was the sort of child who while practising in a bare playroom used to imagine that you were listening to his strains, and he played all the better for the breathless interest his image of you took in them!" In the circumstances all he dared say was a bantering:

"How well you understand small boys! Does that come from experience as a teacher, or is it a natural gift?"

Phœbe's ladylikeness had vanished. "Oh, I'm sure the ability to understand *you* implies something more than either, something approximating genius!" The sarcasm was veiled by the gentleness of her voice, her frank

smile, the suggestion of pale gilding that marked the contours of her smooth hair, her compact little figure, her simple black satin frock.

The retort pleased him, yet as he turned to the keyboard he shrugged his shoulders with a trace of the humiliation he had always felt as being treated as a superior being, instead of a quite ordinary boy.

At half-past nine he escorted Phœbe from the house, past the historic rose-beds. Wrapped in cloaks and equipped with overshoes and a lantern, they plodded through acres of slush which Phœbe likened to pineapple sherbet. For an unnaturally long period Paul had eschewed feminine society. The cosiness of the girl whose arm he was holding roused susceptibilities that had been lying torpid. Phœbe chatted easily, but never aimlessly. Her remarks were inclined to be edged. Her reserve piqued him. It was as though there were a lump in it which all his personal arts failed to dissolve. He decided, on the spot, to challenge her.

“Tell me, Phœbe”—it was the first time he had used her name—“why do you dislike me?”

She looked up at him, her face a patchwork of curved shadows cast by the lantern. Her lips were closed and there was a half timid glint in her eyes.

“Do I?” she fenced.

“Yes, a little. It’s not so much dislike as distrust. Why?”

She considered it. “Why don’t you answer the question for yourself, since you seem to know so much about my feelings—more than I do, I assure you.”

With a grunt he recalled the far distant occasion when she had been unable to state the colour of his eyes. “Do you mean you don’t know that you distrust me?” he insisted.

She went off on a strange tack. “I would have imagined,” she said thoughtfully, “that seafaring would

have dulled your sensitiveness. You must have had some bad times."

He was touched. "It's good to hear you say that."

"For mercy's sake, why?"

He came back to a flippant tone to conceal his concession to sentimentality. "Because," he laughed, "it's another neat sign of your comprehension of small boys—or rather *a* small boy. It proves you, according to your own rating, approximately a genius. Besides, now that you've said it, I'm sure the verdict is only 'distrust.' It was not the sort of remark one makes of a person one dislikes."

"Aren't you conceited!" she commented.

"Ah, now I understand the grounds for distrust."

"I dare say you understand heaps of things. Here's the gate. Will you come in?"

He declined the formal invitation, and stood, throwing the lantern's rays along the pathway. Within the last half hour Phœbe had revived his romantic hopes for her. She seemed to have it in her to rise to occasions.

He splashed his way homeward with a refreshed courage. It was as though his inner egos were happily smiling, after long days and nights of unacknowledged chagrin.

As he entered his house he hummed a snatch from an opera he had heard in some far corner of the globe: "Io son barbiere, di qualita—di qualita."

Why, he asked himself, should that particular ditty come to his lips? What on earth was the association between *The Barber of Seville* and the mood of the evening? For a few moments he indulged in the fascinating exercise of thinking backward, in search of a clue to the mysterious workings of sub-consciousness. At last he had it: *qualita*, quality. "Quality" was the word for which his mind had groped at the dinner table, when trying to define the flavour of the Ashmill ladies.

They considered themselves persons "of quality"—that was it.

Quality, *Quality Street*—Phœbe Throstle! Everything led back to Phœbe!

He shivered as he passed the open door of the ghostly playroom, and hurried upstairs to bed.

2

Inordinate bustle troubled the slumbers of Hale's Turning with the advent of spring, reminding the aged of days when ship "lanchings" were of frequent occurrence. From the riverside issued an incessant din of trip-hammers, and as summer wore on, the hulls of three stocky steamers loomed up. On Sunday afternoons the pastime of the godly was to walk along the bluff, survey these evidences of Dave Ashmill's ingenuity, and make comment on the progress since the previous Sabbath.

Paul's abilities had been discovered by old Dave and put to the best advantage. Chief among them was a knack he had acquired at sea of handling men. Ashmill's success had been due in good measure to his gift for suborning brains, and Paul knew, from Aunt Verona, that his own father had swelled the Ashmill fortunes by enlarging the foreign market.

Paul noted that the people who had liked him seized on his new occupation with relief, as though to assure him that by contributing his knowledge of ships towards the success of the allies he was in a measure redeeming himself. He declined the shift.

"I'm doing it not because it's my 'bit,' " he said truculently one day to the Baptist minister, "but because building ships is always a worth-while task."

"And sinking them?"

"Is, of course, insane."

"Ah, my young friend, how true! I fear Germany's

insanity is of the incurable kind. That comes of denying her God."

"Don't talk rot, man," said Paul, who still harboured a grudge against the sect that had tried to Shanghai him into the fold. "It's insane to fire off twelve-inch guns. All phases of warfare are insane. We're no more exempt than the enemy."

The minister was stung by the trace of contempt in Paul's tone. "Do you realize," he asked, "that your remarks might be interpreted as seditious?"

"Fully. The truth is always seditious—as Socrates and Christ knew to their cost. You men of God don't preach Christ these days. You preach Jehovah, and choose the bloodiest texts in the Old Testament. Why not be consistent—be patriarchal, practise polygamy, and the whole bag of tricks!"

The minister bowed and walked away. Paul had no remorse, for he was settling an old score. He was not impious. Faith had been bred in him through occasional flashes of insight. He passionately envied adepts who had penetrated into the inner temples. But his religion was an intensely personal relationship with the infinite—an infinite which men, in the feebleness of their imagination, had had to personify as an old gentleman with a beard. He heartily endorsed the proverb which says: "*Il vaut mieux avoir affaire à Dieu qu' à ses saints.*" Of course he had made an enemy of the minister, but he preferred enemies to friends who edited his conduct to bring it into conformity with their mechanical orthodoxy.

Even Phœbe, his new friend, persisted in hushing up his heterodoxies, though he had striven to train her into understanding, if not sharing, his own contempt of criticism. His views had shocked her, as they shocked all the others. But Phœbe possessed a mind that invited ideas. Unlike the girls with whom she had studied at Normal School, she had not considered her education

at an end when she received a diploma. Paul had patiently waited for her to overcome her first distrust, to conquer the pride which made her hold out against the personality that had flurried less fastidious women. But in the end it was inevitable they should be together, for he alone could give her glimpses of a civilization broader and richer than that of which she, as assistant principal of the local school, was the accredited representative.

Paul guessed that other girls twitted Phœbe for her interest in him, and in order to spare her had checked his first advances. He guessed, too, that his advent was responsible for a certain coolness between Phœbe and Wilfrid Fraser, who had paid attention to her for years. He had known Phœbe subtly defiant with the girls who were loudest in their war zeal, and he had observed, with sweetly painful concern, her distrust of him change gradually to trust, her edged retorts give way to earnest and intimate confidences. He knew that Phœbe's invalid mother disapproved of his iconoclasm. He knew that Bob Meddar, whom he liked, had warned Phœbe against accepting at their face value the ideas of a confessed visionary—and, worst of all, he knew that Bob's warning was fearfully well-founded. Yet he was drawn.

Phœbe wept helplessly when Bob went overseas. A few months later she saw Wilfrid off to Ottawa, where he had obtained a war post that exempted him from action for which he was physically disqualified. Paul met Phœbe a few days later at the post office, and their interview was a little strained.

He had found a note from Mark Laval, written just before embarking. It was short, but glowed with enthusiasm, as Mark's eyes had glowed in the days when he declaimed romantic verse under the cherry tree. "One of them there dumdums will probably get me," Mark concluded, "but it will be better than a tree falling on me."

As they walked through the fields Paul read the letter to Phœbe.

“Mark will be a good soldier,” she commented.

“Yes—for men like him the war means emancipation. For men like Wilfrid Fraser it would mean torture, slavery, and death. Sensibilities are a luxury society dispenses with in wartime. The arrangement would be more successful if the sensitive men could dispense with their own sensibilities at a given signal. But butterflies don't revert into caterpillars.”

“Just the same,” said Phœbe, with a hint of hostility, “Wilfrid is doing his bit.”

“That's such a glib word, Phœbe—‘bit.’ You who are so meticulous, why don't you avoid it?” He spoke more testily than the trifle warranted, his nerves showing the strain of increasingly intensive propaganda

He knew her feelings were hurt, for she half turned from him. With a tinge of pride and a tinge of appeal in his tones he apologized. Some maternal instinct stirred in her, and she took his arm.

“I'm trying to understand you, Paul,” she said. “But you're so different from everybody I know!”

He was moved. “At any rate you don't despise me—that's something to hold to.”

“Oh Paul—despise!” There were tears in her voice.

They had reached a deserted grove of alders behind the Meddar cottage. Suddenly he took Phœbe in his arms and kissed her—gently. For some time her face lay against his shoulder. When she finally looked up she gave him an anxious smile. Her eyes were like wet violets.

He held her close, as if to assure himself by sheer contact that he had not made a mistake.

3

Gradually it became apparent to Paul that Phœbe staggered under the weight of his anomalous status. The

isolation natural to him was for her a new and trying experience. She continued to knit and make bandages, but worked in private, recoiling from the chatter about slackers and heroes. Unwittingly she antagonized shallow girls and noticed that Myrtle Wilcove, who had been a competitor for her position at the school, made the most of her advantage with public opinion.

When coercive measures began to be seriously discussed Phœbe was dismayed. It had been hard enough to be torn daily between the duty of teaching her pupils prescribed lessons in patriotism and that of defending an unpatriotic lover, but it was harrowing to guess the consequences of his attitude should conscription come into effect.

“What will you do then, dear?” she inquired timidly.

He was hurt by the implication that he might adapt his principles to the exigencies of society and made a truculent reply.

Phœbe was quiet for a while and they sat staring into the open door of the Klondike stove in her mother’s sitting-room—a room embellished with shells and painted ostrich eggs.

“But Paul—they will—don’t they——?”

“Send one to prison, you mean? Don’t be afraid to speak plainly, Phœbe. Now’s a time for honest people to do so, now that highfalutin lies are being hoisted banner-like for folk to rally under. . . . No doubt I’ll be sent to prison if the worst comes to the worst.”

Her lips were quivering.

“They won’t shoot me,” he added bitterly. “Which proves that society, after all, has an embryonic conscience.”

Then he relented and took her in his arms.

“I’m so selfish,” she sobbed, as he petted her, “to make you supply courage for two, when I ought to be a source of strength to you.”

“You are, dear—you are,” he replied abstractedly. But to himself he had to avow that Phœbe was in his boat—his privateer—only as supercargo. He was haunted by the problem of her fate; it weighed on him more heavily than his own.

Some weeks later he found her with red eyes, shrinking. Her manner drove from his mind a momentous development in his own affairs which he had come to announce. He talked of trivial matters, waiting for a clue. They came around to the inevitable topic, and suddenly, with a little rush of words, Phœbe suggested that he should make some compromise before it was too late.

“You might do something that would keep you from the actual fighting. Couldn’t you——”

Paul rose from his chair and paced the room. “Is that all you’ve been able to make of my abstention?” he cried. “Compromise? Now? I’m less ready to compromise than I’ve ever been.”

The statement echoed in his ears like some death knell of reasonableness. Life was a matter of winds and currents, and one’s views must be swung about like the yards of a ship if one hoped to avoid reefs. In his most lucid moments he perceived that he was stubborn, as Aunt Verona had been. Yet fatalistically he pitted his obduracy against what he regarded as the massed stubbornness of the world. He preferred shipwreck on the shores of his own Utopia to arrival in the promised land of the commonalty.

Phœbe was weeping, and he guessed that something unusual had happened. He approached to pat her shoulder and saw the tears come more freely. Then, her face buried in her hands, she explained that her brother had been killed.

For a long while Paul held her in his arms, consoling her as best he could. In the end she became quiet, and Paul, chastened, let her talk.

“Oh, how could they—how *could* they?” she cried, with a return to incoherence. “Poor old Bobby—Oh, why can’t *I* go out and avenge him!”

He had never heard her so emphatic. Although she was unstrung by grief, he could not refrain from presenting the corrective aspect of the case. “But don’t you see, Phœbe dear, that’s the spirit that has brought all this horror about? The more one avenges, the more there is to avenge. It reduces civilization to an arena, and peace merely means ‘half time’—a pause during which you rest and repair yourself for new frays.”

Phœbe was listening fitfully. “They *must* be wrong though, Paul—Oh, don’t you ever feel that you could wipe such people off the face of the earth? But of course you don’t—forgive me, dear.”

Through a haze he saw Phœbe retreating. Mechanically he replied:

“All I feel is that some girl like you in Munich is saying exactly those words to some man like me, provided they have any who are still out of the net.”

“They haven’t—you may depend on it.” She said it in a tone which her nervousness rendered somewhat aggressive, then halted in a panic.

He looked at her steadily. “You were going to add, ‘And we shouldn’t have any, either.’”

