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# FORGET IF YOU CAN

by  
JOHN ERSKINE



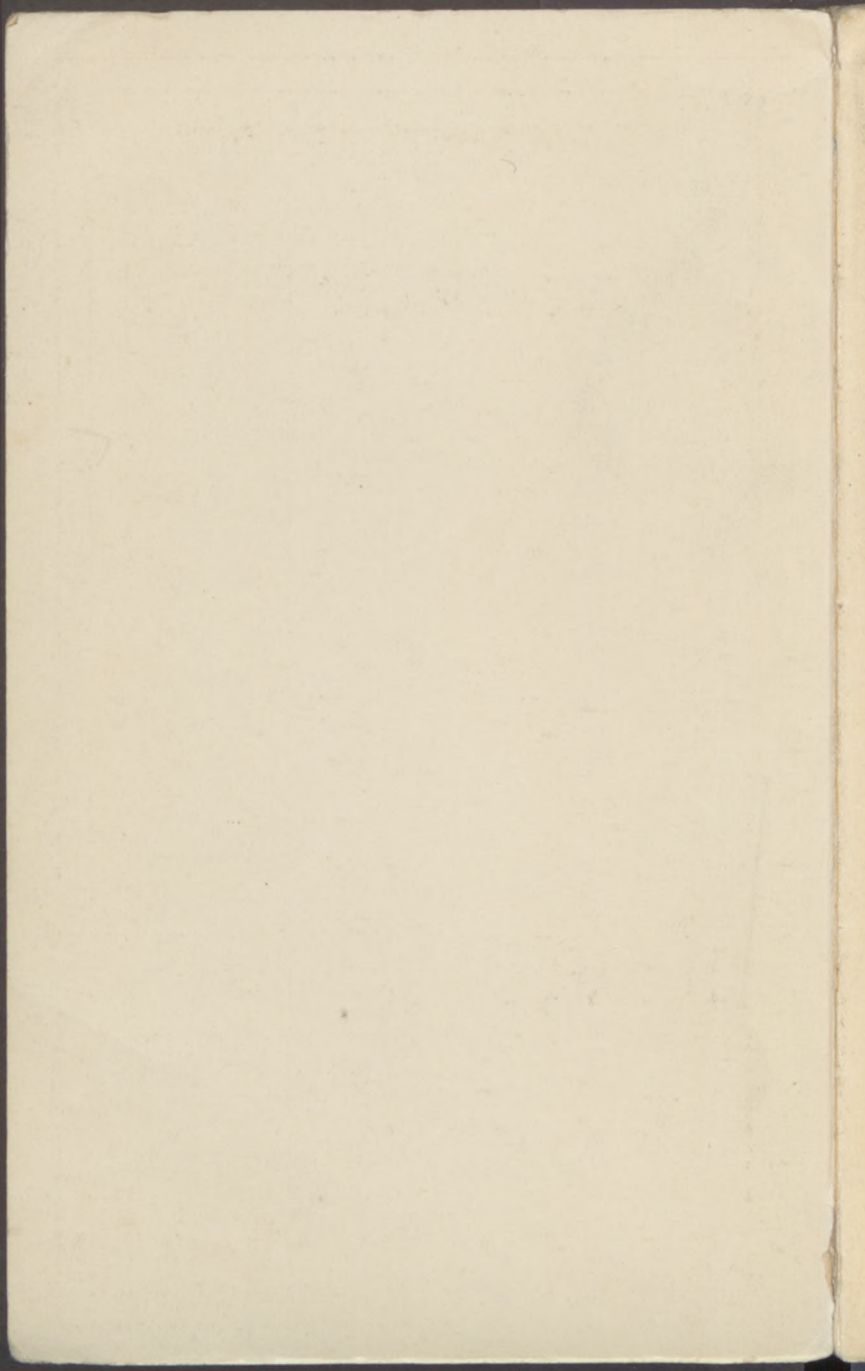
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IMPRIMÉ EN ALLEMAGNE

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PART ONE  
FLIGHT FROM YESTERDAY

I

THIS MAN AND THIS WOMAN WERE FRIENDS OF MINE. I had their story from each of them separately in flashes as it were of summer lightning, brief and savage unveilings of lives habitually discreet. That they spoke out at all, suggests what a welter of feeling they tried to smother.

Do I betray a confidence by writing it down? I confess to some doubt. Yet the story has, I am convinced, import of value to our time, and I think I see a way to share it with you. If I tell it exactly as it was told to me, he and she will never recognize it. Did you ever know your own words when they came back to you?

Since I shall confine myself strictly to the truth, my account must be somewhat uneven. The first section of it I had from Marguerite, from Lattimer, and from personal observation, but chiefly from Marguerite. She told me about Maude and Lila, whom otherwise I do not know, though I saw them at work in the shop. Bob, Lattimer's son, I have met, and he seemed to me like other youth, mildly interesting for youth's sake, and important to his parents. He may be, as his father believes, a titanic character, but I shan't try to prove it. Kate I know through Bob, and the fact that he loved her is neither here nor there, love being what it is. Her mother is, I should say, quite priceless. I recall one evening in that small but charming home of hers when she explained to the company how she would teach the facts of life to children, and Kate laughed but tried to stop her.

Bentoff and Ruth Romain I never met. My picture of them, therefore, has some chance of being successful.

As to the two chief characters, though I am fond of both, I do not see them entirely as they here portray themselves. In the story I shall keep to their point of view if I can, but I must whisper to you that Lattimer

is a very common type among American men, wise in his business or profession, yet a perpetual novice in the art of living. I record his problems of the heart not because I think them novel or profound, but because he thought them so. His numerous kind will, I am sure, agree with him.

Marguerite, on the other hand, considers herself an average woman, and I think her most unusual. Or at least the women she may represent belong to one moment of history, the post-war moment, and we already begin to see that they were peculiar. She thought she had solved life by denying the existence of the past, and according to her theory the past exists only in conventions or in inherited sentiments. For a while she believed herself free. Even now she will, I dare say, go to her grave sorry for Lattimer, and indeed for all men, to whom nature permits less freedom than to women. She is not yet fully aware of what a man would read in her story, the ironic truth that the past survives chiefly in unchangeable instincts, and that women, since their instincts are strong, may against their will revert in a single moment from sophisticated poise to the most primitive antagonism or possessiveness or jealousy.

It is Marguerite, of course, who makes this story worth telling. She is a symptom of the times. She prided herself on being emancipated, whereas, God knows, an emancipated woman is only a savage animal on a vacation.

Now the story itself, piece by piece. I shall interrupt where the fragments need bridgework.

## II

The establishment which Marguerite Laval opened on Fifth Avenue, just below Fifty-seventh, in the autumn of 1929, attracted the comment of those who like myself still took to heart the transformation of the famous street. One more shop. A superior line of coats for women. Other garments too, but chiefly coats. You could find something within a moderate price, that is, only a little



above three hundred dollars, or you could go as far as you liked with ermine and sable. Our general conclusion was that Marguerite Laval had financial backing.

Whether or not we commented on the value of the stock, we said the place had a distinguished tone. If Marguerite Laval drew aid from some discreet benevolence, even the unkind admitted that she herself, and no other, provided the distinction. It began in her own person, as from a tireless reservoir, flowed contagiously over her pretty secretary, Kate Mitchell, invaded the show-room, to transfigure Maude Gill and Lila Braun, the two brunettes who entertained the clients, and at last reached out to the street, where Paul, the coloured doorman, in close-fitting uniform, gave us the idea, no matter how casually we passed, that we were passing something special.

Marguerite Laval's superiority was of the body as well as the mind, but no one who met her was misled into putting her mind second. Her intelligence stalked you in her black eyes. Under their penetration you might be silent, but you could withhold nothing. She rarely spoke without smiling, perhaps because a muscular formation, an involuntary mechanism, lifted the cheek to haunt you when she moved her lips. The smile, rather than the eyes, was a bit world-weary. Once she had smiled at you, you saw there was nothing left for her to learn, and the conviction troubled you that she wished she knew a little less.

She was hardly beautiful. Standing rather more than the average height, she was thin, but in spite of meagreness, she evoked rich senses. In her dress she affected a paradoxical reserve which left you admiring her modesty, yet suspecting she wore only what was visible. Her black hair was trimmed, not close to the head, but with an artful fullness which combed back thick and soft, moulding gracefully over those areas of neck where women who bob usually come to grief. Her shoulders were broad, or seemed so, perhaps, because her waist

was slender. Her bosom, indicated with reluctance in the surface of her gown, was none the less indicated distinctly. You thought of sculpture, and good breeding, and pride. Her hands were noble, and though she did not make ostentatious play with them, they would never be overlooked—large, long-fingered, warm, soft, and very white. For her finger-nails she favoured a natural blush, avoiding the passionate rose and the fire-alarm red.

Her fame owed something to the mystery which surrounded her, and which the ungracious said she cultivated for publicity. Though she appeared ready to talk, it was never of herself. Even Kate Mitchell, her secretary, knew only that she had arrived in New York ten years after the war. Those who believed her the descendant of a great family, ruined by the catastrophe, and driven here where money could be made, were at a loss to explain her slowness in coming. Where had she spent the ten years? Where and how?

If ever she had been wife, she must now be widow, or divorced. Or perhaps she was still unmarried. But no one who had heard her speak, looked in her face, or felt her panther grace as she walked across the room, wasted time supposing her inexperienced.

We who watched her arrival on Fifth Avenue were puzzled that from the beginning she enjoyed unqualified success. How could she make a detour around that prelude of trial and error through which most business ventures pick their way? Then, as now after five years, she was the vogue. She furnished her shop, installed her goods, put on the two smart windows in gilt scroll the name Laval, with no further indication of what Laval proposed to do to you; she engaged Kate Mitchell for her office, Maude Gill and Lila Braun to do the selling, and Paul to inflate his chest at the door in green gaberdine and gold braid, with a gigantic umbrella to bring you from your car on rainy days. Then a little card in the window, so small you had to stand close to read it,

promised that Laval would be at home to her clients the following Monday. On Monday there she was, and so miraculously were the clients.

Considering it afterwards, and making cautious inquiries, we found no woman who had heard of Laval before that prodigious opening. Yet all who crossed the threshold thought they were patronizing the last word in something or other.

Those who worked for her seemed to be loyal. She instituted an inexorable discipline, yet in the merciful roundabout way of a born queen. Her orders were disguised as requests, her rebukes sounded like regrets, and you stirred yourself to please her. Paul, for example, wore his magnificence at first with a slouching shoulder, the military poise being superfluous in a tap-dancer, as in a lyric tenor. At the end of a week, however, he seemed to be imitating West Point. She had mentioned her sympathy that his spine was feeble.

Kate Mitchell, closest to Laval, admired her integrity. Her goods were of the best, each in its kind, and she charged a stiff price, yet she was willing that Maude and Lila should tell any customer where they could get something cheaper. Since not all of us excel in taste, she had some coats for sale which she herself would not wear. On more than one occasion she had said as much to a client headed for a mischoice. This honesty lost no customers. Also it improved the taste of few. In the end they bought what they liked, and Marguerite Laval indulged in her sophisticated smile.

Kate, being young, yearned, I understand, to find beneath Laval's life-beaten wisdom a contradicting freshness of faith and affection. That Laval was generous to those she liked, nobody doubted. Kate held that she was kind in a way which suggested loneliness and need. Should she meet a nature to match hers, she might prove, Kate thought, all woman. For a while, just after the shop had been inaugurated, there had been a series of telephone-calls, insistent and anonymous. Romance had

seemed around the corner. Once, at least, Kate had heard her answering with undeniable tenderness, but except for that moment the woman's discretion had been impenetrable, and for five months now the calls had ceased.

Kate wondered from what country Laval came. She spoke French, but she looked Slavic. Two Russian women visited the shop one day, and not finding what they wanted, appealed to the manager, as they called her. When Laval went out to the show-room they were talking volubly in their own language. Through the open door Kate listened feverishly. Laval pretended to no language but French. Later, however, perhaps off her guard, she repeated what they had said.

If she protected her own secret, she pried relentlessly into yours. Kate's interview with her, getting the job, had been a cross-examination.

'No doubt you are competent! I do not care a fig for these recommendations from your business school! Work for me a week, and I shall find out! But we must understand each other. My people are my family. Why do you come here?'

'For the salary, Madame! My father is dead.'

'If he were not?'

'I would go to college.'

'How old are you?'

'Nineteen.'

'Your mother lives?'

'Yes.'

'You support her?'

'I want to help.'

'No brothers or sisters?'

'No.'

'Have you a sweetheart?'

When Kate resented the question, that mocking smile showed in Laval's face.

'If it is a lover, it does not concern me, but if he intends to marry you, it might be awkward. Perhaps the mo-

ment I have you trained. I deserve warning in advance.'

'There is a boy . . .'

'A lover?'

'No, Madame!'

'You are engaged?'

'He's in Princeton, just beginning his junior year. We don't talk much of marriage yet, but we think of it.'

'At least,' reflected Laval, '*you* do.'

Kate resented the implication. 'He's serious, Madame!'

'They all are. Has he money?'

'His father has. There's only his father—a lawyer—you'd know his name.'

'I'll learn it,' said Laval, 'when the young man interrupts my office. Very well, we understand each other! You will not be married for a year or so, but after that I must look for another secretary. Or sooner, if you put your mind on him and not on me!'

### III

The friendship between Maude Gill and Lila Braun began in grammar-school. Marguerite told me about it. In the comparatively placid days which Lattimer's coming put an end to, she encouraged the two girls to talk much with her, and they told more than they intended.

Maude was slightly older. She had a long face and a short body, and the desire of her life was to keep thin. Along with this main interest, however, she had a zest for human relations. She earned her living because she had to. She strove to keep off weight because a fat girl can't get on so well, and it isn't the style. She investigated her friends and as much of humanity beyond as she could reach, because it may come in handy, and anyway, life is better than a book, if you can get at it. Having got at it, she dispensed few judgements, and no blame. The good-nature which threatened overweight found free rein in giving her friends a lift.

When she learned, therefore, in an exchange of school-girl confidences, that Lila would some day become a

great actress, or at least a chorus-dancer, she supplied the first step in this progress by finding the child a job in Macy's. A friend was saving a place there for Maude, and Maude took Lila with her. From behind the counter, as she explained, you could see the world go by, and watch the behaviour of the polite, which in some shows an actress must imitate, or, if the customer was rude, you could learn to steel yourself against directors and managers. At first Lila rejected this approach to drama, as circuitous, but after waiting in vain upon the theatrical magnates in their casting offices, she became a sales-girl for the sake of food.

Maude loved her with maternal pride and sisterly envy. Nature had conferred upon Lila that priceless metabolism which permits you to eat an éclair without altering a line. Of wisdom in the higher sense she had little, but she could wear clothes, as Maude often remarked, like nobody's business. Put fur on her, and you couldn't tell her from a lady.

Macy's, recognizing a talent, promoted her from the counter to become a cloak-model. Maude, following a less vivid path by humble merits, managed a section of the hardware. It was she, by her unbelievable scent for current events, who learned that Laval would open a shop, and it was her prompt action which secured the job for them both. Their work was supposed to be identical. They were to do the selling, except in emergency, when they might call upon Laval. But in practice Lila was permitted to approach the client first, especially if, as often happened, she was connected with the stage. In these few years Lila had come to know personally several stars of magnitude, and minor lights in great number. Maude served the more sober ladies, and remembered the prices, and at times whispered to Lila what coat to bring out.

The most costly garments might be purchased by girls—in some instances tragically lovely—who at the moment, as Lila knew, had no public engagements. Lila had heard

that life is friendly to youth and beauty, but she had not realized how thoroughgoing the friendliness may be. Maude discouraged such thoughts, pointing out in her natural diction, into which she fell when customers were not present, that this prosperity, though brilliant, was phony.

'They always charge them to a different one, dear, don't you notice? It's a new name every six months. It ain't permanent!'

In an idle moment Lila would stand in front of one of the mirrors, smoothing down her dress with her hands, reassuring herself of the in-curve from under-arms to the outward undulation which was all the hips she had. Her skin was ivory, and her dark eyes singularly clear. Her forehead, to be sure, was a little low, but by doing her hair high she pieced out. She could make herself, one way or another, as attractive as any of the women who came in here and measured themselves in this very glass! Probably she could act as well, if she had a chance. No doubt she too would return in glory some day and have herself a new coat. But on the up and up, of course! Maude was right. Not a new name every six months! Lila had no memory for names.

To speak of Paul, the doorman, is to wander from my narrative, for beyond his activities with the door he had, as you will see, small part in this story. But I happened to know him well, through his music, and I please myself by digressing long enough to describe the one person in this book who was completely and serenely master of his own life.

Like Lila, he cherished artistic impulses, but in another field. He himself danced, but chiefly he was a singer. Among his own people he enjoyed repute as a vocal teacher. He gave instruction after six o'clock, during the hours when his pupils also were free. At the end of the day he shed his green and gold, hurried northward, and opened his studio. That is, his wife, on those exceptional evenings when she was not assisting Laval, retired from

the parlour of their two-room flat and cooked the dinner, leaving to him the upright piano and the herd of students. His daily wage at the shop was only slightly more than his nightly profit from the throats of his neighbours. He favoured the Italian method.

Gloria, his wife, was of medium size, of a darker shade than he. Her disposition was to see all, and laugh, and be patient. Liking music in principle, she regretted the noise in the parlour, but, as she often reflected, at least she knew where he was evenings.

During the day she took care of Laval's apartment, on East Sixty-sixth Street. But this employment she enjoyed on condition that she never spoke of Madame, not even to Paul, and never told where she lived.

#### IV

In his home on the east side of Gramercy Park, Lattimer Morton rose from his solitary dinner-table and prepared to go out, a cold February evening, in the year 1934. Whatever his errand, it was not altogether agreeable. Twice he returned to the window, and looked out upon the night—not, you could be sure, because night as such occupied his thoughts. Without this trouble on his face, even with it, he was handsome, in a kind and hearty way. He was tall, somewhat angular or bony; slender in the middle—that was character; well tanned—that was golf. Hair and eyes were brown, and baldness had hardly begun. He was clean-shaven, his nose and his mouth were sizable, and though at the moment solemn, he could laugh, you guessed, even at himself. There were pleasant wrinkles around lips and eyes.

He had chosen this apartment a decade or so ago, at the beginning of his loneliness, because the windows would have the western sun, and would look down upon the charm of the garden in the square behind its iron fence, and he could reach his office quickly, and there would be The Players, if he needed company. He had thought then that a serene solitude would fill all his wants.



At that time the boy was off at school getting ready for Princeton. The apartment had a room reserved for him with a bookcase in it, and school banners, and the vestiges of last year's vacation. Later the school trophies had been put away, and college souvenirs had taken their place. Now, though the college touch lingered, there were some paintings, aggressively modern, some old maps, and an etching of the Harvard Yard, mark of a broadening mind, which told you at which law school the heir to the name now prepared to emulate his fathers.

Every piece in Lattimer's own room was a quotation from his family history. The line had been good choosers of furniture. He slept in two hundred years of comfort and taste, and tied his cravat at a dresser which Paul Revere had approved, when he ran in one evening to talk rebellion with the Boston Mortons.

¶ Next to his room was a small study lined with books. No law books—those he kept for the office, saving his home for the spiritual and mental play of a free man. His skill in the law had brought him wealth, as it had his fathers before him, but the long habit of affluence had produced its most fortunate effect in a tendency to retreat from the commercial and the mercenary.

¶ On his shelves, in several languages, were the authors he loved, covers much handled and worn, and an impressive collection of volumes on sail-boats and navigation.

The study opened on the living-room, lengthy, with a practical fire-place. When he ate at home, Muri, his man, set up a table by the hearth. For guests there were other tables, but rarely were there guests. Men always. He had a name for avoiding women, and even his male acquaintances, if he wished to entertain them, he would invite further up-town, perhaps to one of the rooms at the Century. The atmosphere of that club harmonized with his tastes, even with his appearance. He was one of the youngest members they had ever elected. Even now he was only forty-nine.

On his way out this evening he stopped for a moment in his study and wrote a letter to his son. According to the usual schedule, the letter should have gone a day earlier, but certain distresses of mind had been his excuse for postponing. He would speak to the boy now, his habitual word of affection and trust. A grand boy, with a throwback in him to some of those ancestors who had made the family. Lattimer treated his son as his contemporary and equal—rather more than his equal, perhaps. He felt with satisfaction that Robert would be stronger than he.

The letter sealed and stamped, he gave it to Muri to post, put on the light coat the man held for him, took his hat and stick.

‘I shall be home early, but don’t sit up for me.’

Muri looked disappointed. ‘Very sorry you go out this evening, Mr. Morton. I had specially good dinner for you.’

‘That’s too bad! I should have mentioned the engagement this morning.’

Muri smiled affectionately. ‘Very lonely here, Mr. Morton. You go out good deal. Like it when you stay home!’

Morton turned to look at the little man who shared with him so much domestic silence. ‘It *must* be rather dull! I don’t blame you for protesting. We’ll mend that soon, I hope.’

‘Thank you very much, Mr. Morton. Wish you pleasant evening!’

At the street, Tim, his Irish chauffeur, was waiting.

‘To the Century.’

They went up Fifth Avenue, and turned west on Forty-third.

‘What time shall I come for you, sir?’

‘That’s all for the night. Thank you!’

Tim saluted, inscrutable, and drove off, while Morton, with a self-conscious twinge, entered the quiet hall, acknowledged the greeting of William, the doorman, and got rid of his outer costume in the cloak-room. As he came out, William bowed.

'Mr. Allen and Mr. Winsor are waiting in the gallery, sir.'

Lattimer mounted the dozen steps to the long chamber where from time to time the works of painter members are shown. The two men who were to dine with him were sunk in a deep lounge, talking in low tones. They did not hear him coming.

'Sorry to be late, Ralph. Hello, Bill! Apologies to both of you!'

Ralph Allen reached up a long arm to shake his hand, but otherwise refused to be disturbed. A tall fellow, much like Morton in build, with a good-natured smile. Winsor, less tall and decidedly stout, pulled himself up out of the comfortable seat.

'You're not late,' said Allen, 'though I'm glad to see you humble.'

'We've settled the case for you already,' said Winsor, light-voiced, quick and precise. 'Nothing remains but the food.'

'All right. Let's go on up.'

Lattimer led the way down the twelve steps again to the hall, where they took the little elevator to the private rooms.

'I ordered,' he explained, 'to save time. I've an engagement at nine.'

'I'm glad you have,' said Allen, 'since I'm driving to Oyster Bay.'

'You're not staying in town?'

'Heavens, no! Not two nights running! I want to see what my wife looks like.'

'How is Jane?' asked Morton.

'Fine! She wants to know why she never lays eyes on you.'

'I've been rather tied up.'

'That's what she imagines. She says you used to be more reliable than her husband. You didn't take her sailing once this summer. She suspects she has a rival.'

Morton let the sally pass. They were in the northern

room, very spacious in comparison with the small centre table, set for three. The sphinx-like steward began to serve.

'It was my hope,' said Morton, 'if we put our heads together, we might hurry this case up. It has dragged on for a year now.'

'If you ask me,' put in Winsor nervously, 'we'd better let it drag. We're not on the solidest of ground, you know.'

'Let's find out just how solid,' Lattimer countered, 'and if we have the wrong end, take our medicine! We have other matters waiting!'

'Our client,' drawled Allen, 'prefers dilatory tactics.'

'But we may surprise him by proving his cause just. Two rather interesting points occurred to me this morning, and I want your opinion. In the first place . . .'

When they left the club at nine o'clock, Ralph got into his car, for the trip to Long Island, and Winsor, in chronic need of exercise, started on foot for Park Avenue.

Morton waited at the club door for a taxi. When he visited Ruth Romain, it was always in a public conveyance. Though he preferred not to consider his motives for this habit, his conscience refused to leave him in peace. She, too, as well as his conscience.

'My regard for you,' he had explained, 'is too sensitive to give people an occasion to talk. If you and I are seen in public together, or if you are recognized in my car, or if my car stands at your door, the gossip will start.'

'Well, dear, what of it?'

'I can't have them talking about you.'

'You mean, not about *you!*'

'About neither of us.'

'Why not, if it's the truth? If you don't love me, you shouldn't be here at all, and if I don't love you, I shouldn't give you—what I give. Let them talk. It would make me proud.'

This had been months ago. He had resented her reminder of what she had given him. She seemed to be

establishing a claim, and to his distress, he found the claim distasteful.

He never invited her to his apartment. He did not wish to let Muri see them together. With his son he had been frank. He had told the boy about Ruth, man to man.

'I love her. We expect to marry shortly.'

Son, having seen her in last year's musical show, disapproved.

'She isn't your type, Dad. I'd hate to see you make a mistake.'

'You don't know her.'

'Dad, I can recognize in her something I do know! She's good-looking and healthy, and may be, as you say, good-natured and a straight shooter, but at heart I'll bet she likes hamburger sandwiches with onions!'

'She is a brilliant woman, Bob—sincere, vital. I want you to see her with something of my eyes.'

The son had responded with the fearlessness which made the charm of their relation.

'Do you see what she is, old man, or what she was? Aren't you in love with her grand-opera days, when she made her name? If she'd been the real thing she wouldn't have gone downhill, would she? I listened in, that time she sang on the air. It was pretty awful. Now she'd be lucky to get another chance at comic opera. She can't sing, and she can't act.'

He could take the merciless criticism, and be glad of the boy's courage. His own faith in Ruth remained unshaken, or so he told himself. Some day he would announce the wedding and bring her home, but meanwhile his household must not suspect.

The taxi took him up Sixth Avenue, across town at Fifty-ninth, up Central Park West to Seventy-second, then over to her penthouse on the lower Drive. He had urged her to move to the East Side. The view across the river was of course extraordinary, and Riverside, in all reason, ought to be the choice part of town, but he feared it was not. He had always lived on the East Side, rather

far down-town. He laughed at himself for the prejudice, but in his bones there was a conviction that these outlying sections were upstart.

When the coloured maid opened the door with a recognizing smile, he inclined somewhat stiffly.

'Good evening, Elise! Is Miss Romain at home?'

He always asked that question, as though his coming were not prearranged, and he always resented the maid's acceptance of him as a domestic incident. This love of his, the great release of his life, he wished to heaven he could grasp it firmly without introspection!

Elise took his hat and coat. He laid his stick on the hall table, and walked towards where he knew Ruth would have the lights soft and the scene set.

She had been reading a novel, stretched out on the divan, but now she was standing up, waiting for him. The book lay where she had dropped it, the cigarette which she had just put down smoked in the tray. She caught him with her eyes as he came through the door, and his heart gave a little jump, touched afresh by her lavish beauty. She was a natural blonde, a bit Amazonian. She wore Chinese pyjamas, black satin, patterned in gold, and yellow sandals with red heels. Her toes, graceful, by some anatomical exception, protruded from the sandals, and the nails were painted vermilion, to match her fingertips.

His eyes went back to hers, to that glint of uncertainty, almost of fear, which he had learned to look for in her recent welcomes.

'Darling! I've been waiting for you! I thought you'd never come!'

He put his arms around her, and found her lips. Afterwards he did not take away his arms, but stood looking down into her face.

'I've had a crowded day.'

'When you telephoned, I was so disappointed! I thought we were to dine together.'

Before he framed his excuse, he drew a chair up to the

couch where she had been sitting, and lighted a cigarette. As he held the flame to the tobacco, he took occasion to glance at the table opposite, on the other side of the couch, made brilliant by a tall vase of yellow roses, conspicuously fresh. Then he inhaled deeply, and turned to her his grave eyes.

'I couldn't help it. . . . What's the news with you?'

She assumed a gaiety of tone, as though putting worry behind her.

'Oh, I had another talk with the manager, and I went shopping.'

'Any prospects?'

'There was one coat I liked.'

'I mean, for the new show.'

She looked resigned. 'They're not casting yet, but I've little hope. They want someone not so tall.'

'Don't be discouraged. The season's young.'

She crossed one ankle over the other, leaned back for a moment, and stretched her arms lazily over her head.

'That's where you're wrong, my dear! I should have found a job last summer!' She smiled, suddenly frank. 'Darling, I'm an old woman! I shan't land many more engagements. My luck in the theatre is out!'

'Nonsense! See here, I wish you'd go back to grand opera, Ruth, or your concerts. That's where you belong!'

The advice annoyed, as though it were too familiar. 'I can't, Lattimer, I simply can't! That's gone, with my youth. But I don't care, since I've found what I like better.'

He rose to kiss her, and when he leaned over, she made him sit on the couch beside her.

'Where do the flowers come from?' he asked suddenly.

'I bought them myself—there was a man on the street-corner—when I was shopping.'

Apparently there was in the question something to disturb her. That frightened look came back to her eyes.

'Can't we be married soon? This long wait is getting me!'

'You asked that the other night,' he answered slowly, 'and I tried to explain.'

'And I recognized the attempt! If you're tired of me, you don't have to stay.'

The challenge provoked a quick answer, affectionate yet exasperated, as though he had heard it before.

'You know I'm not tired of you—I told you what state my affairs are in. I care more for you every day, Ruth. How can you fail to see it? You bring me companionship, courage, delight in life! I wish to God we had met early!'

She reached over to his hand. 'But why don't you do something now? You spend too much time with your books, you ask too much advice of those ancestors of yours! I was just thinking when you came in.'

'What were you thinking?'

Before she answered, she smiled, but her eyes attacked him a little.

'Perhaps you are too old now to learn to live. I am your only woman—besides your wife.'

'Do you regret that?'

'You might understand women better. You'd know what hell it is to wait every day, every hour—and wonder. It's a little selfish of you, don't you think? You're a clever man. What you want, you get. If you loved me, we'd marry at once. We'd both be happy.'

He kissed her hand, not her lips, and made an excuse of lighting another cigarette. When the match was out he seated himself in the chair, not on the couch beside her. Sudden tears shone in her eyes.

'Ruth! What's the matter?'

'I see the end.'

He waited till she had brushed her eyes with her hand and smiled at him again.

'If the end is to come,' he said, 'it may be because of such words as these.'

She shook her head, slowly and sadly. 'How often has that been said!'



'I don't know how often,' he answered, somewhat sharply. 'I thought we were two people in the world who could play fair with each other, and when we met, I told you the sort of person I am.'

'True!'

'I told you what my boy means to me.'

She sat up straight, combative. 'But he's a man now, Lattimer! He has his own life. You can do nothing more for him. How would I come in the way?'

He met her attack. 'You'll remember, in fairness, I foresaw all this.'

'You mean, I asked you for your love.' She leaned forward. 'Why don't you say it out? I made love to you. I'm glad I did! You hadn't the nerve! You were afraid of life, as you still are. You owe me nothing. I said I didn't believe in marriage. I didn't, at the time. Darling, you shouldn't have been such a dear! I've fallen horribly in love with you now. I can't live without you!'

He struck his hands together in a troubled gesture. 'We shall marry. I promised you that last week.'

She fell back upon the couch again with a laugh. 'Last week? A year ago! Well, I won't speak of it again.'

'You won't have to—not if you trust me. Don't imagine I'm enjoying this delay! I came this evening to tell you I can take a vacation this spring. May or June. I can get away then. Shall we make it our wedding trip?'

'Shall we?' she asked. 'You know I'm ready. It's for you to say. But I don't want to urge you. I wouldn't force any man's hand!'

He rose and kissed her. 'In May then. But no more scenes, Ruth! When you cease to believe in me, even for a second, we lose something which we can't spare.'

'Scenes?'

'You know what I mean! How many evenings now have you been in tears!'

'Well, who begins them? I know what the trouble is—you can't forget the other men! If they didn't haunt you, you'd marry me!'

Pain darkened his face. 'I've promised, we shall marry.'  
'Lattimer, listen to me! None of them meant anything in my life, only you!'

When he was silent, she broke off the sad talk, rose from the couch, went over to the table, and picked up a fashion-magazine.

'I saw a coat here I thought I'd buy. This afternoon I stopped in at Laval's.'

'Is that the best place?'

'The only one. Here's the design. Isn't it smart?'

She put the open page in his hand, and he glanced at it absent-mindedly. She ran her hand through his hair.

'Would you like a Scotch?'

'Not now, thanks.' He was turning the pages among the other advertisements. She came over and stood in front of him.

'What's wrong with me, Lattimer?'

He glanced up at her vivid magnificence. 'What *could* be wrong?'