Phœbe rose and walked to the window. “Oh, it’s hideous. I just can’t make it out.”

He had an irresistible impulse to test her.

“Would it make matters more comprehensible to you if I were to give in after all?”

She wheeled about. In her glance he read what he had dreaded to find: a hope that he would be unfaithful to the principles which she knew he venerated but which she could only partially understand. He was something Phœbe had “taken up” as she had taken up chemistry and mathematics, and the study was a little beyond her.

He turned away with a heavy sigh. "Unfortunately, I don't think much of deathbed conversions," he said. Her distress now failed to move him; he was too exhausted to feel.

She took his hands imploringly.

"Oh, Paul, I'm stupid. But I do wish to understand for I—" She hesitated again, at his unresponsiveness, and he patted her hands, then replaced them at her sides.

"No not even that," he said, flinching from the truth, yet forcing his way toward it. "You thought you loved me, and in a sort of way you do. But it's not quite *the* way, and it's not your fault. I should never have inflicted myself on you. I ought to know better than to invite people to subscribe to me. I fail them, and they fail me. But one can't always be wise and farsighted. One so dreads to be eternally thrust back on oneself. . . . A vagrant has no right to claim love and understanding; he sacrifices that for his independence. Besides, a vagrant has nothing to offer in exchange—save picturesque tales of his selfish vagrancy!"

As he talked he heard the words falling dead at Phœbe's feet, as all his weighted words must. She could understand him only when his speech soared on wings of passion. Even yet he might sweep her doubts aside in a single gesture, but all passion had subsided. He saw her fingers twisting and intertwining, and looked away.

"In other circumstances," he went on, "we might have found in each other enough love to sustain us. The war has divided the world into camps of thought, with orthodox folk joined together in temporary fraternity in one, and in the other an assortment of outcasts with an assortment of loyalties. You're not in my camp, dear. It wouldn't even be wise that you should be."

Phœbe winced, but the hard cogent tone helped to steady her. "Who *are* your colleagues?" she demanded.

“God only knows. They must exist. I haven’t lost faith in rationality even yet.”

“But how can you *choose* isolation?”

He smiled grimly, remembering for the first time the tidings he had come to impart. “My social isolation became one degree more acute to-day,” he announced, “and not from choice. I’ve been asked to resign from the shipyard.”

Phœbe’s face exhibited consternation. “Oh, but Paul! I thought Mr. Ashmill declared you were indispensable to him!”

“His good repute is even more so. He has political enemies, and couldn’t afford to have them go on badgering him about his able-bodied young secretary. As the little song says, ‘I for one don’t blame him.’ ”

“But how terrible! My dear, what *will* you do?”

The exclamation and the question bored him. “Oh, Phœbe,” he said, and his voice broke, “does it dreadfully matter?”

He left her, unable to promise that he would return. The prospect of further scenes, further misunderstandings, futile tears, was more than he could face. Phœbe had pronounced her doom and his when she reminded him that he had to supply courage for both. He hadn’t enough.

XII

I

ONE afternoon in the summer of 1917 Walter Dreer arrived on leave from Toronto in the uniform of a cadet in the air force. He had transferred from service to service, with the result that he had not yet been sent overseas.

His greeting to Paul was, "Hello, when are *you* going to join up?"

"I hadn't thought of joining up at all."

Walter, who had hitherto reserved taunts for occasions when Paul was not on hand to parry them, felt emboldened by the presence of his father, who walked proudly beside him.

"Content to let somebody else fight for you?" Walter threw out.

"Not at all," Paul replied. "I always fight my own battles."

Walter could make nothing of this. "It don't look like it," he finally commented.

"Looks are deceiving," said Paul, surveying his old chum's uniform. "Take yourself. Anybody would think *you* had been fighting—for me, as you put it." He had a desire to punctuate Walter's fraudulent heroics.

"It's lucky there's nobody else around to hear you talking like that."

"Well, now that you're back, Walter, all Hale's Turning will get a report of my words." It was the only time he had referred to Walter's propensity for gossip.

“By Joe, if I hadn’t known you as a kid——”

“You wouldn’t realize how beautifully consistent my attitude has been throughout,” Paul finished it.

“Beautifully *crazy!*” interposed Mr. Dreer, with a snort.

“As you decide,” replied Paul.

“It’s not a time for fancy phrases,” pronounced Mr. Dreer severely.

“Then why do you publicly indulge in them?” Paul inquired. He alluded to meetings in the town hall and at Bridgetown.

“That’s my affair, sir. I’m too old to carry a gun.”

“Yes, aren’t you glad?”

“Damn you—your insolence has gone beyond the limit.”

Paul’s wrath came to the surface. He had not sought the quarrel. “What do you expect of a crazy man?” he retorted, and strode away, leaving father and son to assure each other of their moral advantage.

He knew he had gone beyond the limit this time—of discretion, if not of insolence. There were bound to be consequences; but he almost welcomed them. Anything would be better than the present negative status. Even the illusion of Phœbe’s support was gone.

The sequel to the passage at arms with Mr. Dreer came a few weeks later in the form of a summons to appear before a special board in Halifax and explain alleged statements of a seditious character. Then only did Paul realize how many enemies he had made. Mr. Dreer, with the aid of his son and the Baptist minister, had compiled the evidence. There were records of conversations with men in the shipyard—some of them fairly accurate, literally, but robbed of the context, lacking the ironical stress and the qualifying clauses that had characterized Paul’s utterances. Not once had he advanced his views without provocation; not once had he

sought to make converts. The charges seemed to him puerile and he listened with an air of aloofness.

It was intimated that "things" would be "made easy" if he were willing to undertake certain missions for which his attainments specially fitted him. He declined the loophole. "It's entirely a matter of principle," he maintained. Hence they did not make it easy for him.

"And serve him right!" said Hale's Turning, with the exception of Miss Todd, Mrs. Kestrell, Mrs. Barker, Becky States, Mr. Silva, old Silas and Phœbe Meddar.

Phœbe, overcome by the shock, wrote a letter in which she diffidently, and between the lines tearfully, attempted to creep back, to reassure him of her continued faith and goodwill and love. On the bottom of the sheet he wrote:

"The faith I'll keep on trust, Phœbe. The goodwill is still more acceptable, for on the cultivation of that article the salvation of the world depends. The love I'm sending back, dear, ever so gently, with your letter. You'll have wiser uses for it."

Of all the messages he received, that from old Dave Ashmill struck him as being the most apt. "You have two big faults, boy," wrote his former employer. "You're too smart and too honest for your own good. Let me know if I can do anything."

Paul smiled cynically. Old Dave's opportunism always prevailed over his generosity. That explained why Andrew Minas had died poor, when he ought to have prospered on just commissions for charters he had obtained for Ashmill. Paul knew that the patriot, Ashmill, would not trouble to put in a word with the authorities for a young man whom the profiteer, Ashmill, slyly admired. Simply because the shrewd profiteer had observed that his secretary had become bored with ship-building—as he became bored with everything in life that failed to add cubits to his spiritual stature. And old Dave, like most of the men Paul had encountered, was

more ready to pay a deposit on a new order than settle for goods already received.

“Let me know if I can do anything for you.” That was what the world all generously said, whenever it was sure that one would be too proud to take it at its word.

2

Imprisoned and abandoned, Paul marvelled that anything so intangible as a point of view could bring one to such a pass—such an *inevitable* point of view, and such a *phantastic* pass! He disbelieved in martyrdom, yet knew that he would have been ready to make any sacrifice, even that of life itself, for his principle. He could only conclude that the issue had been after all a matter of life and death for him—the life or death of his individuality. He was still obsessed by the idea that he had something to express, in the sense that artists and thinkers “express.” Had he yielded to mass reasoning and entered a fight which in no way touched his moral fibre, his message, he felt, would have been irretrievably lost. By sheltering the principles he had long nurtured, he hoped to bring his life to the point of blossoming, if not of fruit-bearing.

As the months crept by, months during which meditation was an antidote to the hideously importunate reality of his surroundings, his past took on new meaning, and the dejection into which he had settled gave place to a sombre ecstasy as, bit by bit, he puzzled out a future of self-realization—made it out tentatively, hopefully, romantically. The watching and recording faculty, the warder of his thoughts and emotions, told him he was going through hell, and an idealizing faculty, their chaplain, persuaded him that this was a necessary stage of his progress, that the fire would strip him of garments he had worn for the sake of convention. With this certitude to support him, the tension relaxed.

Often now, when lost in meditation, he recaptured the experience of "just being." By holding his faculties in poise he could relapse at will into a state of trance through which came a radiant vision. The discordant forces of human nature redistributed themselves, producing a harmony so exquisite and so complex that the mind grew faint in trying to grasp it. The world revealed itself a transcendent instrument on which one's life would be played as a mighty solo, without a false chord.

From one of these trance-like abstractions he emerged to find a keeper staring at him. Paul returned the stare, wonderingly, and the keeper departed. From that moment he was more closely watched. He concluded they suspected him of lunacy.

When the exalted moods passed, he clung to the memory of his visions with the feverish tenacity of a man whose experience has been an alternation of romantic expectations and brusque deceptions. This next adventure, towards which all his instincts, like tendrils, had been reaching forth since the dawn of experience, must not be bungled, lest the future become a descent into nothingness. He sought support in the poetry which had made an impression on his youth, but the odds seemed against success. Poets seldom got farther than passionately envying the happiness of skylarks. The youth whose motto was "Excelsior" mounted high, but in Alpine snows succumbed to his own fanaticism. Paul thought of himself as Wordsworth's youth, "Nature's Priest," lured by the vision of immortality which had attended him as a child. Heaven *had* lain about him in his infancy; even yet he caught glimpses of an eternal effulgence which gave him courage to defy the life of "sense and outward things." But the poet warned him:

"At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

To make his "shadowy recollections" more tangible, he resorted to pen and paper, even though the transcription should be but a poor caricature. Then one day, as he re-read the pages, his heart stopped beating. He had detected an echo of youthfully exuberant letters from Aunt Verona to his mother—letters which had lain undisturbed in old boxes for over forty years. Aunt Verona had seen visions and counted on realizing them. The future had lured her, hinted at benign auspices. But her future had turned out to be nothing but Paul's early present—now his past! Aunt Verona's light had gone out, leaving her in a fog of desolation, disease, delusion, and death. What assurance had he that his version of the truth was more authentic than those of his sweaty, psalm-singing fellow-convicts?

A mortal weariness seized on him, and he tore up his lyrical diary.

3

When the gates swung open he passed through with a mechanical nod of goodwill. He ignored the directions given by the man who closed the gates after him, and walked at haphazard until he came to a familiar grassy slope.

Above him stretched the hill where he had sat and ruminated one autumn afternoon—the afternoon on which he had defied the gym instructor. From the citadel he had gazed towards ships in the roads, free ships that roamed at will in search of exotic havens.

He was sorry for that far-away boy who had longed for freedom, only to learn that it entailed crushing obligations. The boy had shouldered them, earned his title-deeds, and when youth was gone handed the precious legacy to the man. The man in consequence was now free; his claim was beyond a shadow of doubt. And for that very reason the sight of noble ships lying at anchor

gave him, now, no sense of exhilaration. He thought not of their incomparable privilege as roamers; but of the dreary fate which buffeted them from harbour to harbour in a quest that was never fulfilled. Poor ships! Poor boy! Yet he envied, as well as pitied the boy—envied him his blazing faith in the treasures that lay beyond the horizon. Poor man! His faith nowadays, at best, merely glowed; often it lay cold and ash-buried. It might once more burst into flame—a flame that should serve as a beacon. But it would need the most delicate fanning.

His eyes wandered over the soot-besmirched city. How sure it was of itself—like all things ugly.

He took a deep breath, shrugged his shoulders, and walked down the hill, making for the office of his solicitor. Mr. Kingsley started up with an air of surprise and offered him an awkward greeting.

“Well?” he finally inquired.

“I’d like you to arrange for the immediate sale of everything I possess,” announced Paul.

“Everything?”

“Every square inch of land, every stick, every stock—the whole shooting-match.”

“Won’t you explain your idea—I don’t quite see——”

“You needn’t. You’ll receive the usual commission.”

Mr. Kingsley winced, but took down Paul’s instructions.

“You plan to go away again?” he inquired, when the business was settled.

“Yes.”

“I suppose you’ll let us hear from you occasionally.”

“Probably not.”

Mr. Kingsley looked offended, then, with a sympathy which Paul dismissed as belated, left his desk and crossed the room to stand beside his client. “Look here, Minas, you mustn’t take this thing so hard. I knew your father

and mother, and I hate to see you let yourself grow bitter."

"Oh—you think I'm mad, I suppose," Paul said, as though the possibility of the other man's objecting to his scheme had just occurred to him.

"Well, since you mention it, I do."

"Then, don't waste your advice. Madmen must do mad things."

"Madmen——" Mr. Kingsley stopped short.

"You were going to retort that madmen are usually locked up." With a gleam of amusement he watched the elder man's countenance which suggested embarrassment, anxiety and frustrated affection. "But you see," Paul went on relentlessly, "that it doesn't do us a particle of good. We only grow madder. It's much wiser of you all to let us go unmolestedly to the dogs."