'Your friends would like me. I can get on with anyone.'

He threw down the magazine, and rose to hold her again, in his arms, and for another moment push away what was coming between them.

## V

In the office next morning—the day of momentous interruptions—Kate Mitchell was opening the mail. A comfortable little office, with a tiny room behind it, where she had her desk and her typewriter, and could watch Marguerite through the glass partition. The mail, however, was always opened on the table where Marguerite worked.

No unusual letters to-day, only the familiar run of bids from queer folk who thought Madame Laval might be induced to show their goods, and the complaints of clients who had changed their mind, and a letter from

a Paris house, pointing out the mistake Laval would make if she did not accept their recent offer. There were also six requests for donations to charity. Kate had them sorted only a second or two before Marguerite came in.

'Good morning, my dear! Has anyone telephoned?'

'These, Madame.' Kate held out to her the yellow note-page with the calls, and summaries of the messages. Marguerite glanced them over.

'Pouf!'

'One man, Madame, declined to give his name. He wished to know if you'd be in this morning.'

Marguerite looked interested. 'You told him?'

'I knew nothing of your plans.'

'He didn't say what he wanted?'

'No, Madame.'

Marguerite sat down at her desk. 'That Maude Gill has brains! Lila's a fool. I wish I could send her off and keep the other!'

'They work well together.'

'I wish they didn't, but it's life. Intelligence simply won't mate with itself. You, my dear, will probably have to support your husband. Here, let me get at these!'

They had almost finished the dictating when Maude Gill knocked. Marguerite glanced up, still holding the last letter in her hand.

'Well, what is it?'

'I thought I ought to report this, Madame. Ruth Romain stopped in and spoke to Lila about a coat.'

'But you said she was here yesterday! What now?'

'She wanted us to know that Mr. Morton, a friend of hers, will select the coat. He doesn't know she knows he's coming—it's to be a surprise for her. We must make sure he selects the right one.'

Marguerite glanced down again at the letter, smiling slightly. 'Her old trick! Who, did you say, is paying now?'

'Lattimer Morton—the lawyer.'

Kate Mitchell turned white, but neither Laval nor Maude noticed. Marguerite was getting back to her correspondence, with raised eyebrows and lips pursed. 'She's rising! But Lila can't deal with him—you see to it.'

Maude started to go. 'Don't let it fall through!' called Marguerite after her. 'I'm here, if necessary. What coat does she want?'

'That's the trouble, Madame, the flashy one.'

Marguerite laughed. 'And I was thinking of withdrawing it!'

When she began to dictate again, Kate sat motionless, pencil in hand. Glancing up, the woman saw her face.

'What's wrong with you, child?' Then she answered herself, and leaned back in her chair. 'Ah! A lawyer whose name I'd know if I heard it! You have just discovered something, is it not?'

Kate drew herself together. 'He's Bob's father.'

'And you didn't know of this?'

'I don't believe it! He's not that sort of man! He wouldn't buy her clothes, or let her come here and talk about him!'

'And select such a coat! But no doubt he fell in love with something besides her taste. She has much else. Have you ever met him?'

'No, Madame.'

'Have you seen her?'

'No.'

'She's what a good man might be mad about, for a while. She's very strong where some of the best women are weak. He's probably young.'

'He's nearly fifty!'

'In years, my dear.'

She saw the unhappy look in Kate's eyes. 'No doubt he's a fine man, and you mustn't worry. As a matter of fact, we are imagining trouble. You see? You and I have evil minds!'

Kate would have answered this encouragement, which

for all its affection sounded cautious, but Maude came again to the door with a card in her hand.

'A gentleman wishes to speak with you.'

Marguerite, glancing at the name, stiffened, angry and intense. Kate had never before seen her so wrought. The poise with which she had contemplated Mr. Morton's probable character, melted away.

'Impossible! Not now, nor any other time! Never bring me this card again, Maude! I'm not in!'

Maude looked worried. 'He knows you are, Madame. He spoke to Lila first, and she had no idea you . . .'

'No idea? She *would* have none! If she makes that blunder again, she goes! Kate, you may do the letters, and take the telephone-calls!'

Gathering up her papers, Kate withdrew to the small recess at the end of the office, behind the glass partition, where she had her desk. To work in that corner, she must turn on the electric light. Her chair was just high enough for the partition where the glass began. In a sense, of course, it wouldn't be honourable to listen in. In a sense! She left the door open, an invisible crack, and began typing. In between pages, of course, she would pause.

Marguerite, as soon as Kate had retired, put her hand to her hair, straightened a fold in her gown, and stood waiting with her eye on the door, till Maude ushered in a man of a slightly exotic appearance, like Marguerite herself—dark, ivory-skinned, tall and well built, but not athletic. He was handsomely dressed, with an assumption of the out-of-door style. A corner of his handkerchief was pulled up to show above the pocket. His shoes were graceful rather than durable. They had cloth tops. You would have expected him to bend sharply at the waist and kiss Marguerite's hand. You liked a certain kindliness in his eyes, an openness which surprised. Kate, inspecting through the partition, thought the face did not go with the clothes.

When Maude closed the door behind him, he looked steadily at Laval, and let her speak first.

'What does this mean?'

'I have come back!'

'I forbade it.'

'I tried to obey your wish, Marguerite, but could not. May I sit down?'

He chose one of the office chairs, and was about to light a long cigarette, with holder attached, but when he saw she was still standing, he got up again and began to plead.

'Are you not convinced? I followed you to this country! When you sent me away, I returned! For a second time I return—because I must!'

'You only hurt me—you hurt us both!'

'For that, I am sorry, but there is no choice!'

She sank into the chair at her desk, and the man came over and stood in front of her. She was surrendering a little, Kate feared. No, she was merely strengthening herself for the next manœuvre.

'Why waste your life on me? Why not admit what we are, each of us? If I could have lost myself in you, I should have been happy. I liked you.'

'You *loved* me!'

'Perhaps.'

'You *know* you loved me!'

She smiled patiently. 'Would you have had me otherwise? When the love came to an end, I grieved as deeply as you!'

'But my love did *not* end! That is why I am here!'

For a moment, while they looked at each other, Kate tapped on the machine, to fill the interval.

'There will be no contest of our wills,' Marguerite said, with a certain dignity, and a certain regret. 'I shall give no more commands. This time I shall ask a favour, and unless you are greatly changed, you will grant it. Your love for me, I do not doubt. I would return it, if I could, but since happiness between us was not to be . . .'

'We *were* happy!'

'Then, since our happiness ended too soon, leave me

the memory! If you insist on coming here, you will have your way, but I ask you not to come. I throw myself on your mercy, or, if you prefer, on your love.'

'Leave you the memory? Then you, like me, remember?'

She answered firmly, yet not unkindly. 'I take back the words! Let me forget!'

He turned petulant. 'You have found some other man?'

'No.'

'Then you *wish* to find another—my devotion to you gets in the way!'

She rose, took his hand, led him towards the door.

'Go now, before you say what is not yourself! You are an admirable man, you are kind, but I could not love you. That is all! Don't come again!'

He took his hat. 'I agree to nothing, Marguerite! When I need you too much to stay away, I shall come! At least you will let me look at you, you will give me your voice on the telephone!'

'Not that! Nothing! We are through!'

He bowed. 'I doubt it! I love you very much!'

Though this parting tribute might seem rare compliment, the woman did not mistake his meaning. He had not yet surrendered. For a moment, after he left, she sat gazing upon the table-top, perplexed, but when Kate brought the letters in for signing, she was once more imperturbable.

One other caller upset the morning. Kate planned at the first convenient moment to ask Maude what name was on that card. But when she was free to slip into the show-room, the girls were busy with a stoutish gentleman, thin-haired and round-faced, a blond. His moustaches were fiercely waxed, probably because he was short. He was calling for gowns and coats, and Maude was helping Lila carry them out, but nothing pleased him. Not that he looked displeased, but he didn't buy.

'What's wrong?' she whispered, as Maude put another garment away.

'He saw Lila through the window, and he's looking for more of her.'

Their whispering disturbed him. 'I'll call again, Miss Braun, when I can make a careful selection. Thank you! Good morning, ladies!'

As he went out of the door, Maude pounced on Lila. 'How'd he know your name?'

'He asked, when you talked with Miss Mitchell.'

'I suppose he got your address, too, or does he want you to take a box at the post office? Good morning, ladies! I'll call again! Gawd, they make me sick!'

Kate found it impossible to ask the name of the man who had talked with Madame Laval.

## VI

In his room in the Harvard dormitory, Robert Morton was writing a letter. He worked with his coat off, and from time to time he stopped to light the pipe which his absorption had permitted to go out. You could recognize his father in him, with certain variations not to be explained by the boy's youth. He had the same powerful frame, the same large features, the same hints of good-nature about the mouth and the eyes, but he had a different kind of assurance. With the father it was the inspiration of ancestors and the benefit of experience. With the son it was inborn simplicity and directness. Action would come easy to him. His decisions might be mistakes, but they would not be postponed.

From the state of his desk you judged he was a hard worker. Textbooks on the law lay open before him, with his note-book and a mass of detached papers, on which he had been scribbling. Evidently he had paused for recreation. The letter he was rapidly lining out was, you guessed, a pleasure to write.

'I like this old place more and more. History leaps at you from every doorway, from every brick. A kind of immunity sets up, and we all become very advanced



thinkers. At Princeton we put up buildings to make us seem old. Same thing down at Yale. I don't like to go back on my Alma Mater, but there's something stimulating in this campus, where the past is even thicker than it's long, and in order not to drown in it, you become up to date.

'How's the job? Do you still worship your mysterious *bosseuse*? I'm thinking of running off for a week-end soon—my industry deserves a reward.

'Which will be several hundred kisses from you, and as minor entertainment, a visit to your shop. No longer shall I obey your command to keep out of sight! I have decided—woman, please note that *I* have decided—to end the romantic secrecy which you enjoin! When you present me to the sublimated dressmaker, I will lift your left hand gently, so that her eye may fall on a stupendous engagement ring, a regular head-light. Don't protest! The ring is ordered, my meagre estate is already in hock to pay for it, and I am to stop and pick it up on my way to you.

'I hate to think of waiting two more years! If you insist, it's better to be engaged than to be nondescript, but once I get that ring on your finger, I believe I shall persuade you! It won't cramp my life in the slightest. Why shouldn't we have our love while we're young? My father married no older than I. Do you think I prove he was over-hasty?

'Kate, my darling, if you can read between the lines, I want to marry you! I never was good at writing, but I'll say it other ways!'

He leaned back in his chair and read it over, took up his pen again to correct a word, folded and sealed it, put on a stamp, and with some care wrote the address. For several minutes he sat smoking hard, lost in thoughts which brought happy lights across his face. In the yard a mellow-toned clock sounded the hour. He pulled his textbook towards him, and got back to work.

## VII

When Lattimer Morton came to the door of Laval's shop, Paul touched his cap in a salute which was more than perfunctory. At first sight he liked the tall, rangy man.

'Fine weather, sir!'

Morton paused to enjoy the dark face and the expansive smile.

'Rotten weather, to be precise! It will rain again any minute!'

'Yes, sir, but the interstices is fine!'

Morton laughed and went in. Maude and Lila were busy at the moment, each with a customer. Lila saw him first, and wished she were free, but her customer was an anchor. Maude, more adroit, disentangled herself.

'If you'll take a seat, sir.'

'No hurry.'

He stood there, hat in hand, leaning on his cane, half-humorously watching the two girls bring out garments and try persuasion. Lila noticed that he wore a light overcoat, neatly buttoned, a low collar which made his long head even more rangy. Stylish, but used to himself, she reflected. Maude, who memorized the Sunday roto-gravure, recognized him.

Lila's customer left first. Her lucky day!

'Let me look at some coats,' he said.

'Yes, sir. Any particular style?'

'You ought to know, better than I!'

Lila tried him with a few examples.

'She is rather tall,' he objected.

'If you could tell me her size, sir . . .'

'Thirty-eight.'

'Oh, these wouldn't be nearly large enough.' She took them away, and brought out a noble fur.

He was pleased. 'Ah, that's about what I want!'

Lila chattered glibly. 'It's one of our best models. Completely simple, sir—almost severe—but it's con-

sidered the best taste for tall women, if they can carry it off. I mean, if they're beautiful—as I'm sure this lady is.'

Lattimer smiled. 'That coat will do.'

'There's another,' Lila recalled, 'of the same kind, but even better, perhaps. I'll bring it.'

Maude, making frantic efforts to dispose of her customer, worked herself loose just as Lila went for the second coat.

'Idiot!' she whispered. 'That's Ruth Romain's man! You're showing the wrong goods!'

She herself brought out the arresting thing which Ruth had selected—a light-coloured spotted animal, straight from the menagerie.

'Wouldn't you prefer this, Mr. Morton?'

He was astonished at the name, but at the coat more.

'Young woman, you may put that violence away! I do *not* prefer it!'

'The lady might, Mr. Morton! Of course, it's only for a certain type, but a woman of charm and vivacity—it's a favourite with that type, Mr. Morton!'

'I'll take your word for it—it doesn't concern me!'

Maude pleaded. 'If you don't mind my saying so, Mr. Morton, you're not the one who has to wear the coat.'

'Thank God!'

'I mean, if you're giving Mrs. Morton a surprise, of course you want to pick out something she'll like. Why don't you let us send this on approval, and then, of course, if she really does prefer something else . . .'

'The person who is to wear the coat would not choose that theatrical skin! This other is what I want! Yes, this new model is even finer.'

He turned to Lila, sheepishly bringing up a magnificent dark fur.

'That one, if you please—if it's the right size!'

Maude cut in desperately. 'Show him the others, Lila! The whole line!'

Recognizing the hint, Lila delayed in a slow search

for sizes and styles, while Maude hurried to Laval's office.

'He's here now, Madame, and we can't make him take the one Ruth Romain picked out!'

'Who?' Remembering, she smiled, with a quick glance at Kate. 'Oh—Mr. Morton!'

She followed Maude back to the show-room.

'This is Madame Laval,' explained Maude.

Morton bowed in silence, but with his eyes on the dark woman.

'Thank you for coming in,' she said. 'I hope you find what you wish?'

'I'm more than delighted. I shall take this'—pointing to the coat the girls had tried to defend him from.

'We pride ourselves,' said Laval, 'on the range of our stock. It's selected for all tastes. Maude, have you shown Mr. Morton that rather daring model?'

He answered sharply. 'I've seen it!'

'Shall we send it, at least on approval? Certain women would select it from all we have.'

'I know one who would not!'

He was surprised at the smile Laval gave him.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Morton, but she would!'

'And I beg yours, but she would *not!*'

Maude and Lila were visibly disturbed, but Laval enjoyed the predicament Ruth had got them into.

'It's not my affair, Mr. Morton, you must decide as you think best, but I shall be sorry if your only visit to my shop results in a disappointment for you.'

The solicitude in her voice was flattering.

'Madame Laval, would you yourself wear that coat?'

'I would not—but she would.'

'You don't know her.'

'Mr. Morton, I am so sure, I risk seeming impertinent! That coat, which I would not myself wear, is the one coat she will thank you for giving her!'

He bowed a little stiffly. These foreign women, spoiled by American success, certainly do become autocratic!

'Madame, I will take what I myself prefer!'

He reached in his pocket, and drew out cheque-book and fountain-pen.

'Rather than buy the wrong coat,' she protested, 'please buy nothing! I must consider the good-will of the ladies who wear my things! They must not be dissatisfied!'

He held the fountain-pen poised. 'I never heard such nonsense in my life!'

She smiled. 'Nor I!'

'Then why be so positive?'

'Shall I tell you?'

'I wish you would!'

'I cannot tell you here.'

He was interested. 'Where, then?'

For a second she hesitated.

'If you will step into my office . . .'

When they entered, Kate picked up her papers and slipped out past them, into the show-room, as far as possible from what they might say.

Laval stood by her table. When she offered him a chair, he declined.

'Madame, you know nothing about the woman for whom I am buying this coat! Your attitude is extraordinary!'

'But I *do* know about her—many things! To live at all I must read character every day.'

'Not every character, Madame!'

'Yes, Mr. Morton, every character. They are much alike. Now that I have seen you, I know why she would prefer one kind of coat, and you another.'

He smiled back. 'You assume a good deal!'