"Why 'us all?' You don't suppose I had anything to do with bringing about the wretched trial! On the contrary I did my best to defend you."

"I'm not ungrateful for your aid—even though you did maintain that my statements misrepresented my real sentiments. You didn't realize, perhaps, that you were making me out a liar."

"Oh, look here now, Minas——"

"Well, it doesn't in the least matter. It's over. Get on with the sale. If my property isn't disposed of within a month I'll give it to the poor, like the young man in the Bible." And Paul went out and slammed the door.

A few hours later he drove into Hale's Turning in a hired car. Without useless preliminaries he set to work on the task he had allotted himself. With the aid of the chauffeur, he brought down his trunks and bags from the attic, then went from room to room making a rapid selection of objects to be packed, setting aside others for destruction, and taking an inventory of the remainder for the convenience of his solicitor.

Most of Aunt Verona's possessions he burnt. They were not for the profane. He preserved only her music. Into his bags also went trifling objects which should remind him of boyish faiths and illusions—among them the lacquer box with its dead flowers. Phœbe, after all, had not come to see the bouquet. She must remain in ignorance of that episode, as Leila had remained in ignorance of the "secrets" he had planned to reveal to her. His life was a succession of fanciful projects which never got beyond a dress-rehearsal.

The inventory was completed before dawn, and Paul lay down for the last time in the little room from whose walls Queen Victoria and Sir John Macdonald looked so forbiddingly forth. His life in Hale's Turning, where he had come to anchor, was ended—but what of the friends who remained? He would have preferred not to see them again. Whatever friendliness he had enjoyed had been offered to the image his friends had made of him, an image in their own likeness. His real self they had involuntarily shunned, or sought to edit. True, some, including Phœbe, had overcome the first shock and made timid advances. But he could never forget their shrinking. He could forgive—Lord yes, *had* forgiven freely, just as he hoped to be forgiven for having at times, in the groping past, been a sheep among sheep. The long hours of reflection had at least purged his soul of rancour. But after all he was a new man, and as such must be free of confusing associations. On his new pilgrimage, towards the very heart of life, his spirit's meat, as the poet said, must be freedom, his staff must be wrought of strength—carefully conserved strength—and his cloak woven of thought. If there were to be friends—and he felt he was getting beyond the age for making intimate friendships—they could only be people who would accept him for what he was, not for what circumstances had made him appear. Now

that all veils had been discarded and his essential nature stood revealed, he would never again hide it from the world. Let the world react as it saw fit. Enemies and revilers there might be a-plenty, but he had plumbed the depths of any suffering they could inflict. They had sought to make him like themselves by locking him up, but had merely succeeded in confirming his incompatibility with themselves.

For decency's sake, and in order to reassure those who had been kind to him, he planned, in the morning, to make a round of farewell calls. Phœbe he would leave till the last, for she would be the most difficult—especially if she adopted an absolving attitude now that he had settled his account with society. That would be an intolerable weakness on her part, against which he must guard by an impersonal approach. He could find it in his heart to envy Wilfrid his insipidity. As a child Wilfrid had Gritty Kestrell to protect him. In his maturity, he would have Phœbe. And Wilfrid was of a mental and moral stature that Phœbe could manage, with energy to spare for the "improvement of her mind." One couldn't help feeling a little sarcastic toward Phœbe—in strict privacy. Gritty had said, "At least she's the only girl in that God-forsaken hole with a nickel's worth of brains." That wasn't the final word to be said for Phœbe, but it was wickedly near the mark.

Sleep came at last, while his soul, like a kite, tugged pleasantly at his leaden body. His mind had gone beyond the farewells and he drowsily pictured himself in a train, speeding, speeding, towards infinity. Night drawing in, wheels grinding, the carriage swaying, the world rushing by: the globe, the stars, trees, men. Something infinitely precious, but dead, left behind. Life, a series of partial deaths, or of new creations; merely two ways of stating it. And at the heart of it all was a blessed stability; harmony, forgetfulness, peace.

4

Three days later Paul arrived in New York and put up at the old Brevoort Hotel on the edge of "Greenwich Village." Its suggested bohemianism and the mellow beauty of lower Fifth Avenue and Washington Square, red, blue, white, and gold in the glittering sunshine of autumn, soothed nerves fatigued by the insistent exhibits of a city which struck him as a permanent "world's fair."

He engaged a passage on a ship sailing for Havre the following week, then booked a seat for a performance of *Take it or Leave It*, the revue in which Gritty Kestrell was appearing. Gritty's name stretched across hoardings in red letters and winked at Times Square in electric lights. Her face, with its odd grimaces, its snub nose, blue eyes and hair of counterfeit gold, graced the cover of a smart periodical. She endorsed new beauty creams and published her advice to stage-struck girls. She was proprietress of a dancing establishment frequented by the fashionably fast. Joe Krauss had died and left her a fortune and there were hints that she was on excellent terms with the partner who had stepped into Joe's shoes.

Paul eagerly awaited Gritty's first entrance. There were echoes of a vulgar brawl between father and daughter on a landing, then Gritty appeared, made up as a "slavey," her hair screwed into a knot, her sleeves rolled up, her long, twisted boots toeing in, her apron splashed, her skirt down at the back, bucket and mop in hand, staring aggressively off-stage. She set down the bucket, heaved a sigh, and ran out her tongue at the invisible enemy. Paul chuckled. It was so like the tomboy of twenty years ago.

Then she put her foot in the bucket and came tumbling down the stairs, head over heels, fetching up with a skilfully faked thump and an air of chagrin.

The secret of Gritty's success was patent. On the stage she projected endearingly human qualities, adding a touch of the pert and the incongruous, her whole instinctive object being to *make* people like her. He had noticed that other women in the cast, more beautiful but less successful, walked on assuming that the audience must be overcome by their charm. Gritty took nothing for granted. She "worked" every minute, as he could see from the gestures and tone-shadings with which she drove home her first song. This ditty descanted upon the woes and hardships of an "honest hired girl":

"If you're a char,
 And your pa(r)
 Blows your wages in a bar,
 You better throw yourself into the lake.
 For you can't keep your honour,
 Your virtue is a gonner,
 If your pa(r) bags all your savings
 And you try to live on shavings
 And there's nothing in your stomach but a ache."

It was followed by a dolorous dance in which Gritty made capital of her big boots and the long wet mop. She galumphed about the stage with an infectious sense of rhythm, while the gallery softly whistled the tune, then at the approach of the last bars she neared the wings, always neatly cavorting, and repeated the catch line. The "a' ache"—the elision of the consonant—was the real Gritty, and the audience seemed to know it.

In the interval he sent around his card and received a prompt reply:

"You dear old darling. Talk about bolts from the blue. Come back after the show. Ask for Louis who'll bring you to my dressing-room. You're to have supper with me. Oh Paul three cheers."

For a week Gritty gave him all her available time, which in view of matinées, fittings, and visits to the

cinema studios, was limited. He found himself playing with her as a heavy-hearted man might play with a kitten. They were brother and sister again and took tranquil drives into the country in Gritty's limousine, lunching at remote road-houses in Long Island or beside the Hudson.

The five intervening years had brought rich experience to both. Although Gritty had gone far up the ladder, her success had been purchased at the price of hard work, nervous strain, and fierce intrigue. A new maturity underlay her playfulness. Paul found it strangely easy to talk to her. For all her prattling she was transparently sincere, and protectively affectionate. She knew men intuitively and through long observation. And he was more grateful for her approval of him than he would have been for the approval of a less expert woman, however chaste. Gritty was the only human being with whom he had been able to talk without reserve. She combined two qualities rare in women: frankness and discretion. She said exactly what she meant when her hearer was reliable; and was careful to say nothing that an unreliable hearer might repeat with damaging effect.

The only reproach he made to Gritty was her promiscuity. "Nobody expects you to go straight, Gritty," he said, on the day before he was to sail. They were having tea at her flat in Central Park West. "But do be an artist in your affairs. I hated your association with Krauss, and I don't think much of his successor."

"You're mixing up my affairs with my business, honey. There's a sharp difference."

"Well, don't lose sight of the distinction, then, at any rate."

Gritty was suddenly cast down. "You're so clear-headed," she sighed. "I wisht I could have you handy to scold me often. But you're going away to God knows where. Oh, Paul, there *is* one little streak in me

that's worth all the rest, and you make me remember it. There's something in me that could almost be a nun, if it got the chanst. But you can't give up being a successful artiste to be a bum nun! If I could only be like you and have a thing called a destiny instead of a Broadway career—Gee!"

"You can have a destiny, Gritty. The highest aim anyone can have is to share the destiny of the race. If you go on being generous and playing fair you will be keeping your candle burning and adding to the piteously inadequate enlightenment of this naughty world. The tragedy of it is, there are gigantic waterfalls of intelligence which might be used to generate enlightenment, but the world prefers its dark corners. . . . Oh, Gritty, life is so boundlessly potential. We could be gods and goddesses, if we knew what to do with our energies. Instead of which we snarl and haggle and lie and cheat and show off. We go round in circles instead of going straight forward, and then have the ignorance and cheek to claim intelligence! As an old carpenter on my first ship used to say, 'men are more stoopid as animals.'"

Gritty's eyes dwelt on him trustingly, compassionately. He read some sort of vague inquiry in her glance, and it made him doubt himself.

"One feels lost at times," he said, with bowed shoulders, "and futile—like some dotty grandsire mumbling in a corner."

"Why don't you be a writer?" Gritty asked.

The question startled him. He thought for a moment, then shook his head. "No, I can't do it that way."

"Do what?"

"I mean I can't deliver my message by writing. I shouldn't know how to drive it home with a pen. I've got to do it by impressing people with whom I come in contact."

"Oh, but that's so vague—and inglorious."

“Who’s talking about glory, you poor little footlight moth! . . . Besides it’s not as vague as you think. The greatest messages the world has ever received have been spread by word of mouth.”

Paul’s vision suddenly cleared. “One thing is sure, and that is that I’ll never be good for anything but spreading the ideas that have come to possess me. Like the Ancient Mariner I’m doomed to go wandering forth, stopping ‘one of three’ . . . Do you remember the days, Gritty, when we had to spout that poem?”

“Do I! I was a rotten reciter—and here I am now, reciting every night of my life! Oh, Paul, darling, doesn’t it make you feel chokey to think of those days and that odious little class-room with its smell of wet slate-pencils that squeaked, squeaked, squeaked, and geraniums at the window and coloured water and Miss Hornby’s bottle of cod liver oil?”

“And your pigtails!”

“And gingham pinnies that I always came home torn in. And the spit-balls we used to shoot at each other with a elastic.”

“And Wilfrid Fraser who always put his head under the desk when he blew his nose.”

“And the time John Ashmill held it under when Miss Hornby asked Wilfie a question. . . . And now—whoever would a dreamt all that’s happened! Oh, Paul, it is a dream—no kidding. But I do wisht I could have a aim like you, honest I do!”

“Saves disappointment not to, dear.”

Gritty stroked his hand. “You so often look sad, honey—why?”

“I feel sad—diffusely, almost paternally. I’m sad for the world, rather. As far as I’m concerned nothing matters. I’m too old.”

Gritty gave a ringing laugh. “Baby boy! Why, you’re younger’n me, and I’m only thirty!”

“But I’ve lived harder—mentally. As a boy I was a sort of prodigy. And prodigies have a way of petering out.”

Gritty snuggled closer to him on the settee.

“There are people,” he went on, “whose lives are concentrated in the span of a single generation. Sometimes I think I’m one of them.”

She placed soft white fingers over his mouth. “Hush! Why, in a year or two when you’ve got used to your new ideas you’ll be all over your blues. Won’t you? Say yes.”

A maid entered the room carrying a big pasteboard box.

“Hats! Hats!” squealed Gritty, undoing the cord with eager fingers.

She tried them on and forgot everything but the bright portraits she was making of herself before a mirror. Paul found them pretty, but his mind travelled back to a summer morning when he had seen Gritty trying on a leghorn hat trimmed with heliotrope ribbon, whilst Phœbe Meddar stooped to pick up a bouquet of tea-roses.

He departed with a nameless sense of desolation. Gritty was the only friend left—the last on his list of farewells. And for all her amiability she was scarcely more than a makeshift: a misguided, vicious, pleasant, warm-hearted, promiscuous, vain, tender little makeshift.

“Poor kitten,” he sighed, as he stepped into the street.

PART V.

XIII

I

FOR thirty years the world for Paul had been a bazaar stocked with covetable objects. But by the time he reached Paris the counters had lost their fascination. The youthful Minas had been wont to acquire recklessly, then discard, one by one, articles which proved worthless; the mature Minas took only what he was tolerably sure he needed.

He had reached the point where a man rests on his oars, partly because his youthful vigour has subsided, partly because he finds the elusive reflections in the water more arresting than continual change of solid landscape, partly because he is curious to observe how other oarsmen will pull through stretches that have tested him. In Paris he found no lack of contemporaries at grips with issues which he had already settled for himself. Everywhere he met youth who reminded him of himself a few years back, youths who were peering into odd corners in a restless search for their souls. Many were on false scents; nearly all were doomed to find a soul of smaller dimensions than they had taken for granted; some, soul-searching because it seemed to be the clever thing to do, were doomed to find nothing.