'Shall I prove it? The coat you chose was the right one for a person of taste. You have taste. But the coat I suggested is the right one for the lady, who, in spite of her charm, has no taste at all!'

'How can you tell?'

'If she had taste, you would not give her a coat.'

'That, Madame, is absurd!'

'If she had taste, she would not have asked you for it.'

'She didn't ask!'

He was beginning to lose himself in these brilliant guesses of hers, and his face could not hide his interest. This time, when she motioned him again to the chair, he sat down.

'May I go deeper?' she asked, resting her elbows on the table. 'You were in love with her.'

His impulse was to correct the tense, but he stopped.

'Am I right so far?'

'Proceed, Madame!'

'You *were* in love, but you are beginning not to be. You do not yet admit the change. This gift, you hope, will prove how much you still care, yet it is a signal that her moment is gone.'

'How can you know that?' he exclaimed, off his guard.

'It is life. We make splendid gifts at the end.' She laughed. 'I gave one man a Rolls-Royce!'

He was shocked. 'What has this to do with the choice of coats?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'We use gifts when there is need of them. Since you thought of a coat, she must like coats. You would give her what she wants, but since you wish to give anything at all, there must be a discord between you. I believe it is the style of the coat. You have taste. I conclude she has none.'

He examined the argument.

'Even if you see into character, why should your sales-girls share the talent? They tried to make me take that spotted outrage!'

She made a gesture with her hands, palms up. 'They know nothing of character, those two. They show all styles.'

She stared at him, he met her eye, she as though unwilling to let him go, he fascinated by what she had said. Suddenly she rose.

'Forgive me, Mr. Morton! Take the coat you prefer!'

I think she will be angry, but perhaps not. I did my best for you, yet I may be wrong. I am not God.'

She followed him to the show-room where Kate was talking nervously with Maude and Lila, and shoulder to shoulder with her secretary, she waited while he drew his cheque. When he gave the name and address of Ruth Romain, she put her arm affectionately around the girl's waist.

### VIII

Ruth Romain was sitting at her telephone. Across the couch in her living-room lay the coat, just taken from its box.

'But I want to speak to Madame Laval herself. . . . Yes, it's important.'

As she sat waiting, the toe of her slipper tapped impatiently.

'Oh, it's you! See here, I told your girls what coat I wanted! You knew it? . . . Then why did I get this thing? I'm not a dowager yet. . . . Oh, he did, did he? Well, I can arrange that with him all right. You send up the right one, and take this mistake back. . . . What? You advise me *not* to?'

She leaned closer to the telephone to let her anger come through.

'Who's buying this coat, anyway? . . . See here, Madame Laval, I consider that extremely impertinent! . . . *He's* buying it, is he? Listen to me, you send up that coat!'

Her tone became dignified with astonishment.

'You *decline* to do so? Well, Madame Laval, you've made your last sale to me, I can tell you! . . . Oh, don't worry at all. I'm not inconvenienced in the least! Not *-in-the-least!*'

She put down the receiver, but kept her hand on it, while she reflected. The wrath which she had poured on Laval, died quickly. She was calm again, thinking her way through. She lifted the receiver once more and began to dial.

'Miss Romain to speak to Mr. Morton. . . . Yes, it's important. He'll say it is. . . . Please interrupt him!'

She had to be patient a minute before he came.

'Darling, it is here! How dear of you to think of it! Of course I adore it! You don't want to take me out to tea in it, do you, this afternoon? . . . Of course, I supposed you couldn't. But you'll dine with me. Please don't say no—you must! I want to thank you. . . . Well, tell them you've changed your mind and can't come. . . . Yes, you can—if you could give me this lovely present, you can manage to come. . . . That's splendid! Can't you get here before eight? . . . Well, as soon as you can. Bye-bye, dear!'

She stood looking at the coat, lifted it up, turned it around, slipped it on, walked up and down, glancing over her shoulder to guess the effect, vanished for a moment into her bedroom to turn before the long mirror, then summoned Elise.

'Hang that coat up, will you? And save the box!'

## IX

Lila was putting on her hat, in front of the mirror, leaving to Maude the labours of closing shop.

'Say, what's the hurry? Look at those things on the chair behind you! You gotta pick 'em up!'

Lila hurried two wraps and a coat into the closet. 'I've a date.'

Maude came over to look at her. 'Who is he?'

'Oh, a feller I met!'

The evasion was for Maude a clear sign of danger. 'Butter and egg?'

Lila faced her, nervously bold. 'He's my affair!'

'He is, is he? You sap!'

She went back to her work, pretending no further interest, though Lila, now dressed for the street, hung around, embarrassed.

'Say, Maude, I was going to ask you a favour.'

'What?'



'If my folks want to know where I was to-night, tell 'em I had supper with you!'

Maude sniffed. 'Bad as that, eh?'

'Bad nothing! You know how they'd make me stick home!'

With a quick change of approach, Maude became confidential. 'Who is he, kid?'

'The one who didn't buy a coat—you know—he asked my name.'

'Oh, the waxed moustache!'

'You needn't get funny! He's important, he owns a factory in Bridgeport—or part of it.'

'The smoke, probably!'

'Say, Maude, will you speak to my folks?'

'No, I won't. You do your own fibbing!'

'Gee, but you're mean! You just wait!'

She was half-way through the door when Maude called her back.

'What does he want?'

'He's taking me to a night-club, to dance.'

'That's what he calls it, eh?'

'You shut up! He's on the square!'

'What time you coming home?'

'Eleven, maybe.'

'No, you're coming to my house at ten-thirty, so I can have a look at him, and then I'll walk you home and give you a character.'

'Ten-thirty's too soon!'

Maude was firm. 'At ten thirty-five I start for your folks, and if you ain't by my side, I'll tell 'em to send for the fire-department!'

Lila turned on her heel, imitating Lenore Ulric, and slammed the door.

## X

When Lattimer entered his apartment at five-thirty that afternoon, he found his son stretched out in the easy-chair of the little study, with his pipe in his mouth, reading a book.

'Hello, old man!'

'Well! Where did you come from?'

They shook hands affectionately the hands lingering in each other.

'What are you down for—a play, or some music?'

Bob sank his thumbs comfortably in his waistcoat-pockets.

'Here's where you get the surprise of your life! I'm announcing my engagement. Thought you'd like to hear it first.'

His father stared a moment, then thrust out his hand again without a word. The boy was pleased.

'Thanks a lot! You'll like her the moment you see her.'

His father sat on the edge of the study table, and looked down at him, where he had gone back to the easy-chair and the pipe.

'I expect to like her, and I want to see her. Who is she?'

'Kate Mitchell.'

'Which Mitchell?'

'None you ever heard of, I guess, but awfully good family. Her father's dead. They're rather poor now. She supports her mother.'

'She works?'

'Yes—stenographer.'

Morton took each layer of news with court-room steadiness.

'You met at Cambridge or in Boston?'

'Oh, here in New York. I've known her some time.'

His father smiled. 'You have the family trick of keeping a secret.'

'Well, no use talking till you know where you stand. She was afraid it might be a flash in the pan, and I'd get tired of her.'

Morton raised his eyebrows. 'So wise as that?'

'She wasn't sure you'd like it. She feared you'd think she was making up to my money.'

Morton smiled again. 'Well, to be frank, is she?'

The boy turned grave. 'No, sir! That's one thing she's not!'

The older man nodded sympathetically, as though to encourage the witness. 'Even if she were, son, even if I didn't believe in her, I'd stand by you.'

Bob raised himself to a more energetic position in the chair.

'I want you to be in it, from the start. We've always been pretty close. I've told you everything I ever did . . .'

'Except this getting engaged.'

'Well, of course! But I tell you now, the moment it's a fact. And you've been frank with me, too. I want to keep that.'

The praise of his frankness made Morton draw his lips tight.

'Why don't you bring her here to-morrow for dinner?'

'How about to-night?'

His father looked unhappy. 'To-night I'm engaged.'

'Oh, all right. I was just impatient to show her off. To-morrow will be fine.'

Morton hesitated a moment. 'Bring her here to-night, too. Muri can get you up something.'

Bob shook his head. 'I want you, the first time she comes. I'll take her somewhere else to-night. Might as well dress now.'

He hummed a song as he went off to his room, and with less lightness of heart Morton prepared for the evening. As he shaved, took his shower, got into his dinner-coat, the pleasant lines in the rugged face were drawn. Several times he paused and stared, wide-eyed, at some object in the room, then he would rouse himself and proceed.

Bob, dressed first, called a cheery good-bye and slammed the front-door. Lattimer followed twenty minutes later, Muri bringing him, as usual, his hat and coat and his evening stick. A taxi—not his own car—took the route across the Park to the penthouse on Riverside Drive. Since he was bidden for dinner, he did not ask Elise if Miss Romain was at home.

She was standing in the centre of the living-room to greet him, wearing a dark green, cut to a bold depth.

Over the back of the couch the fur-coat was resting. This time there were no flowers on the table. He thought he saw in her face unalloyed joy.

'Nothing could be so wonderful!' she exclaimed.

'I hoped you'd like it.'

'You, not the coat, dear! *You* are wonderful!'

She had her arms around his neck, and was pulling down his head for his lips.

'You're the only man who would think of a thing so lovely! It's a dream of a coat!'

He picked up the garment. 'Let's see it on you.'

The dark fur transformed her. The sombre, soft collar framing her skin and her shining eyes, made them seem at once tender and regal. For the moment she looked to him as he had thought her to be, and his pleasure made him radiant. She walked up and down the room once or twice, to humour him, then took off the coat and laid it down with an air of having got through a task, then remembered her gratitude and kissed him once more. Elise interrupted the embrace, bringing in the table to spread the dinner.

He told her of Bob's engagement, and quite sincerely she indicated her satisfaction. The boy now, she said, would form his own world, as became his years. Kate Mitchell she had never heard of, but the girl must be desirable, if Lattimer's son loved her. She might have pressed again the theme of marriage, since the boy was engaged and would soon go to a home of his own, but she avoided the subject, thereby making him grateful, and reviving his early admiration of her good sense.

Half-way through the meal, when he referred to the coat, she left the table and put it on again, for his benefit. His pleasure was boyish.

'Anyone could see,' she laughed, 'you haven't given furs to many women. It's a new experience with you, isn't it?'

The remark was unlucky. In some form she had made it many times. He did not resent its truth, as it referred to himself, but when she smiled at him for his inexperience

with women, he could not forget—she compelled him to remember—her experience with other men, perhaps with many other men. It was a subject he would gladly have ignored.

‘Does my ignorance,’ he asked, ‘appear in what I chose?’

‘It’s a beautiful coat,’ she assured him, resuming her place at the table.

‘Would you have chosen a different one?’

She didn’t permit herself to seize too eagerly the handle his question gave her.

‘If I were buying it myself, I’d choose nothing so rich. You’re a darling!’

He was infinitely relieved. For a moment an old confidence returned.

‘That vacation I spoke of the other evening, which we might use as an opportunity for a wedding trip . . .’

‘It has to be postponed, I suppose!’

He tried not to be irritated. ‘I was going to tell you, we may marry still earlier. Perhaps in April, or even March.’

She flung her arms around him, then suddenly withdrew.

‘Why don’t you kiss me, Lattimer? You’re just sitting there letting me kiss you!’

‘If you want to know,’ he replied, with a chilly kind of sadness, ‘that remark of yours, taking it for granted that our wedding must be postponed, hurt me. If you had not said that, it was I who would have done the kissing!’

She put her arms around him again. ‘I’m sorry, dear! I just say those things, but they don’t mean a thing! Remember, I’ve been waiting a long time, but I can be patient, just so we love each other!’

Now he kissed her more to her satisfaction, and they got safely through the dinner, till Elise brought coffee, and supposing the evening out of danger, Ruth spoke again of the coat.

‘Don’t you think it makes me look a little old?’

‘Absurd! It makes you look like a duchess!’

‘Perhaps that’s what I mean. It’s a little stuffy, don’t you think?’

She could not guess what lay behind the astonishment in his eyes. She thought she was merely dealing with a man who plumed himself on his taste—and all the while he was listening to Laval, as though she were present in the room, watching her prophecy, point by point, fulfilled.

‘Lattimer dear, I think it’s a marvellous coat! Everything you give me is perfect! But you asked what I’d select for myself. I’d rather *you* bought it, to surprise me this way, but if I had been choosing it—it’s the same with any woman—she’d pick out something which suits her personality.’

The lines in his face turned grim. ‘I agree with that principle! We should have only what belongs to us! I don’t want you to wear a coat which does not harmonize with your personality.’

She still thought there was nothing but wounded pride.

‘I knew you’d see it, Lattimer. I was thinking . . .’ She paused for him to inquire into the nature of her thoughts, but he kept relentless silence. ‘Of course I’d rather wear this particular one, since it was your choice . . .’ His fixed attention pushed her on. ‘But just as a practical matter, don’t you think I’d better exchange it?’

‘For what?’

‘Oh, something a little more individual, perhaps a bolder colour.’

His voice was steady as he fed temptation to the witness. ‘Laval had several coats—leopard things, or tiger, or zebra, or God-knows-what.’

Hopefully she embraced the temptation. ‘They’re smart, Lattimer! Can’t you just see me in one?’

He raised his hands in an intense gesture, then let them fall limp on the arms of his chair. ‘If that’s your temperament, if that’s what you are, you ought to wear it.’

She recognized the first warning in the ‘if’. ‘If that’s what you are!’

‘Lattimer darling! I adore the coat you chose for me! Please understand me!’

He rose from the chair, paced across the room and back

again, stood in front of her. She was frightened now. 'I *do* understand you,' he said, 'and at last I understand myself!'

Since it had happened to her before, she could recognize the symptoms. Though she turned a little white, she had her own kind of courage, and spoke firmly.

'If you're to leave me, you will anyway, so be frank! Run along, if you must! I didn't believe this talk about a vacation and getting married. We could have married any time these four years!'

He turned on her in a fury which she mistook for anger, but it was the writhing of his own pain.

'I wanted to marry you, I wanted to love you always, but I couldn't make you understand what it was I loved! Now I know why I failed!'

'Why did you?'

For a second he put his hand to his forehead and drew it down across one eye.

'What belongs to your personality! I bought that coat for the woman I loved. You insist on proving that woman is not you.'

For a moment she went to pieces. 'My God, Lattimer! Don't break my heart for a silly thing like that! Haven't we been childish! Come here, dear, sit down beside me! I want to tell you something!'

But at that moment body, hands, and lips were not the language he could accept. He walked out into the hall and found his hat and coat.

'Is it good-bye?' she asked.

'I'm afraid it is.' His voice was not so quiet as hers. From their faces you would have guessed that he, not she, was in agony. 'I'm glad you are yourself, even in a small matter. I'd like to be real, too!'

She held out her hand. 'If you don't love me any more, it's all right! *I* haven't changed. I should have been yours always. I'm glad I was yours for the little time you did want me! Good luck to the other woman, whoever she is!'

He was shaken with unexpected self-knowledge, and with an impulse towards self-defence. 'I haven't changed

either, Ruth! That's the strange thing! I find myself still loving—what I loved before!

Then he turned, opened the door, and hurried out, afraid to trust himself a moment longer.

## XI

Maude Gill was sewing at the side of the parlour, where she had the lamp on a small table. Her brother Alfred had asked more than once why the lamp should not be in the middle of the floor, as is the way with civilized people. When she answered that the disappearing bed came out of the opposite side of the wall, and you'd have to move the furniture twice a day, he had offered to undertake this labour for the sake of a better appearance in the home, and she had said all right, move it if you want to. After that the light had stayed against the wall.

He slept in the authentic bedroom, which was distinguished from the parlour by being even smaller. His bed, too, came out of the wall. For this contrivance, which gave you space to move around in by day, an extra rent was charged. They paid forty dollars monthly. When you cut it in half it wasn't so bad.

There was also a section of the apartment known as the hall. You had to set foot in it to reach the bedroom, the bathroom, or the kitchenette. Maude and Alfred ate in the parlour, with the bed up.

He was dark-eyed and dark-haired, like her, but he did not share her tendency to be stout. A rather smart youth, of thirty or more, shipping clerk for one of the furriers. A lucky remark in that wholesale establishment, passed on by him to Maude, had given her the advance inkling that Laval was to open a shop.

This evening he had pulled his bed down from the wall, and with coat and waistcoat removed, had been stretched on it, finishing the newspaper and pushing further into the mystery story from the circulating library. Now he got up and stood with his hands on his hips, lazily yawning at the parlour door.



'Guess I'll turn in.'

'Any beer on the ice?' asked Maude, without lifting her eyes from her work.

'Sure!' He consulted the ice-box. 'Want some?'

'How many bottles?'

He looked again. 'Five.'

'That'll be enough.'

He became wide awake. 'Enough for what?'

'We're having company.'

For a moment he looked discouraged. 'Then I can't go to bed!'

'Oh, they won't stay long. Lila's out with a beau, and I told her to drop in at ten-thirty.'

He went back to his room and consulted his watch. 'It's only ten.'

'Well, take a nap, and I'll wake you when they come.'

He retired to his book, good-natured, as always, with her. They had no other relatives. She often reflected that in this respect they were unique in the Second Avenue district around St. Mark's. Other families spawned, but they two were isolated, and so far of a consistent loneliness. Some day Alfred would marry, and she would be an aunt, but she saw no prospect of getting herself a beau. She was too busy, and besides, nothing exciting had come along, nothing so nice as Alfred.

Already she was a little penitent about Lila. The girl was a fool to take up with strange men, but of course she was old enough to make a mistake if she wanted to, and it had been rather high-handed to hold the family over her as a threat. Maude wouldn't give her away, no matter what she did. Lila, of course, knew that. Probably she wouldn't show up at ten-thirty. The man wouldn't let her. The beer was only in case.

But at ten-thirty-two Lila climbed the stairs sulkily, and knocked at the door, with Mr. George Stringer, of Bridgeport, gazing curiously over her shoulder. Maude welcomed them with well-acted delight.

'Darling, I'm so glad you've come! Alfred and I were hoping you'd drop in. Glad to see you, Mr. . . .'

'Stringer,' said the owner of the name.

'Oh, Alfred!' called Maude. 'Come in and say hello, and bring the beer!'

Mr. Stringer's hair was thinner, it seemed, his face rounder, than when he called at the shop. His waxed moustache drooped slightly, but his manners were stiff.

'I don't think I want beer,' he announced.

'We've been drinking champagne,' explained Lila.

'My goodness!'

Alfred came out with his coat on. 'Who's been drinking champagne?'

'They have—Lila and Mr. Stringer. Look at them while the effect is fresh. My brother, Mr. Stringer. Sit down, won't you?'

'I don't think I'll sit down,' said Mr. Stringer. 'Lila swore she had to be home at ten-thirty, but I didn't believe her, and I was right. This ain't her home!'

'It is, almost,' explained Maude. 'But she did mean where she sleeps. She and I have a date there with her parents in five minutes. Have a glass of beer before you run along.'

Though Lila's truthfulness was vindicated, Mr. Stringer's irritation continued. 'We hadn't started the evening yet!'

'Did she walk out on you?' asked Maude, very friendly. 'You picked the wrong girl, Mr. Stringer. She does that! She's young, and if you give her champagne, she becomes homesick. You ought to have asked me.'

Mr. Stringer looked at her, and saw something in the idea. Her eyes and her hair were as black as Lila's, and if you liked white skin, there was much more of it on Maude. She made her teeth flash up at him, in what she and he both considered a bewitching smile.

'Be a sport, Mr. Stringer! Sit down and have some beer! Alfred, hurry with the Schlitz!'

Mr. Stringer removed his coat, folded it, and laid it with his hat on the floor, along the wall, in token that he had surrendered, would sit down, and would condescend to vulgar refreshment even after champagne.

'She said she was going out this evening with me,' he complained, 'and I expected to take her to a real place.'

'Couldn't you?' asked Maude, sympathetically.

'There wasn't time to get warmed up!'

'Where'd you go?'

'The Hollywood.'

'Well,' reflected Maude, 'I haven't been myself, but I understand you can have quite a time there.'

'You've never been?' Mr. Stringer considered her with an eye of pity. Lila, watching his face, was not pleased.

'Don't you believe her, she's been around a lot!'

'Not to the Hollywood—not yet. I want Alfred to take me to the Casino de Paree.'

Mr. Stringer brightened. 'They say that's the last word.'

Alfred came in with the beer and pretzels, set the tray down on Maude's sewing-table, and began to uncap the bottles.

'Yeah!' he jeered, 'that's what happens to a perfectly steady woman, who walks the straight and narrow into middle age, then all of a sudden she hears of a chorus with no clothes on, and must see it. I'm not going to help her corrupt herself.'

'I like your spirit,' said Mr. Stringer, taking his beer slowly but with relish, and glancing over the foam at the perfectly steady woman. 'That's the way I feel—keep up with what's going on.'

Maude tried her smile on him again. 'It broadens the mind.'

Lila, exasperated, set up a diversion by stepping over to Alfred and whispering in his ear. He leaned down somewhat unwillingly with a bottle in his left hand and the opener in his right.

'What're you two whispering about? It ain't polite.'

'You go on talking to Mr. Stringer! Alfred and I've got a secret.'

'The next time I come to New York,' said Mr. Stringer confidentially, 'suppose you and I go to the Casino de Paree.'

'How's that?' asked Lila sharply, coming out of her conference.

'I mean, you and her both. We might all go—all four.'

'Not me,' protested Alfred. 'I'm a modest man.'

'Ah, don't crab,' advised Maude. 'All four. When d'you expect to come to New York again, Mr. Stringer?'

'I might make it soon. Let's see . . .' He consulted his date-book. 'No, not this week.'

'Pshaw!' said Maude. 'I'm impatient!'

'I'll tell you what,' said Mr. Stringer. 'I'll let you know as soon as I get back to Bridgeport. You put your name and address right here.'

He handed her his little book and pencil. While she wrote, Lila leaned over her shoulder. 'Don't you want my name and address, too?'

'Sure!' he said generously. 'Put 'em both in! And I might as well leave you my card, while I'm about it.' He took a pack from his vest-pocket, and dealt one to each of the girls, with a third to Alfred.

Maude ran her finger over the card, to see if it was engraved.

It was. 'Make it soon,' she urged.

## XII

'Muri, that loneliness you complained of will be interrupted to-night. Two guests for dinner.'

Muri said his happiness with smiles and bows. 'Very nice, Mr. Morton. Two guests. All right.'

'Well, the question is, what shall we feed them?'

It was not his habit to examine the menu in advance. If he liked it, he would say so afterwards.

'Soup, Mr. Morton, if you please, steak, or would you prefer chicken?'

'My son will be here, and a young lady, a friend of his. We must do our best. They can find steak or chicken anywhere.'

Muri bowed.

'You might get flowers for the table, but none for the room—we've outgrown conservatories!'

Muri bowed again.

'What dessert?'

'Ice-cream, perhaps, Mr. Morton?'

Lattimer pretended horror. '*That's* what you're going to do to me, is it? Ice-cream, eh?'

Muri smiled and waited for light.

'There's ice-cream in railroad cars and in airplanes! You can't escape ice-cream, in hell or heaven! Be original, for once!'

Muri retired to his kitchen to devise miracles, and Lattimer lingered for a moment pretending to read the morning papers. His own affairs, however, came between him and the page—his troubled parting with Ruth, his preparations to meet his future daughter-in-law. If he asked Muri about the meal, it was for the boy's sake, of course.

Strange that he should care what this unknown girl thought of his housekeeping! He wished her to admire whatever had produced Bob.

This self-consciousness caused him some dismay. Until he met Ruth, surely he had been at one with himself—perhaps somewhat repressed, somewhat thwarted by life, perhaps inexperienced, emotionally undeveloped, as Ruth liked to say when she teased him, but still in a condition of harmony. When he met her, however, the accord had to be extended to another nature. A difficult extension, as he had learned. These recent years had been for both an unhappy compromise. Now he pronounced judgement upon himself by giving thought to Muri's table-setting. The girl his boy had chosen might find out—what?

He saw himself more clearly since meeting Laval. That foreign woman in her shop had queer intuitions. While he was speaking to her he had been annoyed by the attempt of the sales-girls to make him buy the wrong coat, and he had been puzzled by her impertinence in analysing his motives for making the gift, but after he was removed from the encounter, especially since Ruth had behaved as Laval said she would, he began to admire this stranger who knew more about life than he, and—unpleasing comparison—who more than he had achieved integrity.

That evening, before his father was home, Bob dressed early and went to fetch Kate from her mother's home in East Sixty-seventh. Lattimer was waiting in the study when they arrived. The little table in front of the hearth was spread for three, and roses filled a vase here and there, spots of living red. Muri had decided to disobey, in the interests of beauty.

To judge from his perfect grooming, Lattimer had taken pains that evening. During the day he had made some attempt to learn who the Mitchells were. It would make no difference, of course, but he wanted to know.

When Bob used his key on the front-door, and announced his arrival with a friendly whistle, Lattimer went out to meet them.

'This is Kate!'

In the boy's voice sounded affection and confidence, love for them both, and certainty that they would be glad to meet. Lattimer saw at a glance that misgivings had been inappropriate. His son had chosen well.

He saw a rather tall girl, rather slender, with brown hair, beautifully waved, and brown eyes. Her mouth was generous and happy—you had the impression of courageous good sense. And she carried herself well. As she stood there in her evening wrap, or as she stepped forward to greet him, she seemed splendidly alert and balanced. Very much a lady, he reflected. He was glad her evening frock was simple. The blue went well with her eyes, and anything more expensive would have offended his intelligence. He had a particular distrust of women who overdressed their income.

'I shall call you Kate,' he said. 'From now on you must be at home here. You and I must be friends.'

He did not then understand why her mouth lost, for a second, its suggestion of happiness. At the mention of friendship between them, she remembered the coat for Ruth. All day she had been trying to follow Laval's advice, and put that incident out of mind, but his kindly greeting disturbed her again. She might have admired him at first

sight, if this had been their only meeting. He seemed all that Bob had said, a grand person. But it might be that he made friends too easily; that is, with women. Bob's father!

She forced her smile. 'When you know me better, perhaps I shan't qualify. You mustn't go by what Bob says—he's prejudiced!'

Muri had taken their wraps, and they were on the way to the living-room.

'As a matter of fact, my dear, he is probably insane, yet I don't think he's mistaken.'

'What a charming room!' she exclaimed.

'I'm glad you like it. There's a glimpse of the park—you can't see much at this hour.'

He followed to the window, where she was looking down at the lights, and Bob, in a state of exalted satisfaction, came to her side and put his arm around her.

'Oh, I adore it!' she exclaimed. 'What a calm little world!'

But just then he looked anything but serene. She was still peering out of the window, but Bob saw the change come over his father's face. Didn't the old man like her after all?

By that arm around her waist the old man had been reminded of something. He had seen her before. He drew them back to divan and chairs by his fireside.

'You're a good business woman, Bob tells me.'

'I'm a stenographer.'

'Where?'

'At Laval's. I keep the books too, with her help.'

'Indeed!' His tone was perfect, as he watched for some indication that she recognized him. 'Laval must be very interesting.'

'I adore her.'

'I've heard she is an extraordinary personality.'

Kate met his eye with steady gaze. 'You've never seen her?'

'Only once. Very casually.'

'You'd like her.'

He waited for Bob to express astonishment that he had met Laval. Even the slightest surprise would have been welcome, as proving that she had not told the boy about Ruth's coat. But Bob was sitting beside Kate on the couch with his right hand around her shoulder, possessively tickling her further arm, as though in perfect bliss, free-flowing and youthful. His father reflected with some discomfort that the boy knew how to keep a secret, and the girl obviously was a good actor. How far had they gone in their discussion of him?

When Muri brought the cocktails, Lattimer spurred himself to happier thoughts.

'Since you two intend to marry, when is it to be?'

'At once, Dad.'

Kate laughed. 'He wants to hurry me into it, Mr. Morton! Ought I to study him a bit first?'

Lattimer shook his head. 'It'll do no good. His present condition is unnatural. You'll learn nothing you can count on until he's himself again.'

'That's the kind of cynic he is, Kate! He means marriage will let us down.'

'Not at all, merely that you are at present inebriated. Kate may like you even better when you're sober.'

Bob gave Kate an impulsive hug, to which she submitted with a broad smile. She was following Morton's eyes, and the smile was for him. He interpreted it as an attempt to establish an understanding.

'Bob tells me,' he said abruptly, 'you live with your mother.'

She nodded.

'You were born in New York?'

'No—in Michigan. In Kalamazoo, of all places, among the Dutch, with their tulips and celery!'

Bob pretended to be startled. 'You never told me!'

'You never asked! Your father has more curiosity about me!'

'And you came to New York recently?' continued Lattimer.



'When I was two years old. Until Father's death we lived on the West Side.'

He could not trust her apparent innocence. He wondered if the West Side was intended to remind him of Ruth.

'Who is Laval?' he asked suddenly.

She leaned forward. 'That's what *I'd* like to know. She never speaks of herself. I think she must have been a princess somewhere.'

'Why so?'

'Oh, it belongs to her! She's not just a business woman. She's superb!'

He nodded, as if to salute his own thoughts. Almost against his will he found himself asking the next question.

'Does she wait on her customers in person?'

'Never—that is, very seldom. Maude and Lila do the selling, but she knows everything that goes on. She can read you like a book.'

What he took to be the girl's boldness in glancing at his own experience, did not bear out that impression she made, of innocent courtesy. This younger generation was terrifying. How much did she know? What had she revealed to Bob?

During dinner he kept the talk on prudent themes, and for the most part listened to their plans, which were Bob's plans, for a speedy marriage. He encouraged the idea.

'It's the one field of conduct in which I don't favour caution. If you think you love each other . . .'

'No thinking about it!' interrupted his son.

'Well, since you're the authentic case, don't lose the bloom by delay.'

She looked across the table, and flashed an unutterable adulation at Bob. Lattimer was glad he could give that advice sincerely. They both liked him for it.

Only once he came back to his perplexities.

'Where does Laval live?'

'East Sixty-sixth, near Third Avenue.'

He tried to recollect the block.

'It's a private house,' she went on, 'done over into the

cutest apartments—two of them. The owner lives on the top floor, and Laval has the duplex, with a wing built out into the garden, so there's a little court, and you look over other gardens, towards the church on Lexington.'

He puckered his brows. 'I should think the elevated would be noisy.'

'She says gardens and towers make her think of Paris.'

He pushed on to the main point. 'Her home ought to tell something of her past.'

'No. She says there isn't a thing in it she didn't buy in New York.'

'No photographs, or personal knick-knacks?'

'Listen to him!' broke in Bob cheerfully. 'He's an incorrigible lawyer! He thinks he's in court.'

Kate laughed. 'Will you be that way with me?'

'Of course! Don't try to put over anything! I shall hunt you down!'

### XIII

That night Lattimer waited up with a book till Bob came home.

'Hello! What's wrong? I thought you'd be asleep ages ago! It's after one.'

'I wanted to talk with you,' said Morton, putting away what he was reading.

Bob got out his pipe. 'Don't tell me you don't like her!'

'I congratulate you, with all my heart!'

Bob sank into the couch, content with his world.

'The more you know her, the more you'll understand why I'm so hard hit. She's a white woman, Dad. She's a lady.'

Morton got up and strode the length of the room, then stood before his son.

'What has she told you about me?'

He had his answer in the boy's surprise. No one could feign that start.

'About *you*?'

'Did she tell you we had met before?'

'You and Kate?'

'Did she mention Ruth Romain?'

'Never! She doesn't know her. I asked her once.'

'I thought she might have mentioned my visit to Laval's the other day, to buy a coat for Miss Romain.'

The boy looked troubled. 'Not a word of it!'

Morton sat down, and stretched back in the chair, affecting a relaxation he didn't feel.

'I'd like to tell you of that episode, though it's not edifying, but it's part of my life. You ought to hear it.'

'I don't like her, you know,' said Bob firmly. 'I'm always expecting you to find her out.'

'From that point of view,' said his father, 'you need give the matter no further thought. I shan't see her again.'

Bob turned completely cheerful. 'Good work! Let's forget about it.'

'Before we forget, I'd like to be sure you understand what happened.'

'I've no curiosity. Whatever you do is all right with me. If you're happy, that's all I ask.'

'But you may hear echoes of this, and I'd like to tell you myself.'

'I knew you thought you loved her.'