Paul watched this game with a sort of tutelary interest. When he offered corroboration and encouragement, the searcher redounded in tributes to his insight; when he adversely criticized, the searcher cried, "But you don't understand!" In either case, when the egoistic possibil-

ities of the discussion had waned, the searcher turned back to his quest, regardless of the interlude, for, as Paul reflected, it is in the nature of youth that it must make mysteries for itself to solve, no matter how lucid a solution you lay before it.

The situation was tinged with paradox. He, who had held his teachers in low esteem, had arrived at the age of thirty to find himself a teacher. His own long process of self-searching had brought him to the pitiable conclusion that the purpose of his existence was to point out to other men the purpose of theirs! He could artistically think—which was to say philosophize—but he could not *do*. Whilst others performed doughty deeds, he must be content doughtily to theorize. Was that the splendid goal toward which one had so painfully striven? He wondered whether some such let-down were reserved for every man of thirty, or whether the let-down was evidence of his own futility. He classified himself as a creature—like countless other nondescript aliens in Paris—whose body was too heavy for its wings; or rather, a creature all wings and no body, consequently impotent against strong worldly winds.

In any case a failure—except in a limited sense. High time, then, to acknowledge the limitations, and act within one's rôle. He thought of Aunt Verona, his own mentor—Aunt Verona who, like himself, endowed with unusual gifts, had somehow lost heart and sought recourse in teaching, in preparing a prodigy for the destiny she had missed—a destiny which he, in turn, was to miss.

The whole of his property had been realized, and when the final draft had been forwarded he withdrew the money from his bank and deposited it elsewhere, thus removing the last link between himself and the life he had forsworn. He had taken rooms at the top of a bare old house in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, and passed for a student—a classification to which his habit of

bringing home second-hand books lent a colour of veracity.

The first definite indication of his tutelary vocation came to him after a casual encounter with a young poetaster on the *terrasse* of the Café du Panthéon. It was an afternoon of late spring, in the year 1920. Paul had just heard in the Sorbonne a lecture on Will and its Rôle in the Universe, and stopped at the café to sip an *apéritif*. The professor's theory had been incontrovertible. The world *was* what its inhabitants chose to make it. A world peopled by the pure in heart would revolve morally on its axis; the same world would revolve frivolously at the behest of knaves. Paul fatalistically accepted his status as that of a believer in *l'univers moral*, despite appalling evidence to the contrary. And the only honourable course was to live up to the belief—to go on, in the face of unromantic fact, performing romantic deeds. Such a course was impractical, foolhardy, *catastrophant*—to use a word of his own coining—but it might serve to redeem his failures. If only enough men turned angelic, earth would become heaven; and somebody had to make a start.

As he mused, he observed a gaunt young man scribbling at the neighbouring table, in a corner that might once have been occupied by the needy Verlaine. His face was drawn and his grey eyes seemed to envisage defeat. His clothes were threadbare, but he was clean, whereas he obviously belonged in a category of visionaries who, like Verlaine, their prototype, were usually dirty. Paul saw in the youth a promise which was in danger of belying itself, a brittle spirit which life might easily snap. Another example of the wretched species—the creature all wings.

At length the youth set down his pencil and looked away from his bescribbled sheets and empty glass. Paul leaned toward him, addressing him in English.

“Do you mind if I see what you’ve written?”

The young man shrank. “Not at all,” he finally replied, shoving the sheets to the edge of his table.

Paul’s curiosity had been aroused by a blend of intensity and fastidiousness that reminded him of himself in days gone by. As he read, this impression was confirmed, for the poem evoked one of his most familiar moods:

“Golden wine before me, gold-green trees,
An orchestra of voices,
Siphons,
Chaos merging into yellow warmth,
Satiety.

A yearning to lament,
Exquisite,
Gains me.
Yet what may I lament save surfeit?
Surfeit not of sense,
But of a self unshared,
Unsharable.

That leaf among its mates!
Ephemeral?
Less so than I, who, brushing every land,
Am at the bidding of capricious winds
Which *it* knows to resist
Until due Autumn claims it.

I, human leaf,
Have learned
That leaves once fallen
Never regain their branch;
And, till a new wind stirs
Rest here,
Peering through golden bubbles,
Summer trees,
Into a radiant vault

Where, one by one, pale monitors emerge
And say:
'Here is the bourne you seek,
The object of your nameless pilgrimage.' "

The poet's thoughts proceeded far afield, lured by a romantic gleam. Paul read to the end and handed back the sheets.

"You've always expected a good deal from life, haven't you?" he finally commented.

The youth reflected. "I dare say. But life led me on to expect a good deal. If you're born with an imagination, life puts notions into your head."

"But sooner or later people with imaginations must learn to prepare themselves for the meagreness of what life can give. They can't, of course, cease expecting, but they can, while greatly expecting, reconcile themselves to the inevitable little."

The poet shrugged impatiently. "I despise compromise. For me it's everything or nothing."

"What will you do if it's nothing?"

There was no reply.

Paul smoked in silence. Gradually the youth's eyes came round to him again, filled with a new-born doubt. The impatience was gone. "Would you say," he began, "after reading these silly verses, that with me it's likely to end in—nothing? Was that what you meant?"

Paul weighed it. "No. I merely wished to startle you into the thought that some sort of compromise may be inevitable. 'All or nothing' is a brave banner to rally one's forces under—but few men can keep it aloft."

"Life's damnably hard," said the poet, and the remark was obviously more than a platitude.

"Of course it is. That's why I suggested the wisdom of considering its niggardly terms. In that way one to a certain extent disarms life. By yielding on the score

of sordid fact, one conserves energy for the promulgation of one's private version of the truth."

"But that's cheating!"

"If you leave all the cheating to fate, what ghost of a chance have you to survive!"

"There are destinies more glorious than mere survival!"

Paul smiled sympathetically. "I used to think so—passionately. Now I honestly wonder."

"Oh well, just because you've lost faith is no reason for expecting me to!"

"Certainly not." This was sincere. "If you can win the battle I've lost, so much the better. As it is, I'm cheering for you—albeit half sceptically."

The youth for the first time was lifted from his egoistic morass. "I say!" he exclaimed. "I believe your sceptical warnings are worth more than some men's headlong partisanship. You really have been through the mill, I dare say."

"I have, and it grinds, exceeding small. That's why I wish to help you."

The poet had a twinge of conscience. "Oh, let's forget me. I was spoiled as a child."

"Then, no wonder you expect so much!"

"I do expect a lot, God help me!"

"Even from God!" Paul laughed.

"Rather *only* from God. Mortals can't do much for you, except in the way of food and clothing."

"That's something."

"You mean it's more than I'm disposed to acknowledge?"

"Yes."

Paul watched the sensitive mouth harden in scorn for a poverty which was imminent and abject.

"What are your plans?" he asked after some desultory talk.

"I don't know. Paris has lost its glamour. One can't help feeling that somewhere one will find one's level. I've thought of Austria. The Philistines at home have said so much against our former enemies that one feels they must harbour rare virtues, as does everything the Philistines decry! Do you know Vienna?"

"I spent two years there—before the war."

"Tell me about it."

"I daren't, for I was young. Consequently I look back at my sojourn through a treacherously romantic haze. You might do worse than go there, if only for the sake of storing up impressions upon which you, too, can look back sentimentally in days to come. For half the joy of life consists in passionate recollection."

Paul paused a moment, then said:

"Do let me send you to Vienna. I can supply you with enough to keep you going for a year or two."

Instinctively the youth drew back. "It's very kind of you, but of course it's out of the question."

Paul was impatient. "I gave you credit for more consistency," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"My offer in no way reaches your pride—or, if it does, then your pride is an impertinent intruder upon your idealism. You profess to be an 'all or nothing' idealist, yet you hold back because of a scruple bred in a sphere of society where ideals are ignored, like the drains."

The young man was impressed, and visibly tempted. "But I can make no return," he temporized.

"I'm not offering gifts to you, you fool," retorted Paul. "I'm subventioning your soul. Your soul is only a facet of my own, of the universal soul. If you starve, the cause of enlightenment is retarded by so much—that is my misfortune as well as yours"

"It sounds cogent—but I should feel that I had taken a selfish advantage of your generosity."

"Isn't that my lookout? If I have faith in you, you can't have less. Besides, are you so sure I'm not at heart an 'all or nothing' man? What if my idealism can only be expressed in such ways as the material furtherance of other men's idealistic efforts—will you obstruct it?"

There was a pregnant pause. "Do you realize what a thankless mission you're setting yourself?" asked the poet.

"Perhaps some day you'll ask yourself the same question."

The youth sighed. "I've even done so already."

"*Eh bien, trève d'explications!* If you'll be here at this hour to-morrow I'll have the money for you."

Two days later Paul made the following entry in a fitful diary he had begun to keep:

"Saw George Paddon, the poet, off to Vienna. His haggardness gone, his eyes lit up with a prodigious expectancy, poor devil! But at least he won't expect to find gold cobblestones there, as I did. Strange that, of all the questions he might with profit have asked, he asked none; and strange that he, like most others, should choose the one question I will never answer: 'What is your nationality?'"

2

For the next three years the diary continued at irregular intervals to reflect Paul's life. No mention was made of his routines, his readings and his return to a half intensive, half dilettantish preoccupation with music, nor of his donations to the needy students, painters, musicians, and writers who kept crossing his path. The entries mirrored picturesque elements in his surround-

ings which stung him into a philosophic reaction. The charities, for the most part quixotic, went on as long as his small fortune lasted.

Following are extracts from significant entries :

“Drawing-room in Passy, Nov. 5, 1920. Luigi Pesaro says he lives for and by virtue of music, yet his rose-festooned piano, under my fingers, is out of tune, and neither he nor his mother nor the Principessa seems aware of it. Moreover, he has just sung a Scarlatti ditty and sentimentalized it out of all conscience. Then how account for that opera score there, inscribed by the composer himself, a ‘cordial souvenir to a magnificent artist?’ Was Massenet sub-consciously thinking of the artist’s eyes! And are all composers as fallible as Massenet? Did a certain ‘vieux musicien’ sub-consciously think of Aunt Verona’s eyes when he waxed eloquent about her performances? As one grows older one grows into the habit of believing by contraries. In a way that’s novel and refreshing; gives one a sense of living one’s past backwards.”

“Night café, rue St. Marc, 4 a.m., December 3, 1920.

“Last night Suzy showed me two snapshots of her little boy in the country. She swore her only reason for being in such company in such a place at such an hour was the necessity of providing an education and prospects for her baby. She wept and leaned her blond head on the beer-stained table and finally tucked the photographs into her powder-dusted bag among notes from a legion of lovers. I half believed her, ‘lent’ her fifty francs again, for luck, and helped her on with her satin cloak when the American lieutenant invited himself to her apartment. She danced her way out, wreathed in smiles.

“To-night, or rather this morning, a chauffeur and a market porter went home with Suzy, and the *patronne*

says Suzy will give them somewhat more than the proceeds of the American's liberality, despite her overdue rent. In the light of that fact, what becomes of Suzy's emotion apropos of the snapshots? More to the point, what becomes of the education and prospects of the little boy in the country? Still more to the point, when shall I learn to distribute my fifty-franc notes to good purpose?"

"Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, May 20, 1921.

"Last night, wandering far afield, I found myself in a deserted street on Montmartre. Abruptly, out of the buried past, came the palpable forms of Lord Henry Shroton and his lady. With them a sister of Freddy, Elsie Shroton, exceedingly pretty. If Gritty had only known, that last night, that Freddy would be shot down before the year was out!

"We proceeded to an expensive restaurant for dinner. Through mazes of comfortable talk, I heard scraps of fact concerning motor routes in sundry corners of Europe, gossip about old acquaintances. How lucky, observed Lady H., tentatively, that I hadn't been killed in the war! Ominous silence. Then we went to a haunt where the niece's desire to be shocked could be decently gratified. She sipped a liqueur on my recommendation, with sidelong violet glances from under a stretched-silk hat brim, and poor Cora watched me, her drooping, cynical lips seeming to say, 'Is *that* then, your *type*?"

"On leaving them I strolled away to a dingy studio in an alley on the side of the Butte and sought out Karl Zurschmiede, the little Swiss who paints. With him was an anarchistic Italian-American who has roamed the world on 'freight cars' and cattle boats and who has visions of becoming a second Jack London. At present he shines shoes on a boulevard and secretly hopes somebody will write a story about it for the supplement of a

New York Sunday newspaper! So much for the quality of his soul. He made vindictive accusations against the bourgeoisie which grated on my nerves. Middleclass people grate on my nerves equally when they make vindictive remarks about Labour. He gives me the impression of having deliberately chosen to pass his life shining shoes, riding under railway waggons, sleeping in the open, and snarling at the bourgeoisie for keeping him starved and consumptive. I helped him, but felt that his object in life was to arouse sympathy simply that he might have a theatrical occasion to say, 'Damn you and your pity!' And when he departed, tucking his complaints into his cud, the little painter sidled out of his constraint and showed me a series of sketches which proclaimed a painful struggle towards an individuality of expression, which he is scarcely likely to achieve.

"We chatted in a dim candlelight, surrounded by rags and tags, dusty windows, a dilapidated bed and wet canvases, including an agonizing Christ flanked by a Barrabas who suggested a boozing taxicab driver.

"Flavouring it all was Karl's thickish, German-Swiss French, his shiny, round, plain features, his gentle eyes, his simple, warm, considerate sincerity. Not once did he complain of his penury, his chagrins, his amorous betrayals, nor boast of his gift—he merely stated them all, laying his emotions one by one on the table in a hope that I, practised in speech, would build them into an edifice for him; and I did, like a house of blocks for a child. Then he guided me down the steps, through the alley, and I particularly remember the warm, dry, compact stubbornness of his hand, as we parted, the determination in the line of his jaw. The greenish light from a street lamp over his shoulder made a circle around his dimple, and he anxiously told me what to do for my cough. There was a daub of chrome yellow on his nose and he wore no collar.

"I walked home, diametrically across Paris, still keyed up as an effect of the brightness and friendliness of the Shrotons, but mellowed by having acted as Father Confessor in a dingy studio; and I pondered many things.

"Earlier in the evening I had stopped at the Rotonde to drink coffee, and repelled the overtures of a Swedish cinema actress trying to ape the make-up and manner of French tarts—why, God knows! And on my long journey home I had stopped in the Rue St. Marc to have an omelet and a cup of coffee beside a mixed group of thieves, gaming crooks, journalists, public ladies, including Suzy, and other *noctambules*, where the *patronne* gives me credit and relates the *peripéties* with which *patronnes* of blackguardly resorts have to contend.

"The point, is, I don't know to which category I, by nature, belong: to the facetious, aristocratic and opulent, or the starkly, grimly, obstacle-ridden idealistic. I like good cheer at a scintillating table surrounded by the socially and sartorially impeccable, the playfully-minded leisure class—I shouldn't, but I do. Their point of view is unaccountably familiar and natural to me. I disapprove of the Bolshevist fellow's shallowness. I disapprove even of Karl Zurschmiede's griminess, of his cluttered floor, of his uncomplaining acceptance of squalor. Yet I instantly respond, for, as he would modestly say of a well-drawn sketch, '*Il y a du caractère dedans*,' and I know I would forego many a good dinner, many a reunion with old acquaintances who show me off at my most amiable, in the interest of the principle that makes the young Swiss, for instance, struggle on in the hope of being able one day to paint a Christ that won't look like half-melted putty."

"Night café, rue St. Marc, 4 a.m., July 8, 1922.

"You remember that woman who was sitting in your

corner here yesterday morning?' asks the *patronne*, and I have to think back to the dawn before.

" 'She was short, thick, black, with wildly disordered hair, rouge-daubed cheeks, a dirty blouse, stubby fingers, magnificent teeth. She was drinking little glasses of rum, and reminded one of a gay, hearty murderess. She was thirty-seven and had just been beaten by a boy of eighteen whom she seduced five years ago. She showed me the bruises and told me how brutal he was—and laughed, a wickedly infectious laugh. She said life was a long series of deceptions. Her young lover forced her to give him money, and spent it on others, and yet she couldn't do without him; and she laughed, and I laughed. She said at that rate her lover would end by stabbing her, or she would stab him, and we laughed and laughed, until the tears came.'

" 'Yes,' I replied, 'I remember her.'

" '*Ben, mon petit*, she's desperately in love with you. She came back here last night with diamonds in her ears, to find you. She says she can't do without you. She showed me a roll of hundred-franc notes with which she proposes to tempt you. She was in a terrible state.'

" 'Did she laugh when she confessed herself?'

" 'Laugh! She was filled with nine thousand green devils, and each one was shrieking with laughter.' "

"Night café, rue St. Marc, February 1, 1923.

"After an absence of months I stopped in to listen to the *patronne's* latest *peripéties*. On my last visit Suzy, in the name of sweet respectability, 'borrowed' twenty francs. She told me she was going to Rouen to attend the marriage of her young sister and was 'making economies' in order to put up a good front before the family.

"Heavens knows what Suzy has done in the meantime, but the *patronne* assures me that the agents broke

into her flat and caught her red-handed. As a result Suzy's curls are drooping in the prison of Saint-Lazare, and the family at Rouen will have one more mysterious silence to add to the long list of gaps in their general information about Suzy.

"Her little dog has been taken in charge by her friend Berthe, who once pulled out half Suzy's back hair in this very room. He seems disconsolate, as though he knew Suzy were languishing. It reminds me of a ditty which Luigi Pessaro used to sing :

'Son chien sur la fougère,
Assis nonchalamment,
Du mieux qu'il pouvait faire
Disait, le regardant :
L'amour me fait languir,
Lon la !
L'amour me fait,
Lon la,
Me fait mourir.' "

"Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, September 5, 1923.

"Across the court there lives a girl whose hair is the colour of new copper wire. Sometimes she hangs her gloves at the window to dry in the sun. Sometimes she sits there polishing her nails. Every day she sketches at a life class in the Rue de la Grande Chaumière around the corner. When we meet in the court, or on the *terrasse* of the Rotonde, she nods without smiling. I love her. Her name is Germaine. Her *ami* is a medical student who wears loose collars and baggy trousers. Late at night, when the concierge's gate clicks open in response to Germaine's knock, her friend crawls through beside her on all fours, so the concierge won't see him through the window. Germaine is more careful of her reputation than most girls who 'go in for' art.

"Her sketches are rather less than mediocre, and she

must know it. Why will women waste time in search of a soul they don't possess, when all they need do, to become incandescent, is to hold themselves before the light of a man's soul—the right man! At her best a woman is a vacuum tube reflecting in rays of dazzling violet, the spiritual current passed through her; at her worst she's a chameleon; when she tries to be the spiritual currents, herself, or the dye-stuffs, she's either a mannish woman, or just a fraud. Good women there are—the world abounds in them—but they smother you. Conscienceless women are fascinating, and if you're not wary you become addicted to them. The others simply pass by in indifferent clothes, indifferently made up.

“The Germaine who has imbibed enough feministic theories to be useless to herself and the world goes daily to the sketch class. The girl who sits polishing her nails in the sun is the real Germaine. I can't be bothered with the former, but I catch myself peeking through my window rather too often for a glimpse of the latter.”

“Rue N. D. des C., November 28, 1923.

“It has been a day of little running waves of imaginative pleasure checked and drawn back into the ocean of fact by an undertow of fear. Illness has something to do with the palpitation—but not everything.

“I'm on a threshold and dare not cross it, lest the abode prove dark, cold and bare in contradiction to its alluring exterior. I'm grateful to be able to forestall desolation by stating it in this way. Many people haven't the anæsthetic of words for their aches. While reason points out the circumstances conspiring against an enduring friendship with the woman who obsesses my vision, my emotions are flowing towards it in a cascade, and one might as well try to cure a drunkard as try to cure me of emotional excess. It's useless to offer me the substitute *tisane* of studio gregariousness and hail-

fellowship for the potent distillation of passionate companionship, flavoured with loyalty. That intensifies life, brings oblivion of minor cares, creates an illusion of energy and health. Yet it belongs to a category of things I've forsworn. The old Adam dies hard. And Eve, this time, ascended my rickety stairs, not with an apple, but with a packet of thermogene!

"What deft fingers, what a way of tucking in blankets that always slide off in the middle watches, what a voice to let oneself sink into—a voice which laves feverish thoughts like a cool river. Hair of glowing copper silhouetted against my brown walls! Some suggestion of jade—the eyes. Translucent jade—a risky amulet.

"Like the drunkard I'm sorry for myself in a maudlin way, but don't wish to be cured. I want earthly love once more, only once. I want it neat. Yet with the glass before me, inviting, I'm afraid. Courage, I know only too well, will come with the first sip, the treacherous courage that bears you on the crest of warm waves, mounting, roaring, rolling with an irresistible momentum, the courage that abandons you at the impact, leaving you numb and weak for the arduous recovery."

"Rue N. D. des C., January 19, 1924.

"A convalescent torpor, grey clouds and wet pavements, an unheated hovel and a cough, growing penury—my own fault, but no matter—and the thought of having to commence some routine of daily-breadwinning. I feel as though my soul, as well as my body, had had an attack of double pneumonia.

"I can fight any number of odds and win, if the odds will do me the favour of being above-board and aggressive. But if they are insidious and passive, if they are merely sandbags, mines, and entanglements, I have no resource but to lay down my firearms and ardently envisage the state of affairs I would substitute.

“Germaine desires to see Italy and Greece. She has saved my worthless life. The return is small enough. We may manage it on my balance at the bank. If we can't—well, one might as well try conclusions with the gods in Athens as in Paris.”

“Lake Lemman, February 2, 1924.

“A few months ago I was telling the *patronne* of the blackguardly café in the Rue St. Marc that I longed to escape the blights of a northern winter. When I coughed she recommended her most expensive liqueur! A few weeks ago I was tossing and turning in delirium in the ugliest and coldest little room in Paris. To-day I am sitting on the deck of a white steamer on a blue lake, gazing at sun-gilded, snowy mountaintops, breathing air which stings like rum. Germaine is throwing cakes to the birds and watching them swoop into the icy water.

“A few miles away is Clarens, the enchanted bosquet of Rousseau's Julie and St. Preux. Byron and Shelley once came to visit it. Poor silly pilgrims.”

“Hotel Porta Rossa, Florence, February 18, 1924.

“For her the picturesque, the romantic, the idealistic are elements with which life is garnished. For me they are the dish, and the garnishing is what is commonly known as fact. ‘I'm so glad it's *you* who are taking me on this trip,’ she says. Which merely means that the excitement of travel is for her the present dish, and my society the garnishing. Somehow I was unable to tell her that her society is the present dish for me, that Italy and Greece and a whole geography-full of lands to be traversed are merely the garnishing, and even over-seasoned for my present strength; for she should know it.

“This morning, while Germaine stayed in to polish her nails, I rode in a dusty tram-car to the summit of Fiesole. There I saw pointed hills ringed with gardens and stroked with cypresses, and a Roman theatre whose ruined walls were bescribbled with communist slogans. Roses and oranges tranquilly flourished near, as they flourished when the walls were built.

“I also saw a cab-horse whose tail had grown threadbare through long service in swishing off flies, while bracing himself for the ascents of Vallombrosa. His master had tied on a new tail with red ribbon, but it hung motionless from a weary stump. For Dobbin had come to the dispirited conclusion that fine tails do not make fine horses. I have a presentiment that he will lie down on a steep hill and die before the summer flies arrive. Then that luxuriant false tail will be untied and combed and reutilized, and Dobbin will be cast into a pit and covered with earth. *‘Vanitas vanitatum serait bien le fond de tout!’*

“We’ve been looking at lovely, long, bent-necked Botticelli virgins, and to-morrow we pack our bags again. Whither is it leading? I’ve gone far enough on the path of self-realization to know that the life of a man bent on that supreme adventure is like a cake, with highly-flavoured little accidents for raisins, and soft, leavened loneliness for dough. It’s baked in an oven of intense meditation, and some one, presumably, will eat of it. Will anyone smack his lips in the eating of my cake? I fear it will be done to a cinder.”

“Hotel Helvétia, Rome, February 27, 1924.

“Cold airs are creeping in under the doors of the abode. And just what can be the status of this man who has turned up again—the man with whom she danced in the *Kursaal* at Geneva? Is he garnishing or dish? A little ‘high’ I should imagine, whichever.”

“Pensione Grimaldi, Capri, April 18, 1924. Five weeks in bed. By this time Germaine and her captivating (literally enough) dancing man must be well on the way to India. After all, she wished to see strange lands! One can almost be thankful she ran away when she did, for if she had seen the present collapse she might have remained out of pity—which would have been intolerable. As it is, she has even a sense of moral advantage—at a stretch of imagination which she is equal to. The fact that I failed to keep pace with her up that beastly hill—the mountain of Tiberius—will remain for her an evidence of sulkiness on my part. For all her former care of me, she had forgotten the doctor’s warnings. If one were cynical one would wonder whether she ever listened to them.

“My only quarrel with Germaine is that she didn’t pay me the compliment of being honest—I think that’s the only quarrel I have with anybody. But the boat was ready to leave for Naples and, even if she had had a vision of me prostrate on a deserted mountain path, there was no denying the fact that our funds were running low. The other man had to catch his steamer to Port Said. Opportunity knocks only once. Germaine answered. *Grand bien lui fasse!* At least she’s not spoiling perfectly good canvas!

“I’ve been less clever than Germaine. I’ve sent word out to Opportunity, in the phrase that Aunt Verona taught me: ‘He’s not at home.’ That, she said, was one of the few fibs in the world that might be told, a mere *façon de parler*. A grim *façon*, on the whole—sinister and symbolic. Opportunity doesn’t call nowadays; knows it’s useless; and I’ve only to crawl back to Paris. It’s just possible that one day even Germaine, if she makes a good thing out of life, will look back and say, ‘He wasn’t a bad sort; he once gave me a leg-up.’ But, if

she plays her cards wrong, she'll say, 'It all started with *him*; if I'd only stuck at my sketching!'