'Did you know we were living together?'

Bob looked slightly uncomfortable. 'I hoped you weren't, but I supposed you were. I didn't think she'd let you off.'

For a while neither spoke.

'And now you've parted?'

'Yes,' said Lattimer. 'We've decided not to marry, and the experiment therefore can have no further purpose.'

The boy smiled with the wisdom of his generation. 'Did you think you were making an experiment? Weren't you just lonely, and a little hungry?'

'I was convinced I loved her,' said his father firmly.

The boy put his arms above his head and stretched. He even began to yawn, then recalled the seriousness of their talk.

'Well, I'm glad you're out of it! I think I understand. If I couldn't marry Kate, I'd be in an awful jam. I don't like this browsing.'

At the word Lattimer took offence. 'Your mother and this woman were the only two in my life.'

'Well, Kate's going to be the only one in mine.'

'You're sure?' asked his father, a little spitefully.

'Positive!'

'I hope you're right.'

Suddenly the boy became sympathetic. 'It must have been hell for a man like you to be mixed up with her! I'll bet you're thankful you're out of it.'

Lattimer wished to say again, that Ruth was a splendid woman, but after all, she couldn't be so very splendid if he was leaving her.

'You seem interested in Laval.'

He stared at his son. 'Why do you say that?'

'You made me feel selfish to-night. I wish you knew someone like Kate.'

Lattimer smiled. 'I know many fine women.'

'Not since you met Romain. Why don't you look them up? Don't be so darned lonely!'

#### XIV

In Laval's shop next morning there was a certain chill in Lila's manner, and an aggressive cordiality in Maude's. Neither mentioned Mr. Stringer, the Bridgeport disturber of friendship. Lila knew she cared nothing for the man, and she knew also that if Maude tried to fascinate him, it was only by way of rescue, but she was annoyed at being rescued. If Stringer came again, she'd go after him tooth and nail, just to show Maude what she could do in a real test of charm.

Meanwhile she sulked. She occupied herself re-arranging garments which did not need re-arranging, shifting them from one hanger to another. Someone opened the shop door.

'There's a customer,' said Maude shortly. 'It's your turn.'

'Wait on her yourself!'

'It's a nice man.'

'Well, men are your meat!'

'Hurry up! He's a friend of yours.'

Lila turned, with thoughts of Mr. Stringer, but the tall figure walking towards her was strange. She didn't recognize him till he began to speak, and even then she failed to recall his name.

'Is Madame Laval here?'

'I'll find out, sir.'

'I'd like to speak with her alone for a moment.'

'Who shall I say?'

'Morton—Lattimer Morton. I bought a coat here.'

'Of course, Mr. Morton! I couldn't see your face with your back to the light.'

On her way to Laval's office she forgot her feud with Maude.

'It's about the coat!'

Maude strolled out towards him.

'Good morning, Mr. Morton! Was the coat all right?'

'I like it very much—a beautiful coat.'

'I thought it was. Didn't it fit?'

'Perfectly.'

He could see Lila coming out from Laval's office, with Kate Mitchell. His future daughter-in-law seemed greatly embarrassed. He held out his hand. Hers, when he took it, was cold.

'Madame Laval,' she said, 'is awfully busy, and she wonders if you'll tell me your errand. Was it about the coat?'

'No, another matter, quite personal, and I hope she'll give me half a moment. Tell her I shall count it a great favour.'

She hesitated, then shook her head. 'I don't believe she can see you!'

He smiled. 'I shall be a nuisance! I won't take that answer! I must see her! You may hold a watch on us, and put me out after three minutes. Three minutes precisely!'

She looked doubtful. 'I'll tell her.'

Lila went back to her coat-hanging, since there was no prospect of a sale, but Maude lingered to play hostess, and, if possible, pick up some gossip.

'Won't you sit down?'

He preferred to stand.

'Did she like it?'

'Who? What?'

'The lady you bought the coat for?'

'She couldn't help liking it.'

'Sometimes they don't,' said Maude. 'Most all favour different things.'

'Well,' he commented politely, 'that must give interest to your work here.'

'No, it makes it hard. You never can be sure you've made a sale. Some weeks I've sold three good coats, and not made a cent; they all came back.'

He caught the point. 'You work on commission?'

Kate Mitchell was coming from the office.

'Madame Laval will see you, she says, for three minutes!'

Her smile answered his as they walked to the office door, but she was not happy at his presence there, and when he entered, she stayed outside, closed the door, and went back to the girls.

Laval rose from her desk. He noticed there were no papers on the desk, nor any other sign that she was busy. He thought she looked amused at his reappearance.

'Good morning, Mr. Morton. Is the coat...?'

He began with a slight resentment. 'Everyone here inquires about that coat!'

'Naturally!'

'I wanted to speak of something else.'

She motioned him to the chair on the other side of the table, and from it he leaned forward as he spoke, fixing her with earnest eyes, and her own face, watching him, turned grave.

'The other day you told me unexpected truths. Your penetration is amazing! Since those brief words I haven't been able to put out of my mind...'

She shook her head, and waved a finger sideways in an impulsive No. 'Don't go on! It's impossible!'

'But you haven't heard me!'

'I hear in advance every word! Good morning, Mr. Morton. Please go.'

She rose and held out her hand, but he refused to take it.

'This is too extraordinary! What you knew the other day you might have guessed, but you cannot suspect what is in my mind now!'

Though she remained standing, his challenge registered, and she was willing to justify herself.

'The other day I knew why you came, and I understand why you are here this morning. Don't call me penetrating! It is all so obvious!'

He smiled confidently. 'This time, Madame, you are wrong. My business here now is so simple, you couldn't possibly guess it.'

She did not return his smile. She gazed at him intently, almost tragically. 'I think you hoped I would have tea with you this afternoon.'

A sudden shining of his eyes told her she had guessed right.

'And not at any public place, but in your home!'

He looked at her steadily.

'It *does* come back to the coat, is it not so?' she went on. 'Ruth did not care for it.'

He waited for her to go on.

'You have discovered she is not what you love. You have put her out of your life, and I am to have the privilege of being her successor. No, Mr. Morton, I decline!'

'You entirely misread me! The last thing I wish is to fall in love with anybody!'

'Then why do it?'

'The quality of your mind,' he exclaimed, 'fascinated me, and I came only for that, to beg the privilege of knowing you better. I have no other intentions whatever, but I could not withhold my admiration for a personality which, if you'll permit me to say so, is unforgettable!'

Clearly she liked to hear him say it, but again she shook her head.

'How it begins is not important—it comes always to the same end. When Lila told me you were here, I knew why. When you bought the wrong coat, I knew you would return. It was in your eyes. I will not come to tea, and I will not see you again. I cannot disturb my life.'

He was tenacious, a little impatient. 'I don't see why you misinterpret a harmless invitation! You interest me, as a human being, and just at this moment you could give me a great deal, if you gave me merely your friendship.'

'Merely?' she smiled. 'If two people need each other and are friends, how long is it merely friendship?'

He caught at one word. 'You, too, need me?'

She corrected herself quickly. 'No. I was speaking in general. I will never again lean on any man.'

Now he recovered his easy humour, and the pleasant lines wrinkled about his eyes.

'To accept a cup of tea from me wouldn't be a heavy kind of leaning! Even after the tea, and an hour of good talk, I should concede that you were still a free woman.'

'You promise still to be a free man?'

'Absolutely!'

As she stood before him, she picked up her pencil from the table, and turned it in her fingers.

'I will not be your mistress, nor even your wife. That is, I will not have tea with you. Not this afternoon.'

At those last words he rose, recognizing victory, and knowing how to use it. 'May I ask you again another day?'

She took his hand in an honest grasp. 'I'd rather you didn't—really, I should!'

He bowed. 'Muri serves tea without poison, and my guests leave heart-whole.'

'Since you like me,' she pleaded, holding the door for him, 'wouldn't you do what would give me pleasure?'

'Nothing else.'

'Most of all things I desire to be left alone!'

He paused to think. 'How about lunch with some



friends of mine, a very interesting man and his wife? They would value your company, as I should, and their presence would save you from this fate you dread.'

'What a persistent man!'

'Very!'

'But really I can't come!'

He took out his engagement-book. 'Which day would be most convenient? Say, about one o'clock?'

## XV

That afternoon Bob and Kate were walking down Fifth Avenue from the City Museum. They had looked at the fire-engine, and the coach, and the horse-car, they had passed rapidly through the Hamilton room, and had spent a jovial half-hour inspecting the Directoire dresses. It was one thing to look at these old styles in the illustrations of books, and quite another to confront the garments themselves, still carrying the conviction of the flesh and blood that had worn them.

'Pretty frank, eh?' he commented, before one lacy filminess, saved to a degree by a green wrap.

'The hats,' said Kate, 'are still lovely.'

'Come back to the subject! How about the dresses? You aren't a prude, are you?'

'They must have been as we are,' she answered quietly.

'They say it always happens after a war. Those dresses are charming. It's you who are the prude!'

Then they had looked at the ship-models, favourites of his, and now they were walking down towards Sixty-seventh, where they would turn east, past Second Avenue, to the flat where she and her mother lived.

'I wonder why we have museums, anyway!' he said, guiding her between automobiles at a crossing.

'Wouldn't you preserve beautiful things?'

'Won't beautiful things preserve themselves? Anyway, do you consider those dresses beautiful?'

'Of course!'

'Would you wear one?'

'I'd love to!' she laughed. 'Wait till we're married! I shall wear much bolder things!'

'Ah, you're avoiding an argument! I bet you wouldn't wear them, and if not, why preserve them? If we don't get rid of what we're done with, the earth will be cluttered up.'

She walked by his side cheerfully, understanding that this was small-talk. He had a great flare for the up-to-date, since he went to Harvard.

'If you'll lunch with me to-morrow . . .' he said.

'I thought we were going out to-night!'

'Of course! But to-morrow we'll have the morning and half the afternoon. The train doesn't leave till four.'

She clutched his arm. 'I can't bear to have you go! These days have been wonderful!'

He glanced down proudly. 'Wedding in June, eh?'

'Can we, really?'

'Don't fret! It's settled!'

'And you'll let me go on working?'

'Certainly not! We can take care of your mother.'

'I can. It doesn't concern you!'

'Funny how you pretend to be modern!'

'Of course I'm modern! I wish to be independent, though a wife, and I don't want to leave Laval.'

'Not even for me, eh?'

'You're silly to make it a choice. We'll be happy, and I'll keep my job.'

He ended the debate. 'We'll marry in June, and have the rest of our life to argue.'

They walked on for half a block.

'Father thinks you're wonderful. He's been singing your praises. Isn't he a grand scout!'

She chose her answer. 'He's a very distinguished man. He looks like you.'

Another half-block. He was analysing the reserve in her tone.

'Did you see him the day he bought the coat for Ruth Romain?'

'Yes.'

'He was very fond of Ruth, but I'm glad that's over. You knew he and she had parted, didn't you?'

'No.'

'It's one of those things that had to wind up, but I guess it was pretty fine for him, and for her too, if I understand it right.'

She tried to show adequate sympathy by listening.

'I'm glad you'll love him as I do!'

'I know, you're awfully fond of each other.'

One half-block further.

'Say, Kate, you don't blame him for Ruth Romain?'

'Why should I? It's none of my business.'

'Yes, it is. You're in the family...'

'I don't exactly criticize...'

'Then you do!'

'No—if he believed it right, it was, but I'm sorry she was so ordinary.'

She expressed his own regret, of course, but he stood by his father.

'That was just her stagey manner! At heart she was a grand person, Father says.'

They turned east now, at Sixty-seventh, and he probed deeper.

'Do you mean you don't approve of the affair, or you don't approve of Ruth?'

'Bob, dear, she's vulgar!'

'You mean you don't approve of Father?'

'Of course I don't mean that, Bob! I admire your father!'

He steadied his voice and became affectionate again. 'I think so much of him, I couldn't bear to have you feel he wasn't quite up to the standard!'

'Of course not!'

They were nearly at her doorstep when he resumed his worry. 'You know, I don't see why you didn't tell me you had met him! He noticed it too, of course.'

'Noticed what?'

'When I went home night before last he wanted to

know if you had spoken of that coat for Romain. I guess he expected you to talk to me more frankly than you do.'

'Bob! How unkind! I wouldn't mention it for the world! He's your father, and I'm not spying on him!'

'Spying, my dear! My father wouldn't do anything he'd be ashamed of!'

She hugged his arm as they walked. 'Darling, you're talking like a boy, a very small boy! What has come over you? If he said anything against me night before last . . .'

'He didn't! He likes you!'

'Well, whatever you're bothering about, why didn't you mention it yesterday? You've been getting up a grudge! You're a perfect child!'

He said no more, for the moment, since they were climbing the stairs to the refuge which she and her mother had made charming. He prepared to be cheerful, since Mrs. Mitchell would be there. He liked her paradoxical habit of challenging you to unconventional thoughts, contradicting all you had imagined of that Victorian period from which she survived, and which you expected her to illustrate. Even the briefest conversation became, under her guidance, an adventure.

Had she been poised and discreet when young, acquiring gradually her present zest for life? He rather hoped so; he would like Kate to grow old in that kind of crescendo. Or did she come of a generation whole-hearted and honest beyond the boldest aspirings of later youth? Evidently she had enjoyed admiration in girlhood, for she kept the manner of a beauty holding court, though time had worked its fading of hair and cheek, and calories or some other enemy had curved out the lines which once had curved in. She was not so tall as Kate. You could guess back even now the pert dignity of the short figure, when she was slender. She still bore herself with a graciousness modest but not self-distrustful, and the energy of her wit set her apart, distinct and in an admirable sense solitary.

She surrounded herself with heirlooms, yet roused like a war-horse to the trumpet of a new idea. She had been

among the first to foresee merit in the Soviet, herself a confirmed individualist, and at quiet dinner-tables she had embarrassed Kate by speaking up for birth-control, which she would have taught to the young before they leave home, and once, just after Judge Lindsey had argued in church with Bishop Manning, she paralysed a group of Episcopalians by complaining that both men were timid and pulled their shots. When nudism got itself talked of, she studied the available books, and discussed the illustrations with nervous visitors.

'Mother thinks of joining a colony,' Kate had said, trying to laugh off the strain.

'Not yet, my dear—some day, perhaps. How exciting it must be, and at so little cost! I should probably look as well as the others.'

Bob delighted in the shocks she provided, and hoped the old lady meant what she said. She read much, and gave the impression of living in another world, but that was because, when you came in, she would speak first of the book in hand, and afterwards of the daily news. But if you were shrewd, you could recognize the hunger for immediate life, and the resignation which accepted the substitute under compulsion.

When he entered now, she was reading at a table which had belonged to her husband, seated in a chair which had served her mother. Other tables were set against the edges of the room, too many of them, but since they were relics they were cherished. There was a highboy in the corner, and a desk opposite, both a little overwhelming in the limited space, and across one wall spread a vast and anonymous portrait, brought from Ireland by the original Mitchell.

The two small bedrooms, like this parlour, were on the way to be family museums. Bob reflected that his own father was well furnished with antiques, yet there was a difference. In the Gramercy apartment old things were taken for granted, and quietly absorbed. Here they were respected, but Mrs. Mitchell used them as an intellectual springboard.

The book which she was reading when he and Kate came in, stayed in her left hand, with a finger marking the page, while she paused to greet him affectionately. Before his overcoat was quite off, he began to draw her out.

‘What have you there?’

As though to be sure, she opened the volume and raised her head a little, to bring her spectacles in line.

‘It’s the new Sinclair Lewis, *Work of Art*.’ She laughed quietly. ‘I thought it meant what it said! I’m frequently deceived by titles!’

He smiled sympathetically. ‘But it’s quite a story, don’t you think? That hotel-keeper, and the good-for-nothing poet . . .’

‘My dear Robert, they’re vulgar!’

‘Now, you two!’ laughed Kate. ‘I know just what you will say!’ She went into her room, to dress for the evening.

‘But they *are* vulgar!’ insisted Mrs. Mitchell.

Bob stirred up the argument. ‘Aren’t there always a few second-rate hotel-keepers, and any number of tenth-rate poets?’

‘Perhaps it isn’t the vulgarity,’ explained Mrs. Mitchell, ‘so much as the indecency. In this book the indecency is quite inadequate. You know what I mean.’

‘No.’ Bob laughed. ‘But I’d love to learn.’ He raised his voice. ‘Kate, come on back!’

She opened the door of her room. ‘What is it?’ He could hear the water running in her tub.

‘Your mother is about to define the desirable aspects of indecency.’

‘I hope you won’t understand,’ she called back. He could hear the door shut.

‘My dear Bob,’ Mrs. Mitchell resumed, as though she had been waiting all day for this opportunity, ‘indecency is a defiance of the code, and there’s no point in defying half-way. One should conform or else step out boldly. That’s why Satan is so attractive. I do admire a rebel! But when I was a girl in school I almost cried, I was so ashamed for human nature, when someone made faces

at the teacher, behind her back, or thumbed a nose at the departing policeman.'

She turned a few pages, as though looking for a place to quote. 'I can't feel rewarded for reading when the thumb is made at nothing more dangerous than the Ladies' Aid or the sewing-circle.'

## XVI

In Front of Laval's shop Paul stood as close to the door as he could squeeze, with the big umbrella in his hand. All morning it had rained steadily. The congestion of cars on the Avenue was terrific, each car blowing an exasperated horn. Paul enjoyed traffic noises, particularly the swish of wet tyres sucking up from the asphalt. It was his observation that wealthy women, by innate perversity, preferred to shop on rainy days. Some of Laval's least regular customers had chosen that particular forenoon for a reappearance. At least three were showing off new cars, who during the recent lean years had come, if at all, in taxis.

Inside the door the bad weather made a less favourable impression upon Maude and Lila. With the temperature suddenly mild, the steam-heat was over-generous, and though they had turned it off the moment they arrived, the store was still hot. Their tempers were giving way. Moreover, the customers with new cars had done no serious shopping. In fact, the purchase of a car had in each case rendered further investment highly impractical. The girls had been bringing garments back and forth till their arms ached, and as yet they had nothing to show for this industry.

In a pause Lila mentioned Mr. Stringer. She had promised herself not to, but under this weariness she weakened.

'I got a card from him, and he's coming next week and wants to give me a real party, so I tell you right now, Maude Gill, this time you can lay off! I shan't need your help. Last night I told my folks all about it, so they wouldn't worry.'

Maude was sincerely astonished. 'You told them you were stepping out, and they didn't worry?'

'I told them they could lump it! They might as well be angry before as afterwards.'

'I'll *bet* they were angry!'

'Only at first. I told them we're engaged.'

Maude closed her eyes to a penetrating squint. 'Are you?'

'We're going to be. He wouldn't ask me so soon if he didn't like me.'

'Gosh,' said Maude, 'but you're a sap!'

Lila tossed her head. 'You're jealous!'

'Poor fool!' said Maude, in mournful resignation. 'I needn't be jealous. He asked me too.'

Lila came slowly out of the shock. 'Two-timing, is he?'

'No, wholesale. It's the same party. He says he's invited you, and will I come along and bring Albert, to make it four.'

Lila glared at her. 'If ever I heard of a dirty trick! I won't go!'

'That's not the way to punish a man,' explained Maude. 'He won't sit in the hotel and grieve.'

'Are you saying I ought to go? I thought you didn't like him?'

'You belong in kindergarten! He wanted to make you the other night, and then, after the beer, he wanted to make me, and now maybe he thinks he can make us both, by pretending to be a family man and asking Alfred. The way to get even with him is to go eat the dinner! You can tell your folks the engagement's broken, but we're all friends.'

A taxi drew up at the kerb, and Paul had the umbrella ready just in time to protect Ruth Romain's new hat. She had a large box under her arm.

'Wait for me,' she told the driver.

'I can't, lady, they won't let me park here!'

'Then go round the block a few times. I'll be only a minute.'



The driver looked at her suspiciously, having been abandoned unpaid by more than one well-dressed fare, but Paul gave him a reassuring nod and motioned him to move on.

Maude and Lila came forward together.

'I brought back this coat,' said Ruth. 'I told you girls which I wanted!'

'He wouldn't listen to us,' protested Lila, before Maude could stop her.

'Well, I warned you! This is the last thing I buy here! Have you still got that leopard-skin?'

They brought it out, but it didn't fit across the shoulders. Eagerly Lila promised quick alterations.

'What's the difference in price?'

'Oh, that's fourteen hundred dollars less, Miss Romain.'

Ruth considered for a moment. 'Tell Madame Laval I'll leave the rest on credit. Or I'll tell her myself. Let me talk to her.'

Lila came back promptly with Kate.

'Madame Laval is busy, Miss Romain. Can I do anything for you?'

'I want to see her!'

'She's very sorry, but this morning she can see no one.'

Ruth reddened with quick anger. 'All right! You tell her I'm changing this coat, and the difference gives me fourteen hundred dollars credit!'

Kate nerved herself to make a difficult reply.

'Lila explained that to Madame Laval, and she says she can't admit the credit, but she will be very glad to give you her cheque now for the difference!'

Ruth stared at the girl, at first in blank bewilderment, then with a gradual, shrewd smile.

'Oh, that's it, is it? Then I'll keep the first coat! . . . No, I won't either! I'll leave it here! Tell her she'd better send the whole cheque to Mr. Morton! I'll let him know I've returned the goods.'

On the sidewalk she was quite cross with Paul because the taxi was still circling the block,

'Now you stay inside, Ma'am, till the next time he comes around.'

But she preferred to wait on the kerb with the rain splashing her ankles. When the taxi came at last, her indignation had got beyond words, and her departure was dignified and silent.

## XVII

When Marguerite rang the bell of the New Yorker, between Park and Madison, Lattimer was waiting for her in the hall, with a man of his own height, and a tall woman, neatly tailored, with a longish face and whimsical grey eyes. Laval liked her from that moment.

'Oh, thank you for coming! We feared you were detained!'

What he really feared, she knew, was a change of mind on her part, a return to her first sound wisdom. She was glad he had recognized the possibility that she might stay away.

'This is my very dear friend, Mrs. Allen—and Mr. Allen—Madame Laval.'

At the somewhat boyish eagerness of the introduction the woman with the long face laughed. 'I'm not dear at all—he couldn't think of anything else to say about me. It's the booby prize!'

Ralph Allen was studying Laval, above his disarming smile. 'Madame, you'll understand what your responsibility is when I tell you it's the first time in twenty years I've left my office in the middle of the day to lunch with a woman.'

'That's for my benefit,' said his wife, cheerfully. 'I am not sure that he knows where his office is.'

'Shall we go upstairs?' asked Morton, offering himself as Mrs. Allen's escort. Ralph attached himself to Laval, as they climbed the winding stairway.

'Do you know this place, Madame?'

'Indeed not, but how delightful it is! You come here often? For dinner perhaps, if not for lunch?'

Allen chuckled. 'Not recently.'

At the top of the stairs Morton was consulting the waiter. There was a table in the front-room, and there were also those comfortable seats against the wall, in the bar.

'What do you say, Ralph—Fifth or Sixth Form?'

'You know me—Sixth, every time!'

Morton led them into the bar, and seated the ladies on the *banquettes*, with two chairs opposite for Ralph and himself.

'How extraordinary!' exclaimed Laval. 'It is a café. A little like a *brasserie*! You call it the Sixth? Where are the other five?'

The men laughed; Lattimer, conscious of the patient waiter, picked up the card. 'Since you are reminded of Paris, shall we be un-American and avoid cocktails? How about an *apéritif*? Sherry, perhaps?'

The waiter departed. Laval persisted. 'Why is it the Sixth?'

Ralph leaned over. 'Don't tell anyone, Madame, but Lattimer and I went to school here.'

'In a café?'

'At that time it was a school. Sixty or seventy years ago. They called the classes Forms, in the English way. It was practically in colonial times, Madame, and the Sixth Form occupied this area. Many a morning I have grieved to see Lattimer caned for not knowing his Greek—the cane, during quiet intervals, rested against the wall, just about where you are sitting.'

The long-faced woman turned to Marguerite. 'My husband is a great tease. Besides, he is a born liar. The fact is, he never went to school.'

When they all laughed, Marguerite glanced from one to the other, bewildered. 'You didn't go to school?'

'Madame, Hope thinks I show no effects of that discipline,' said Ralph, nodding towards his wife, 'but Lattimer suffered with me, and he knows. There was a famous school on this site, the old Columbia Grammar, and

where we now expect to eat, when Lattimer gets around to ordering the food, is the very spot where Dr. Cook tried to teach me Latin, algebra, and punctuation, and Dr. Hooper poured Greek into Lattimer.'

'It was the next building to the west,' corrected Lattimer, 'and Hooper had the narrow room on the other side.'

'That's right!' conceded Ralph, 'the one old Bacon had before him! Do you remember Benny Campbell? There was a schoolmaster for you! That time when you got up to answer his question, and I tied the tail of your coat to the chair! But it wasn't next door, it was on this very spot!'

'Don't think so!'

'Sure of it!'

'They've done this for years,' said Hope Allen, in an aside to Laval. 'Of course they could settle the dispute by looking up the number of the house on their old report-cards, but I suppose they hate to be reminded of the marks they got. . . . My dear, I like you very much! When Lattimer asked us, I was positively in a flutter. Ralph likes you too—that's why he's talking so loud. When his heart is touched, he becomes noisy. You've made a great hit. . . . See here, Lattimer, am I to starve? Man, I am in your hands! Bring me meat!'

An hour or so later the women had gone off together, towards Fifth Avenue, already good friends, and the two men were riding back to their office.

'As a matter of fact,' asked Ralph, 'why did you want us to meet your friend?'

'Don't you like her?'

'Much! But still why?'

'I shall marry her shortly, and I'd be glad if you and Hope will count her in, as you've always counted me.'

Ralph held out his hand. 'Grand news! When's it to be?'  
'At once.'

Ralph was digesting his surprise. 'Have you been engaged long?'

'I haven't proposed yet.'

His partner took a good look at him. 'You mean she hasn't heard of this plan of yours?'

Lattimer laughed happily. 'I'll tell her when she dines with me this week, and she will say it's impossible, and then I'll marry her! I've found what I want.'

'I admire your confidence,' said Ralph philosophically, 'and no doubt it's justified. You're not a bad catch, as men go.'

Lattimer rose to Marguerite's defence. 'She's not looking for a catch. She objects to marriage on principle; in particular, she objects to me.'

'Does she? I didn't notice that at lunch.'

'She will object strenuously,' Lattimer repeated, 'but I shall be firm.'

Ralph studied him with one eyebrow raised. 'This return, or survival, of youth is a gratifying miracle! The vitality of the hoping heart!'

XVIII

In the Gramercy apartment, a few nights later, Muri had brought the liqueurs, and he was taking away the little table where Lattimer and Marguerite had dined before the hearth. Now they were at the end of the room near the drawn curtains of the window, he in a deep chair, she in the corner of the couch, with the coffee-cups on the low table between them. For him the evening had been pleasant; he was happy and relaxed, young again. Muri's presence had interrupted the intimacies of talk. Lattimer held the liqueur-glass in his hand, and watched her.

Her costume was even more severe than her day-dress, but he thought it made her extraordinarily beautiful. A dark-blue silk or satin—he couldn't identify the fabric—but in the lamp-light the dark-blue came out a deep black, and made her arms and shoulders gorgeously white. She was resting easily in the comfortable couch with her arms by her sides, and one knee crossed. At the moment she watched Muri's manœuvres with the folding table. Morton enjoyed

the line of her forehead, the intimations of a smile, the curve of her throat.

When Muri had retired he spoke again.

'You are the first woman who ever dined with me here.'

She looked straight at him, comrade-fashion. 'You have been too lonely, Lattimer—that I admit.'

'There is only one cure for it!'

Though she still smiled, her voice was troubled. 'Don't make me regret I came to-night! Help me to believe, if I can, that I was wrong in the first place!'

'You were! It was a mistake to think we couldn't be friends, or shouldn't be. I'm glad you saw reason. How quickly we have found each other! I feel as though I had known you all my life!'

She reached down for her coffee-cup. 'You choose an excellent luncheon, Lattimer, and your cook here is superb. I've tasted no such coffee since I came to New York. Why don't the philosophers investigate the influence of food? Two meals with me, and you imagine you've known me all your life!'

He smiled at her, full of faith in their destiny.

'Other women are coquettish, but I really didn't suppose you would be.'

'Me?'

'We have met, we love each other . . .'

'But you cannot say that!'

'I say it again! We love, and I ask you to marry. Why can't you give me a direct answer?'

She opened her eyes wide. 'But I have done nothing else! I told you from the first, we must not know each other. When you returned, I told you I could never be your sweetheart, nor even your wife. One blushes to be as direct as that, but it was because I liked you.'

'I'm glad you changed your mind, at least in part,' he said. 'The friendship is worth while, isn't it? And you didn't find the lunch or the dinner dangerous, did you?'

'Very dangerous! I am on my guard!'

He leaned forward earnestly. 'If you love me, there's

nothing to fear! If you don't love me, I shall bother you no more. I mean, I shall keep on trying till you do!

'Is it so simple as that?'

'Marguerite, I offer you whatever I am, and all I have!'

She shook her head. 'No. You offer me whatever I think you are, as though it were in your power to give it. I have made the mistake too often. I won't pretend I don't love you—I do. Like you, I have loved before, but you have learned nothing, and I have learned a little.'

Because his emotion, for all his light tone, needed a stage, an escape in action, he rose and stood looking down at her for a moment as he spoke.

'I have loved no one but you! You are what I have always given my heart to! Since you love me, it would be unpardonable to miss our fate. Be as difficult as you like, Marguerite, for as long as you think best, but I will not give you up! You must marry me!'

She too rose and faced him. 'Never! It would be the greatest of follies.'

The heroics came to a sudden end, and he laughed. 'You might as well sit down! We've a lot of talking to do.'

She remained standing after he resumed his seat, and she kept her tragic tone. 'If I let you talk to me any more, it's a confession of weakness. I do confess it. When you have looked for something beautiful all your life, and once more believe you've found it, it's hard to turn away, yet the more often you've made the mistake, the less you can afford to repeat it. Friendship is dangerous because we can't stop there. I shan't marry you. I still believe we ought never to meet again.'

He took her hand gently, and led her back to the couch.

'Don't talk of parting! I shall always see you sitting there. But one can't live on a memory.'

She raised her eyebrows.

'Ah, can't we! That's what I fear. Perhaps we live on nothing else!'

The remark meant nothing to him then. His thought was driving towards his desire.

'You have no ground for saying no. You admitted it a moment ago.'

'When?'

'At the table there—when I asked why you refused, and you only shook your head.'

She raised both hands in a comic gesture of despair. 'Such a determined man! So relentless to himself! I wished not to hurt you, Lattimer!'

'You hurt me by not answering.'

'Then take my answer, and be hurt! I will not marry you, and I have two reasons. First, you are a man, and second, you are an American man. Does that mean anything to you?'

'Nothing whatever!'

'Then I will explain from the beginning. A man expects to make experiments in love, perhaps few, perhaps many. But when he marries at last, he forgives himself all his mistakes, or he still thinks they are not mistakes, but only his lessons in a beautiful art, and his wife ought to be thankful he is so well educated. When he takes his bride, lays his hands on her, he wants her not to ask herself which other women taught him to make those caresses so well. Am I not telling the truth now? He expects her to forget as easily as he forgets. But suppose the woman also has made experiments, or mistakes, or whatever name he uses on himself. Will he overlook what she has done? You know he won't! He will remember and guess, and guess and remember. And then he will ask questions, and he won't believe her replies. The torture will grow, and grow!'

'You're speaking of an old-fashioned code,' Lattimer interrupted. 'Our world is more intelligent.'

'I am speaking of men, and they do not change.'

'There was another reason,' he reminded her. 'I am not only a man, but an American.'

'Ah, that is soon said! American men are like other men, only worse!'

He considered his answer well before he made it. 'Perhaps I'm not modern, not altogether, but then it's not ex-



clusively modern to be just. I believe I am that. What you may have done before you met me is strictly your own affair. I should be a fool to interpret it as disloyalty to me. I offer the same confidence that I expect. We both wish, I am sure, we had met long ago, and had loved only each other, but now that we have met at last, we shall love only each other for the rest of our lives. What happened before is forgotten.'

'Ah, if it could be! But it is not!'

'You know my life,' he argued. 'I thought I worshipped two women. They both were admirable, but I belonged really to neither. Would you be jealous of that?'