"One's life is at best a melody soaring above the dissonances of life, but even the worst solo has some coherence, a beginning and a logical end. It doesn't just trail off—*surely*."

XIV

I

By easy stages Paul made his way northward through Italy, putting up at the cheapest *pensions*, resting in villages innocent of tourists, following in the wake of spring, overtaken by summer. The illness which had struck him down proved stubborn, and there were intervals when he was too weak to pursue his wanderings, when he could do little more than lie exposed to the sun, frightening away with a stick the lizards that scrambled up gorse-covered banks and darted between the hot flat rocks.

His objective was Paris. The thought of its neurotic atmosphere daunted him. Yet he was drawn back. He could only explain the urge on the ground that he had failed to fulfil there some mission which he had been predestined to fulfil, though in his present state the idea of hoping to fulfil any mission seemed the wildest mockery.

His past was a series of abdications. As a child he had been impelled forward by the vision of fulfilling a musical destiny he had, as it were, inherited from Aunt Verona; but his inability to do this had become patent in Vienna, the scene of her moral defeat. As a young man he had been lured on by the wonder and splendour of spiritual initiation; but the hard kernel of his ego had remained opaque when subjected to the rays, except for a few blessed moments. In the manner of a resigned

loser, he had indulged a last hope, the hope of squandering his unproductive experience on others, and thus sow, as Aunt Verona had done in his case, seeds of truth in soil which seemed propitious; but even in this rôle he could credit himself with only the most dubious success. And, with such aims, to have blundered into the bog of passion for a woman with eyes like risky amulets! Verily he was a prophet *à la manque*.

Despite which the old injunction still haunted him: Have faith in yourself, and nothing on earth can prevail against you. Only now, after many years of obedience to it, did he realize the sinister corollary: "If you have faith to the *n*th degree in yourself, the universe will virtually consist of yourself, consequently, however badly fate may serve you, you'll be able to say that nothing is prevailing against you, since, naturally, you can't prevail against yourself." Therefore, in a sense the undeniably true formula was a snare and a delusion, but even if he had been duped by it, he was past caring. In rebellious moments he could almost find it in his heart to wish that Aunt Verona had never existed. She was the only idol that had remained intact. Were she to fail him, life would indeed have been a wilderness.

Of all his misadventures, the one for which he found it least easy to excuse himself was his addiction to Germaine. He had had several months in which to review the affair, and marvelled that he could so completely have hoodwinked himself. By some freak of womanliness she had taken it upon herself to nurse him, and under a spell he had lavished on her the pent-up emotions of a lifetime devoid until then of overmastering passion. His amours had been confined to the comparatively large class of women who make the mistake of assuming that they are indispensable to the men they covet. Germaine, if vastly inferior to these women in worth, was more crafty than they. "Any woman could do as much as I have

done, and more," expressed her attitude, and as it was the plain, hard truth, men, as they must, misinterpreted it as the rare flower of womanly modesty.

"It's a waste of time for you to fall in love with me; besides Raoul, although he is a pig, needs me, and you don't; for you're clever and I'm not."

That is what she said to him, and had doubtless re-echoed to the third man. In consequence she had inflamed him, whose nature it was to crave and magnify what seemed beyond his reach. He had not stopped to ask why she had devoted herself to him. It had been sufficient that she had done so. Now, as he looked back, he gave a new importance to the fact that she had regarded him—whatever other feelings she may have entertained for him—as a man who could feed and clothe her for the time being. Then, as he had made his slow recovery she had talked of her frustrated longings for an education, her desire to see the world—and he had taken her troubles *au grand tragique*. What a situation for a man who had presumed to lead youth in the way it should go, who had so confidently pointed out pitfalls to others! Ah yes, but in their cases he was not blinded by his own febrile passion. The most wise and sober of men were not proof against madness where their own affairs were concerned.

It was over now, and he would never feel again—in that particular way. It was a relief to know it. Germaine now stood merely for the memory of a bad investment—the worst of many doubtful ones. Some might yet show a dividend. The young poet, George Paddon, for example, might end by upholding the torch toward which he, Paul Minas, a sort of philanthropic foolish virgin, had contributed a little oil. Paddon, according to a letter now several months old, seemed to have found his level among a group of budding philosophers and poets—neo-somethingists.

By the time Paul had made his way as far north as Siena, his funds were at a point which made imperative the most rigid economy. Having no head for figures he could not account for the fact that he had, in less than five years, disposed of a sum that should, under wise manipulation, have provided him with an income for life. For life! He smiled at the phrase. What with incessant coughing, perspiring through the night, waking with shiny eyes, and funking every steep hill—the handful of francs still in one's possession might last a "lifetime."

He thought of the young sailor who had hoarded his savings, year in and year out, for the sake of a holiday in Germany. Paradoxically, in those days he had not known the value of money. Now he knew. Money existed for the purchasing of one's ideals—whether the ideals consisted in fine raiment or the subsidizing of needy visionaries. Paul had had money to spend, and spent it. Not a sou had he begrudged. Not a purchase did he regret. Not even Germaine, for she had taught him something, if only the extent of his own fatuity.

He arrived in Paris on a rainy day of September, 1924. He had spent a sleepless night on the wooden bench of a third-class compartment, and caught a fresh chill from the bad air and the draughts. By the time he had collected his scanty possessions from the *entrepôt* and moved into a fifth-floor lodging in a dingy street behind the Gare Montparnasse, he was in the grip of an illness which he knew to be dangerous. Of all his former acquaintances there was no one he cared to send for, no one he could trust to do the right things, without asking questions or offering advice. He craved companionship, yet he was relieved to think that no one could find him in this retreat. For two weeks he lay in bed obliged to submit to the attention of a fumbling old physician whom

the concierge had sent up, and retarding his recovery by worrying as to how he was going to pay the bills.

His first venture out of doors was an excursion to the stalls along the quays, where he sold an armful of his best books for a tenth of their value.

Once he thought of looking up friends to whom he had made advances in the past, on the off-chance that their fortunes, unlike his own, had taken a turn for the better. But the suggestion was vetoed by the very pride for which he had righteously scolded so many others, when they had shown a reluctance to accept aid at his hands. After all, he had invested in their talent, and he had no talents of his own deserving subvention. Besides, the men he had helped—at least in the best cases—had not actually asked; they had simply accepted what he had guessed they needed. Would anyone guess he needed help? Perhaps, but he was under no illusion as to the amount of help likely to be voluntarily offered. *Tant pis*. He had known that a day of reckoning must come.

At the night café in the Rue St. Marc he found a disconcerting welcome. The *patronne*, who had always regarded him as her most distinguished client, received him with open arms, but only after she had stepped back with an expression of consternation on her face and a fervently uttered, "*Grand Dieu du Ciel*." For a moment Paul was unnerved. He had not realized that his appearance had altered to such an extent.

For the next fifteen minutes he was engaged in answering Madame's questions. Then she went to the kitchen herself to prepare food for him. The night was not far advanced, and the regular gathering of composers, van-drivers, thieves and fly-by-nights had not arrived. Paul had hoped to see Suzy, whose favours he had declined, but who was indebted to him for many a loan. Suzy, for all her depravity, would heartily welcome an opportunity to do him a good turn, if she

was in luck. When he had finished his meal he mentioned her name to the *patronne*, who treated her own sex with uniform contempt.

"Oh, Suzy never comes here now. She's living up in Montmartre somewhere. She owes me thirty francs—*sale gribiche qu'elle est!* They're all alike, *ces filles*. . . . But your great *amoureuse* still comes."

"Who is that?"

Madame reminded him of the murderous, mirthful hag who had been prepared to bid for him with rolls of hundred-franc notes.

"She always asks about you."

Paul shuddered. To-night the thought of his admirer was not even funny. He turned up his collar, and rose from the bench.

"*Ça ne fait rien, Madame, si je vous paie la prochaine fois?*"

"*Mais quand vous voudrez, mon petit, quand vous voudrez. Ici vous êtes toujours chez vous. Vous le savez bien!*"

He thanked her and shook hands, in accordance with the etiquette of the establishment. The dirty floor and the stale smells of tobacco and beer nauseated him. Madame had just served to an unsuspecting customer a steak of horse-flesh. In the fat surrounding his own potatoes, Paul had been obliged to remove the corpse of a fly. He hurried away.

"Here, you can always consider yourself at home," she had said. Home!

2

There was only one direction in which Paul could turn for an immediate livelihood. Through the centre of all the shifting emotions of life, music had run as a dull gold thread. He would have preferred not to degrade it to the status of mere breadwinner, but there was

no alternative. He thought of becoming a professional accompanist, as he had done in Vienna, and with this idea in mind sought out an acquaintance of four years back, Luigi Pessaro, a man of ample means who had taken up singing as a hobby and whose art was reserved for *salons*.

Pessaro received him with the dismayed countenance that Paul had grown to expect. For once, however, his altered appearance stood him in good stead. The singer, shocked into action, took him to Monsieur Sariac, a teacher at the Conservatoire.

Monsieur Sariac heard Paul play with evident interest. "With your temperament," he finally commented, "you strike me as a virtuoso run to seed. You've missed your calling. You have more to say than the average soloist for whom it will be your duty to efface yourself."

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "There comes a time," he replied, "when one has no desire so strong as to efface oneself. I am seeking a livelihood, not a career."

Monsieur Sariac was unable to offer him employment, but promised to recommend him in various quarters. Then, as Paul was on the point of leaving, an idea struck the elder man.

"Do you by any chance play the organ?"

"Yes."

"Then I may possibly be able to help you. It's a very unusual post."

Paul sat down again. It was a question of going three or four times a week to play for a harmlessly deranged old gentleman—an aristocrat and an exile—who lived, closely guarded, in a house off the Boulevard St. Germain. When Paul had assured M. Sariac that he was not deterred by the singularity of the situation, the teacher gave further details, binding his listener to respect the confidence.

"The old man lives under the delusion that a woman

long dead is at his side—a girl with whom he was violently in love, but who vanished on the day he killed his wife.”

M. Sariac paused to watch the effect of his words, then reassured, went on. “The crime was committed in an access of insanity brought on by the hopelessness of the love affair. M. de Reisenach, as he is called, fled to Paris, but was overtaken by couriers, who found him raving. To avoid a scandal it was given out that he was dead and, with the connivance of the authorities here, it was arranged that he should be installed in a private house. The house is, of course, nothing more than a private asylum, and for many years its inmate has persuaded himself that he is living in clandestine happiness with the woman he loved. Naturally he sees almost nobody from the outside world, and whoever penetrates into the house is obliged to humour him in a dozen subtle ways. . . . You see the difficulties of the post?”

Paul was fascinated by them. “What makes you think I might qualify?”

“*Ah ça!* How does one know such things? There’s a quiet intensity in your manner that makes me feel you might appeal to the old man—if you care to undertake the task. Of course he may turn you down at sight. There’s no accounting for his judgment.”

“Has he nobody to play for him?”

M. Sariac’s face became grave. “For the last twenty years my wife went regularly to play for him—my wife died only last week.”

Paul filled the hiatus with an expression of sympathy, and M. Sariac descanted upon the qualities of the unfortunate lady.

“If you are interested,” he finally said, “I’ll take you to M. de Reisenach’s secretary.”

Paul felt that the offer lay peculiarly in his province.

“There is a further warning,” concluded the teacher.

"Like most deranged men, M. de Reisenach has periods when he believes himself watched by spies. You will have to exercise great tact."

"And the remuneration?"

"It is modest, but if you succeed in pleasing the old gentleman they will be liberal. When my wife died I received a charming letter and a cheque for twenty-five thousand francs."

Two days later, on a crisp afternoon of November, Paul was ushered into an enormous *salon*. A tall, white-haired man of seventy, dressed in correct morning clothes, turned at his approach. Paul found a pair of large blue eyes searching him. Lips half defiant, half appealing, pronounced a courteous greeting in French which betrayed a trace of accent.

Then, turning to an empty arm-chair which was drawn close to the fire, M. de Reisenach said in tones at once ceremonious and affectionate:

"My dear, let me present to you Monsieur Minas, a friend of our good Sariac. He has come to play." Then with a quick motion, M. de Reisenach turned and pierced Paul with a suspicious glance.

But Paul had been rehearsed, and was bowing gravely to the imaginary occupant of the chair.

The old man's face relaxed in a smile. "My wife adores music," he explained. "Though I, too, am fond of it, in my ignorant way. It was very good of you to come to us. We are dull old fogies."

"On the contrary, Monsieur, it is a pleasure to be invited to play for appreciative hearers—and in such a room."

For half an hour the old man exhibited his treasures, explaining their history and artistic worth. At the end of the room in a large alcove stood an organ built of dark carved oak, its pipes rendered as inconspicuous as possible by a decorator who must have deplored their in-

trusion into the scheme. Near the alcove stood the most beautiful piano Paul had ever seen—of glowing black, inlaid with metal in a pattern that corresponded with other pieces of furniture in the room. M. de Reisenach himself lifted the lid, and motioned Paul to the keyboard, then retraced his steps toward the fireplace. A footman advanced silently and wheeled the vacant arm-chair round so that the back of the imaginary woman would not be turned to the guest. For the first time since he had entered the room Paul thrilled to the uncanniness of his surroundings. He had experienced no difficulty in bowing to the chair, or in casting polite glances in its direction, but the footman's matter-of-fact attention to a non-existent mistress sent a shudder through him, and he had to make an effort to steady his nerve.

For an hour he played, gaining confidence as he went on. The old man dozed through it all. The piano responded graciously, and Paul rose to his best heights. It was as though he were desperately trying to disprove M. Sariac's frank comment: a virtuoso run to seed. And the old man dozed on till a clock warned Paul that his time was up.

He left the piano, and his host, roused by the cessation of sound, got up to meet him.

"Ah, Monsieur, I cannot tell you how much we have enjoyed your music. You will come again, will you not—often?"

Paul breathed a sigh of relief. "You are very kind, Monsieur." He turned to the arm-chair and said, with a bow, "*Bonsoir, Madame.*" Then he shook hands with M. de Reisenach and left the room.

3

As the winter wore on, Paul settled patiently into his new mode of existence. With lessened vitality had come

a simplification of interests. From a daily routine which would once have dejected him by its lack of variety he now derived as much stimulation as his chastened organism could endure. He had no grievances, no wayward hopes nor goading ambitions to disturb the tenor of his mind. In the mornings—often after nights of pain and insomnia—he awoke with a sense of security. Outside his window, in the streets, beyond them, in outlying villages and fields, stretching in circles which infinitely widened, life hummed and purred its course in myriad activities each of which contributed to a compact protective total. For life *was* protective; it afforded sustenance and comfort in subtle ways, meting itself out in portions nicely adjusted to one's capacity.

Paul had progressed beyond the stage of exacting boons from life, consequently could at last appreciate boons which came gratuitously, could revel in diluted rays of sunlight which more sturdy souls cursingly accused of meagreness, could feel deep thankfulness for food and drink which to others seemed frugal, could find solid worth in creatures whom the world voted dull. Without picturesquely striving—as the devotees of a hundred cults strove—he had unexpectedly achieved, as they expressed it, peace. He made no boast of it, took no false credit for it. Simply his soul was in equipoise.

For this long coveted state he had paid heavily—but he was able to face the bill without a tremor.

The lonely ache which had always shadowed him was gone, yet in spirit he now stood farther aloof from the world than ever. Friendship and companionship were as far beyond his reach as if he were an invisible figure on the earth, though he moved among men who passed for friends and companions. Love in a personal sense he would never experience again; its place had been pre-empted by an emotion which reached out in all directions, knitting the universe together in a warm garment

which he wore as a mantle over his soul. For thirty-five years he had been a slave to his egos, then, as in the case of the Ancient Mariner, his stubborn heart had yielded without warning, and the weight of his mistakes and failures had dropped into the sea at his feet.

One of the first signs of his spiritual freedom was the magnetism he unconsciously exerted. In the old days the rare homage of his fellows fed his vanity. Now it increased his humility. Night after night in a modest restaurant on the Boulevard Raspail, he found himself the centre of a heterogeneous group of students and artists. Former acquaintances sought him out and, having found him, came back again and again to lay their problems before him. Karl Zurschmiede, the painter, the American-Italian tramp of literary and anarchistic leanings, Paddon, the English poet fresh from circles of radical opinion in Vienna, were among the list. And a prominent figure in the growing confraternity was a young French Jew, Philippe Bloch, whose essays on the theory of relativity, concerning which speculation was rife and comprehension uncertain, were winning attention for him in serious reviews.

Each member of the confraternity, with the exception of Paul, was driven by some demon. Each was bent on entering controversial lists to vindicate the honour of some theory on which he might base a scheme of life. Each was obliged to argue at length and with heat in order to find out what he believed. And through the kaleidoscope of colours that would not blend, in the wars that surged round the names of modern personalities and movements, artistic, political, scientific, religious, Paul's impartiality became the refuge of all parties. He seldom supported an applicant with an axe to grind, but he usually restored harmony by his faculty for reducing all problems to a common denominator, his faculty for eliminating inessentials and raising the issue to a plane

beyond the reach of disputation. He was not known to have any special subject, though he was described, vaguely, as a musician. And he seemed to have no panacea for the ailments of the world, unless his views on internationalism and the fundamental unity of all religions could be thought of as such.

On a few occasions Paul had emerged from his impersonality in some sudden onslaught, some appeal for tolerance, some championship of the despitefully used. In such moments he had expressed himself with a fervour that gripped his hearers, and it was on account of them that he had begun to acquire the status of a prophet. But for two reasons he curbed such effusions. In the first place he felt that his most valuable contribution to life lay in his ability to exert a tranquillizing rather than a stimulating influence. In the second place the concentration entailed in propounding a difficult thesis, in preaching and converting, took a heavy toll from his physical resources, bringing on disorders which he could ill afford to encourage.

One evening in March, 1925, intoxicated by the deceptive warmth of a spring-like night which seemed to presage a summer of infinite bounties, a future of glorious opportunity, Paul threw precaution to the winds. He had been absorbing life in small, diluted doses. To-night he craved a more potent draught. The soft strong air from a window opening on a row of evergreens laved and quickened him. The lights, the buzz of familiar faces, the distant murmur of a world awakening from winter sluggishness filled him with a throbbing joy, made him feel twenty-one instead of half the allotted three score and ten. He tingled to the incomparable privilege of living, gave thanks for it, gloated over the treasures that lay within the reach of himself and his kind. He had an impulse to rouse the world to a sharper wonderment, a more electric vitality. To-night he knew

himself for a superior being—superior not in the sense against which he had chafed as a boy, when Mrs. Kestrell placed before him her finest linen, but superior in his comprehension of the infinite insignificance of himself and of all men as individuals, in the puissant totality of life. With flushed cheeks and shining eyes he seized the reins of discourse and drove it furiously, increasing the pace as each man and woman showed signs of catching up.

In the background he saw the proprietor rubbing his hands.

Paul found himself talking of the soul, of its arduous journey through the valley of the shadow, of its imprisonment in the body and its subjection to a mind which sought to argue it out of existence, of its incessant struggle for liberation, encouraged by a presence merely felt, as a brushing of wings, or merely glimpsed in flashes of celestial light, of its ultimate emancipation at death. He deprecated the unnecessary strife within the trinity: soul, mind and body. His plea was for order, co-ordination, poise, harmony. Religion, he said, any sort of religion, even that of maniacal evangelists, was an essential part of life, necessary as a sort of tuning-fork that gave human beings the right "pitch," according to which they might live without flattening.

Then the talk swerved round to the topic on which he was known to have expressed views that savoured of a past bitterness. Never had his conviction that national barriers were a heritage from barbarous days, that the progress of civilization depended on a pooling of human interests, been so succinctly, so vehemently and inspiringly set forth. "*La parole est à Orphée,*" cried Philippe Bloch, who sought to maintain a sort of parliamentary procedure in these discussions. "Orpheus" was a nickname conferred on Paul in jest by his acknowledged disciple, George Paddon, and it had caught.

For an hour Paul talked, foretelling the new heaven and the new earth illuminated by a unified religion, impelled forward by the concerted energies of a unified race. He suggested, in imaginative flights, ways and means of making it feasible, appealed for support, speculating, affirming, convincing. Through it all he was exultingly conscious that this, at last, was the essence of his famous message. A message neither startling nor original, but grand, with a grandeur that could only be measured by the intensity with which it was projected, the zeal with which it inspired those who were destined to carry it into the highways and by-ways. His ego was not delivering the message; the message was being delivered through it, by a power as much greater than himself as winds are greater than the ships they drive across the ocean. He was free from self-consciousness now as he had never been—not even on the far-distant occasion when, as a precocious cabin-boy, he had evoked the spirit of Beethoven and caused it to speak, through him, to a roomful of seamen. The difference between the two occasions was that to-night he was able to bring the force of experience, reason, spiritual exaltation, moral fervour, and impassioned words to bear on his audience—an audience, moreover, of virtual disciples, predisposed to accept the message which was being transmitted through him.

Of all the faces that crowded about him, Paul was conscious of only one steeled against his appeal. The Italian-American vagabond, a man who, born perverse, had let his mind become distorted still more by disease and hard-usage, and then become enamoured of his own distortions, had from the outset of their acquaintance shown a personal antipathy, an antipathy which Paul, loath to argue with an insincere man whom he had aided, had taken no pains to break down. When Paul brought his impromptu speech to an end, the anarchist waited for

a lull in the hubbub, and then, with a cynical laugh, threw out a challenge which he had obviously been saving.

"How do we know you're speaking in good faith? For all anybody knows to the contrary, you might be a spy in the employ of a government that has something to gain by your kind of propaganda, preached outside its own boundaries. Are you afraid to show your papers?"

Although the speaker was not popular, and although in its present mood the confraternity would have taken Paul's side against anyone, an undercurrent of curiosity awaited with interest the fate of the challenge.

Paul had no intention of gratifying this curiosity, nor of evading the challenge.

"I make a secret of my nationality out of sheer consistency," he replied quietly. "To my way of thinking, the fact that nobody here can say for a certainty what country produced me is a vindication, in a small way, of my thesis. If everybody had tried to ignore national prejudices as consistently as I have done, we should find ourselves able to co-operate in ways which are now infeasible. . . . I'm not afraid to show my papers—the suggestion is silly. But I don't mind telling you that I've served a term in prison for the views I've been advocating, if you need any proof of my good faith."

A few short years ago he would have been tempted to give a cynical flourish to this final piece of information. But he had outgrown his cynicism.

There was a stir of renewed interest, and Paul went on to link up his remarks, bringing the audience again under his sway. Gradually his words dwindled. There was a singing in his ears which drowned the sound of his voice. He was suddenly oppressed by the thick smoke that filled the room, and reached towards the window, which someone had closed as the night air grew colder. Paul knew now that he had shot his bolt. The strange buoyancy he had experienced earlier in the evening had

departed, leaving as a sort of echo an inward turbulence. He was too exhausted to decide whether the turbulence was emotional or physical.

He shivered. The draught from the window brought him out of his thoughts. He had a vague premonition of impending trouble, and felt he must find a pretext to go home.

Before he could close the window again, he was coughing. His cough was well enough known by this time, yet many eyes turned to him with quick sympathy and fear.

He had only one thought now—to control himself until he could get out of the room, away from everybody. He rose from his chair, and some one darted forward. Why should Karl look so panicky? Paul tried to deceive himself with the question, then gave it up. Self deception wouldn't work; he had tried it before. He sat down again, racked in a cough that was past controlling. He had once thought of buying a red handkerchief to carry against such emergencies. Had he done so, his acquaintances would merely have laughed at his conversion to Bolshevism. As it was—there would be a scene—and his speech would be forgotten in the light of this more impressive, useless phenomenon. His genius for anticlimax again.

Zurschmiede and Paddon got him to his attic room, and Bloch arrived shortly afterwards with a doctor.

The three young men took their leave. As Paddon opened the door some loose sheets of paper fluttered from a table. Believing them to be a copy of an essay which Paul had forgotten to return to him, he mechanically thrust the sheets into his pocket. Later in the evening, by the light of his own candle he read what seemed to be an entry destined for a diary:

“Rue N.D. des C., March 14, 1925. Since my soul insists, I give it up to a soft breeze which mysteriously

stirs in all this wintry stench of mid-Paris, and bears it to the bourne of my life-long pilgrimage which I shall always vaguely discern but never reach. The sea is there, amethystine; a shore of crisp velvet sand, deserted; sweeping green banks; a sweetly melancholy, faint rustle of leaves; deep-hued flowers discreet in number, for each has its individuality; not one is superfluous.

“Silence composed of infinite soft sounds, as whiteness is composed of infinite colours. A terrace, high windows flung open, a glimpse of spacious rooms which my soul can enter when night falls.

“Music which comes from the flowers or from within me and pervades the afternoon but has no locus. Music and perfume which mingle, which gently thrill, which stir the curtains of the high windows, the foliage of trees, music and perfume which give life to the sea air, which like interweaving recitatives hover above the ocean’s rhythm.

“And a presence felt, guessed, but not seen: a radiant figure so perfectly unlike, yet so strangely like me, for it has a beauty I have ever coveted. It comes and goes, brushing me invisibly in its flight. It is young, fresh, eager, iridescent, suddenly languid, suddenly animated, suddenly visible, splashed with the blue-purple-green of the water, the yellow of the sunshine, the green of the trees, the red of the flowers, a red that throws off glints of orange and purple like rubies. The figure is echoed by a rhythmic fragrance, perfume that comes in a pattern. Its movements are determined by, or determine my music. It has the fragility, the grace of a vision, yet it makes me conscious of my body, stirs my veins to new measures. It mocks and challenges, and the music and perfume deepen to riot, and I am running to its urge, leaping, pursuing, nearing, touching draperies of gossamer, catching laughter tossed to me like bubbles, capturing, subduing, at the music’s dictate.

“In my arms the vision takes life from me, leaving me but a soul. The enchanted laughter under my lips becomes a healing caress. My eyes, for the fullness of seeing, close. The ethereal figure which was beautiful is now a part of me, a supplement. With it I am become the universe. The music has grown so full-toned, it is beyond hearing, just as my eyes in the fullness of seeing merged into the vision and ceased to see. The music has become as great as the universe; it is the vesture enveloping the universe which I, by uniting with my fleeting vision, have become. With the fullness of feeling we have ceased to feel.”

4

Paul was warned by a specialist that he must leave Paris at once and seek some mountain resort.

“But it’s a luxury I can’t afford these days,” said the invalid.

The specialist held open the door of his consulting-room. “*Alors, mon pauvre ami*, unless you do as I say, life itself is a luxury you can’t afford.”

The remark took Paul’s fancy. “That’s what I’ve been telling myself for many a year,” he replied.

He walked into the bright April sunshine and directed his footsteps toward the Luxembourg gardens. Under a canopy of trees on which budding leaves shot forth like green flames from gas jets, lolled students wearing black hats and red neckties, idly addressing themselves to books and sketch-blocks. He pushed on towards the round pound, where children were sailing boats, and paused to watch them, marvelling at their obliviousness of the doom that overshadowed them. They were as exuberantly unconscious of their sad mortality as the hyacinths were unconscious of the rain-cloud encroaching on the blue and golden glories of the afternoon sky.

He left the park to the innocents who infested it, to

the God-blessed and the God-spared, and walked on through the gates past the Odéon, down the hill through narrow streets toward the river. When the shower descended he took refuge inside the doors of a book-shop. One volume attracted his attention, for it contained an account of the life and teachings of Orpheus.

“‘Rugged is the road which leads to the realm of the Gods,’ said Orpheus, who seemed to be replying to voices from within himself rather than to his disciple. ‘A flowery path, a sharp slope, then rocks haunted by thunder-bolts and surrounded by the immensity of space—that is the destiny of the seer and the prophet on earth. Let thy feet dwell in the flowery pathways of this world, my child, and aspire not to go further.’

“‘My thirst but increases the more as thou seekest to quench it,’ said the young disciple. ‘Thou hast taught me the secrets of the Gods. But tell me, great master of mysteries, thou who wast inspired by divine Eros, shall I ever be able to see them?’

“‘With the eyes of the soul,’ replied the pontiff of Jupiter, ‘but not with those of the body. At present thou canst see merely with the eyes of the body. Only by dint of long travail and great pain may the spiritual eyes be opened.’ ”

Paul thought of his disciples, of Paddon, who had conferred on him the name of Orpheus. He skimmed through the pages and came to the end of the dialogue:

“‘Thou hast earned the crown of initiation, and thou hast lived my dream,’ concluded Orpheus. ‘But let us depart from hence; for in order that fulfilment may come to pass, it is necessary that I should die, and thou shouldst live.’ ”

On the point of buying the volume with the few remaining coins in his pocket, Paul was deterred by a per-

ception of the irony of the situation. What purpose could be served by his absorption of the contents of one more book? What purpose, for that matter, had been served by the omnivorous reading of thirty years? Books had nourished his mind as bread had nourished his body. But why should either have been nourished? In a few months or weeks or days, the one would be under the ground and the other would have vanished God knew where. An echo of war-time phraseology recurred to him—*spurlos versenkt!*

Perhaps this volume, after all, could throw a glimmer on the probable destiny of one's spirit. One might read it on the off chance that it would impart a smattering of spiritual etiquette, in case there were some sort of conscious survival after death. He bought the volume, and went out again into the cold sunlight of the rain-splashed street.

He passed cafés where men were sipping pleasant concoctions, passed stalls heaped with fruits, heard scraps of good-humoured talk, caught glimpses of fresh cheeks and keen eyes. What a pity to leave it all behind, what a pity beyond the range of tears and chagrin! What incredible and meaningless extravagance, *que la vie!* Thirty-five years of seething and frothing like a busy bubble, then, instead of floating off, as a bubble should, towards some Empyrean, one merely relapsed into the illimitable ocean—the river with but a single bank. One's iridescent personal bloom, a mere reflection, vanished with a little plop, and one dispersed as air and water. The arch-anticlimax! It was not that one resented being merged into the reservoir of life; it was simply that one endlessly wondered why a complicated system of bubbles should have been ordained. Did they, perhaps, make it possible for a greater quantity of oxygen to be dissolved into the water for the benefit of fish—and if so, what, in the metaphor, corresponded to fish?

Why seek to purchase a prolongation of life? Would one be warranted in begging for the wherewithal to tarry among stalls heaped with fruits, streets running over with traffic, gardens filled with children, young and grown-up? Besides, could one cheat fate with money? Into his head came the ominous air from *Carmen* he had hummed one night more than ten years ago: "*Si tu dois mourir, recommence vingt fois; la carte impitoyable répètera la mort.*"

He wandered along the quays, nodding to booksellers of his acquaintance, and at the Gare d'Orsay turned into a street leading to the closely guarded house of M. de Reisenach, where he was due at five o'clock.

The old man greeted him with the customary show of hospitality. Paul bowed as usual to the empty arm-chair, exchanged the usual remarks about the weather, sat at a tiny table laid for three and drank tea poured out by a servant, since "Madame" had "an aversion to presiding over her table." This explanation was invariably repeated.

Paul had forgotten whatever horror he had first experienced on hearing of the crime committed so long ago, and felt strangely in sympathy with the motives that urged M. de Reisenach to persist in his realization of a wildly extravagant ideal. Paul entered into the madman's psychology and played his part in the other's life-long drama with a facility that gave him cause to question his own balance. The measure of his sanity, he concluded, was merely the measure of his failure to realize his *chimères*. Paul recalled a sentence of a favourite writer: "*Cette forme est réelle, puisqu' elle est apparente et qu'il n'y a de réalité au monde que les apparences.*" M. de Reisenach's visions were real to him. He was to be envied.

Paul's long walk had fatigued him. The strong tea made his cheeks burn. He felt his body frail against

the soft upholstery of the chair. In a mirror he saw a reflection of his face—a flushed ivory setting for two black jewels. That very morning he had seen a paragraph in the Paris edition of an American newspaper stating that Miss Gritty Kestrell had arrived at the *Ritz* for a visit of some weeks, and he could not go to her, for he was unwilling to subject her to the shock of his emaciation.

Within him, beneath a little singing restlessness of nerves, there was a deep tranquillity.

Monsieur was speaking of music. It was time to drag oneself from the chair. He marvelled that a body so thin could be so heavy. Monsieur was asking him to play the organ for a change. If Monsieur only knew how fatiguing the pedals were, how hard one had to press down the keys!

Once seated on the bench, Paul's energies rallied. He played a *Pastorale* of César Franck's—a thing of quiet, gentle, austere beauty, reflecting a loftiness of spirit, a sincerity and nobility that refreshed and inspired.

Although he had drawn away from it at intervals, music still expressed some truth he had always sought in books and in life itself yet never quite attained. It was strangely satisfying, yet it stirred a longing for fuller revelation.

From Franck he went back to older masters, and found himself playing Bach fuguettes he had not heard since childhood. Once more he was the small boy performing his solo while the pennies fell with a chink into baize-lined mahogany plates. Once more he was playing for Phœbe Meddar—not the ladylike schoolmistress, but a pale blue, pale pink, pale gold and lavender Princess of Alcantara who knew no language but the ethereal language he made for her with his music. Once more he identified his life with the melody—he was the voice which rose yearningly above the complexity of opposing

voices. Again he thought of life as a series of variations on a given theme. His had surely passed through enough. Further variations could only be anticlimactic. Yet it was so difficult to know when to stop.

His strength had come back as if by magic with his absorption in the music. His body was forgotten, he was again the creature all wings. What if he endeavoured to live, after all? There were always ways of making shift. He thought of Gritty. She was a sort of sublimated Suzy—a Suzy with the advantages of talent, brains, and what she had called “one genuine little streak.” If Gritty only knew, she would insist on helping him as a right—a right given by sisterly regard. In a sense he even owed Gritty the opportunity to be of service to him. She had once expressed a desire to share his destiny in some way.

Yet——

His fatigue was creeping back. The thought of going over old ground, of preparing a fresh campaign against the world of fact—even were it worth the effort, could he undertake the responsibility? Something in him held back, something whispered: “Your solo is finished, and a damn bad job you made of it; get off the platform.”

He turned away from the organ.

For once Monsieur had not dozed. A psychical sympathy which had grown up between them made him respond to Paul’s mood.

“You’re tired, to-day, my young friend. Has something gone wrong?”

“Things always go wrong, if one is foolish enough to brood. They’re right enough if one doesn’t care.”

“Then you’ve been brooding—it doesn’t pay.”

“One has weak moments.”

The old man eyed him with vague misgiving. Usually he was too deeply immersed in his own unreal world to be conscious of others’ anxieties. “*Pourtant,*” he went

on, "you've never played so well as you played to-day. That's curious."

"*Malheureusement,*" supplemented Paul, with a grim smile. "Good art is a product of suffering."

The old man had retired into his shell. "So well," he insisted, "that I was hoping you'd play a little longer—perhaps something on the piano."

"*Volontiers,*" Paul acquiesced, though he would rather have crept back to his garret.

He opened the piano and let his fingers roam. He was still living in the past. His moral life was unfolding itself before him year by year. Instinctively he began the sonata he had performed on the night when he had first become conscious of having a mission to fulfil. As the first movement played itself he relived the tropical nights at sea, recaptured the smell of tar, the sound of crisp, lapping water and flapping sails, the sight of a moonlight track through the indigo gloom, a track down which he sent passionate invocations towards a radiant future which had become a dreary present.

In the last movement his courage failed him. That triumphant, self-sure theme which he had boldly identified with his own ego—what a travesty! Yet he forced himself to play it, if only as a tribute to the heroic dead—for that eager, credulous boy of thirteen was assuredly dead.

His arms dropped at his sides. He could not have played another bar.

M. de Reisenach came towards him with tears in his eyes. He looked old and harrowed. It was the first time Paul had played the sonata in his house.

"*Ah, mon cher ami,* if you only knew what the sonata means to me—to us. It was one of my wife's favourites. How many times has she played it for me in the old happy days that ceased long ago—before you were even born!"

The old man turned to the arm-chair silhouetted against the gathering twilight which showed through a high window. "My darling," he said, in deeply moved tones, "how long we've had to wait to hear it again! Aren't you happy?"

Paul's glance had instinctively followed the old man's towards the arm-chair which he was so tenderly addressing, and there, with his own eyes, Paul saw—Aunt Verona!

Not the Aunt Verona he had known, but the Mademoiselle Windell who had stirred imaginations and captured hearts in Munich and Vienna, young and handsome, her dark hair smoothed over her ears, her figure lost in folds of silk.

He started up as if in a trance, old recollections and recent gleanings of fact darting through his mind, while the image slowly vanished and he saw nothing but the vacant chair.

He turned towards the old man, awe-struck and dumb. Then through his dry throat came the words: "*Dann sind Sie der Prinz Heinrich!*"

He was thinking aloud, having been rendered incautious by fatigue and the overwhelming revelation. Already the words had wrought their havoc, for the tender, tearful old gentleman had been transformed. Paul, holding to the piano for support, found himself face to face with a fiend, the personification of insane terror, suspicion and guile. He thought of calling out, but could make no sound. He could only wait and stare through the twilight at a pair of protruding blue eyes.

Instinctively Paul drew back, a move which kindled a baleful glint in the eyes. In an unearthly silence they stood watching each other, and Paul felt himself sway. Before he could collect his forces a massive object whirred past his head, crashing on the keyboard of the piano with a hideous clamour.

Then the madman was upon him. Fingers closed about his throat, and the world grew black.

When he regained consciousness it was to see the maniac struggling with three servants and shrieking execrations in German as they dragged him from the room. Paul lay on the floor, coughing, coughing, with a handkerchief to his mouth. He heard a sound of sobbing, and realized it was himself. The shrieks died away in the distance, and the world was again blacked out.

XV

GEORGE PADDON, Philippe Bloch, and Karl Zurschmiede stood in the garret behind the Gare Montparnasse, surveying a little heap of objects spread out on the bed: among them a yellow copy of the Liszt Sonata bearing an inscription, "V. W., Wien, 1876." They were looking for an address. Despite everything they had heard him say about his renunciations, they had the human urge to notify some one.

"There was a diary," said Paddon. "That may give us a hint."

Karl, more visibly affected than the others, had been silent. "The concierge burnt it," he interposed. "It was his last request."

They had another talk with the concierge.

"Had he no final message?" asked the Englishman.

"He said something we couldn't understand," she replied. "One word was 'belle.' It was just at midnight, for I remember the great clock outside was chiming the hour."

Only Paddon had an inkling. Bell, midnight. "*Alors, il a du être*——" he began, but quickly checked himself.

He had almost said, "Then he must have been English"—and although he experienced a guilty emotion of pride and proprietorship at the discovery, loyalty bade him withhold it. Bloch was eager to prove that the dead man had been a French Jew. Zurschmiede, whose mind was

methodical, had already classified his origin as Germanic. Whereas all the poor devil had ever asked of anybody was that he be allowed to remain his own anomalous self.

THE END

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