'Certainly not! But I'm a woman! I would not be jealous, but you would! You would eat out your heart, wondering about the men you never knew.'

He looked troubled. 'You mentioned the lover to whom you gave a Rolls-Royce.'

She laughed. 'That was only to shock you! But we *do* give presents at the end. I have loved three men, and two of them are dead. The last I sent away a short while before you came into my shop. The dead men are not further from my life than he is. But you will remember them all.'

'On the contrary, I shall never give them another thought!'

She came over to him, and when he rose, with arms outstretched, she held out her own arms in passionate entreaty.

'Kiss me now, Lattimer, and I will remember that! Good-bye, my dear!'

'Nonsense!' he laughed.

Her face could be sadder than any other face he had ever seen. 'I hope I am strong enough to do what I know is right! I shall never forget you, and I will never see you again!'

## XIX

Bob was stretched out on the window-seat of his Harvard room, reading a letter. He had read it several times, and now in the fading afternoon he wrinkled his eyes to inspect

once more a few thought-provoking sentences. He would put the page down, gaze out into the dusk, then attend again to the text. Once or twice he rubbed the top of his head thoughtfully.

'Why do you keep harping on this subject, dear? I wish you hadn't asked me! When we said good-bye at the train, didn't you promise to forget? Oh, how I'd like to go back to the happiness we had before! Why should I criticize your father? I would love him for your sake, even if he were not so kind to me. But if you *will* insist on an answer, of course I must be honest. Don't you wish me to be? I can say only this, that she seems an ordinary person, or something worse, and if he really could love her, I'm sorry. It isn't a matter of morals, you see.

'Now I suppose you'll write back that I'm insulting your father, that I'm accusing him of being less than a proper gentleman, that I'm disloyal to your family! That's what you're thinking, isn't it, when you ask me to explain my attitude?

'Please don't ask me! It's more instinct than reason, and I can't set it to words without seeming to say what you and I both might regret.

'Why didn't I let you meet Laval on this last trip? My dear, I kept you away from her because of these vague feelings which annoy you. I was afraid that in some unforeseen way you might be still more deeply troubled, if you and she met. She knows about the Romain creature, much more than you know, much more than your father knows! If I saw you talking to Laval, I'd imagine what she was thinking. I don't want her to meet you for the first time with that coat episode still fresh in her mind. She might connect you with it somehow, ever so slightly. At least it was your father who wanted to buy it.

'There, I've written too much, and you'll misunderstand! Did you know your father stopped in to talk with Laval afterwards? I didn't mention it to you, perhaps I have no right to, but I speak of it now to add that Laval

admires him greatly. When he was gone, she said half to herself, as though she had forgotten me in the room, "What a man!" and then more out loud, "If his son is like him, you are fortunate."

"A few days ago—you might as well know this—Miss Romain brought back the coat, and wanted to change it for a cheaper one, with the difference to stand as a credit on her account. Of course I was glad to have Laval learn that the affair was ended, but she was awfully angry about the credit. "An excellent business woman!" she snapped. "Salvage from her heartache!" She refused to let the credit hang over—insisted on giving the Romain person a cheque for it. "I won't have her in my shop again! If she comes back, shut the door in her face!" Then the actress got angry, and wouldn't take any coat at all, which gave Laval genuine pleasure. She sent all the money back to your father.

"So that's that, and I hope you and I need never speak of it again. If you understand what I've written here, you'll know I think your father a splendid man, and Laval thinks so too, but she has a way of smiling when she admires. I dare say she is terribly wise. Nothing that men or women do could surprise her, and when she praises with that peculiar smile, half amused, half sad, you feel a little ashamed for the human race. I think she pities them, and expects nothing.

"Now I've probably bungled it again, but I'm trying to say that I can't bear to watch anyone in the process of pitying you, or pitying your father, or pitying anything which is yours. I love your greatness and your strength, Bob dear! I am jealous for you. When Laval first lays eyes on you, I want her free to see you as you are.'

Bob got up from the window-seat, turned on his desk-lamp, and sat down to write. He hesitated only a second or two between the date at the top of the page and the vigorous paragraphs underneath.

'All right, we needn't mention it again! I get your point.

My father *has* embarrassed you. You *are* a little ashamed of him. But since it's not my fault, you want to keep him and me apart.

'Don't I know how kindly you mean it, how much you love me? But I too have some vague instincts, difficult to express. You're willing to admire my father if you can, for my sake. Well, I'm willing to admire Laval, for yours. At least I'm making an effort. It's better perhaps that I didn't see her just now, for I fear that I shan't fall heavily, and I'm a little on my guard against your worship of her.

'We can either take life as it is, and admire people for the good in them, or we can be more fastidious and admit to our society nothing but perfection. Either way we ought to be consistent. Father isn't perfect. I told him what a mistake he was making, long ago. Laval isn't perfect, either. I can make the same allowance for her as for Dad, but if you're going to be strict with him, how can you be charitable towards this rich experience of hers, which has gone clear through human nature and has reached disillusion? What do you know about her, anyway? Where did she get the money to set up that shop? You say she has more information than anyone else about Ruth Romain. Where did she make her acquaintance? What have been their relations? Why are they enemies now?

'I'll take a leaf out of your book and hope that what I've written will not be misread. I love you, you can't guess how much, and there's only one thing I want more than marrying you. I want us to understand each other. What I think of my father indicates the kind of man I am. You might as well know your future husband. I'm sorry for this affair of his, I didn't think she was worthy of him, but if he went quite cuckoo and stood on his head in the middle of Times Square, I'd still think him the best friend I ever had, and the most worth while.

'That foreign woman couldn't pity me for being his son. If she did, my dear, I'd feel an impulse to black one of her fascinating eyes.'

Reading this message over, he feared his fiancée might find it a little brusque, so he added a paragraph of endearment for an emotional cushion, but he was rather proud of the letter, on the whole. He felt at peace after he had mailed it.

## XX

When Marguerite woke up Sunday morning in that quiet apartment of hers on East Sixty-sixth, the sun was streaming through the window. She lay for a while and watched the light on the Sixty-fifth Street houses. It seemed to her a prophetic radiance, at the end of winter. If a new season was beginning so early, perhaps it was to match a turn in her own life. She was conscious of being rested and ready.

When she told Morton a week ago that they must not meet again, she had been sincere, yet the parting was without sadness, since there was no reason, except her own will, why they should say good-bye. He had refused to submit. Some morning or afternoon, doubtless, he would appear at the shop, and the argument would begin again. She hoped he would not come too soon, but she hoped he would come.

Sundays she got along without Gloria, and she liked these hours when she had the little home to herself. She had found it a complete refuge. The bedroom was on the second floor, looking to the south and giving a glimpse of the gardens which stretched to the church on Lexington Avenue, the vista which reminded her of Paris, and which expressed, so far as she could recognize, nothing of New York. Though she was fond of the brilliant city, it was like taking a vacation to enter this retreat, and be for a while in another land.

I know how she felt. I once considered this apartment for myself, before she took it, and the European atmosphere attracted me, as well as the surprisingly low rent. But it was too far east except for a tenant who wished to be alone.

As I remember, there was a northern bedroom, smaller, and in between a bath. She had converted that bedroom into a study, with bookshelves filling every space except

for windows and door. Oddly enough, the books had all been published in America, and they dealt chiefly with history and the lives of statesmen. They had been purchased for use, and you could see slips of paper sticking out of many of them where she had left a marker or a note. She had done her best, you would judge from the titles, to acquaint herself with the country to which she had come, but she had paid little attention to New York. The books which dealt with America discussed the South and the West, and the Canadian border. She seemed interested in frontiers. Her only tribute to the city in which she worked was a row of social directories, bound volumes of the *New Yorker*, and the current *Who's Who*. On some of the shelves, and stacked on the table, were finely printed magazines, local and foreign, devoted chiefly to fashions.

The bath she had remodelled in order to insert a shower. Except for the fact that she had installed mirrors on all the walls, the bathroom remained a normal American masterpiece of nickel and porcelain.

When she had lain a good half-hour, lazily enjoying the sunlight, she pushed down the bed-clothes, swept her feet to the floor, and found the orderly red mules waiting there. Before she stood up she stretched her arms lazily above her head, then drew off the pink lace night-robe, tossed it on the covers, walked over to the corner of the window where she could stand in the slanting sun. Again she stretched her arms high, making her slender body more slender, lifting ribs and muscles until they showed under the whiteness. Slowly she rolled her head sideways, backward and forward, then she moved her hands down her body, as though washing it in the light. Reluctantly, at last, she walked towards the bath, and for a moment the shower sounded. When she came out her hair was dressed, and she wore voluminous pyjamas of a dark red, a soft crêpe, quite plain. She had put on beige stockings, and she still wore the red mules.

From the second floor of the apartment you descended by a narrow winding stair, with rail of wrought iron, to a

living-room on the south side. To the north there was a kitchenette where Gloria, Paul's wife, had left the fruit and the coffee ready. Marguerite needed only to start the water boiling. In a moment she was comfortably settled in a large chair by the window, as close as she could get to the sun, which on this lower floor was less plentiful. The fruit and coffee were on a table beside her, and she had all the sections of the Sunday paper in her lap.

This room, too, as Kate had said, gave no clue to her history. The furniture was local, of a modernistic cast. The origin, one suspected, was Bloomingdale's. On the walls were some excellent prints, some, you would guess, from Keppel's, others, if you knew your New York, from Weyhe's. There were tables, chairs, and lamps, but no provision for guests, no dining-table, no sideboard. This was a home for one person. Nothing except the fire-place suggested comradeship.

When she took the apartment, there had been a garden, the usual back-yard, with wretched sod and flagstone walk, and clothes-lines for wash-day. She had built out a wing to fill this space, a corridor along the eastern side, lined with more books, and at the end a tea-room with a fire-place in it. The living-room, the corridor, and the tea-room made three sides of a court which opened towards the west. The court was paved, foreign-fashion, the only part of the house which suggested a previous chapter. Into the sides of the court were fixed fragments of excellent stone carvings, perhaps provided by the architect.

From the massive Sunday paper she discarded promptly the comic section, the sports, and the real-estate. The book-section and the magazine she laid by themselves on the floor for a second inspection. The news, of course, she glanced through, skipped the editorials, lingered a moment over the deaths, and settled down to a careful reading of what was good and bad in the N.R.A., and why the French government reserved judgement, as usual, on some international proposals, and whether Russia was in difficulties or in the way of grace. From time to time she sipped

coffee or nibbled at fruit. She was enjoying a long, unmolested morning.

When the bell rang, she thought at first she wouldn't answer, but when some persistent finger stuck to the button, she had to open the door in self-defence. In the hallway stood Lattimer.

'Will you ask me to come in?'

'If you insist,' she said, but she smiled and led the way back to her window. 'How did you find where I lived?'

He was very confident that morning, very much alive. He threw coat and hat on the chair near the door and lighted his cigarette before he answered.

'You can't hide from me! You can't keep me away! In fact, you can't escape! You're going to marry me to-morrow morning!'

She stretched back full-length in the chair, and laughed. 'Isn't it a wonderful day! Did you ever see such sunlight?'

'To-morrow will be still better!'

She took up the page she had been reading. 'You think there really is going to be trouble in Bulgaria? I've always wanted to visit the Balkans and see for myself what keeps them boiling.'

'All right! We'll go there on our wedding trip.'

She laughed again, then sat watching him.

'A case which has held me in New York,' he explained, 'came to an end this week. I had planned to go away later in the spring, but I'm free now.'

She pretended to be very glad for his sake. 'Where will you go?'

'Wherever you say.'

She shook her head.

'I'll call for you about ten to-morrow morning,' he continued confidently, 'and we'll drive to the Municipal Building, get the licence, be married on the spot, and go down to Long Island for lunch.'

'Will we?'

He looked around the room. 'Have you a long lease on this place?'



'I expect to stay here.'

He pretended to consider the idea. 'I take up a lot of room, we'd be crowded here, and I'm rather fond of the Gramercy home. I'll dispose of the lease for you.'

She roused herself. 'What a poor hostess I am! How about some fruit and coffee?'

'Thanks—I've just come from breakfast.'

She went to the kitchenette and lighted the gas. 'My coffee isn't so good as yours, but it's bearable.'

He waited cheerfully till she had brought the cup, with an orange and some grapes. For a moment he admired her, a striking figure back in the deep chair.

'I've made no preparations for the trip,' he said. 'That will be your choice.'

She put an end to their fencing. 'I gave you my answer, Lattimer!'

'I won't take it.'

'You must!'

'I won't leave this room till I have your promise!'

'That's nice! I like to see you here.'

'Marguerite! Stop this nonsense! I know you love me!'

'Do you?'

'Well, don't you?'

She began manœuvring again.

'You haven't seen my little home. The court is really charming. Did you ever know of such a prospect in New York?'

She got up to show him, but he wouldn't follow. She stood waiting. When he remained silent, watching her, she walked back towards him.

'You make it very hard for me!'

He stood up suddenly, and seized her. She tried to free her lips from his kisses to protest.

'For God's sake, Lattimer, don't!'

She was helpless in his fury, her hands were not strong enough to push his away. He strained her to him, and caressed her body, and made her quiver at last, weakened, helpless.

'My dear, my dear!' she moaned. 'Have mercy!'

'None whatever!' he said firmly. 'You are mine.'

'Let me go!' she pleaded. 'Take your hands away! You don't know what you're doing!'

His kisses silenced her again till all resistance ceased. He drew back his head and gazed down at her face. Her eyes were shut, her open mouth was breathing hard.

'I will call for you at ten o'clock to-morrow morning!'

'Let me sit down,' she pleaded. She fell limp into the chair, then put her hands to her face. He waited till she looked up at him again.

'Don't waste words, Marguerite! We have met, we belong to each other. There's nothing more to say!'

When she had control of herself again, that peculiar smile which Kate had often noticed showed faintly, the smile of pity and understanding.

'Must it begin again? The same dream, the same disappointment?'

'Not for me! It never happened before.'

'How certain we always are!' She put her hands again to her eyes, as though trying to think. 'No, it's impossible, Lattimer! I told you why.'

'Because I'd be jealous?'

'Because you would not be able to forget.'

'Absurd!'

She went to the window and looked out, and when she spoke, her back was still turned to him.

'I said I would not be your sweetheart, but perhaps that is the better way.'

'You'll be my wife!'

She faced him. 'No, I will be your mistress.'

'You will not!'

She knelt by his chair and took his hands. 'Listen to me, Lattimer, you and I can't be happy together—it's too late. But I believe we do love, and to that extent, at least, as you say, we can't escape. I will not marry you, not now, but perhaps since we both have made other experiments, we might make this one venture together. I will live with

you for a year, and then, if you haven't been jealous, I will marry you.'

'You will marry me now!'

'We are both discreet, Lattimer; it will be our secret. Nobody will be hurt except ourselves. The result will be in your hands. If you can love me for a year, without thinking of those other three, I shall know I was wrong.'

He lifted her from her knees, and though she protested, he held her in his lap, and between words he kissed her back into weakness.

'It must be all or nothing, my darling! No experiment—complete faith. We have too little time! I adore you! Nothing shabby or secret. No more experiments! You and I, one!'

## XXI

She was in her office Monday morning when Kate arrived.

'So early, Madame? Or am I late?'

Laval looked up mischievously. She had opened the mail herself.

'I came ages ago.'

'But I thought it was just nine!'

'I was here at eight. Sit down. I must talk to you.'

She looked radiant, and Kate's astonishment gave her pleasure.

'Are Maude and Lila here yet?'

'They've just come.'

'We'll call them in a moment. I must talk with you first.'

'What has happened, Madame?'

'Nothing yet. It happens to-morrow!' She paused to make an effect. 'I am to be your mother-in-law.'

Kate's mind refused to work. She sat and stared.

'To-morrow morning,' explained Marguerite, 'Lattimer Morton and I shall marry at the City Hall, or wherever it is done. You will be my witness, and Lattimer has telegraphed for the boy. He wanted the wedding to-day,

but I couldn't leave this place without setting it in order. While we are gone you will run the shop.'

'But Madame . . .!'

Marguerite laughed. 'You should first congratulate me! She came over and kissed the astonished girl. 'My dear, how cold you are! Aren't you glad?'

'Of course I'm glad, Madame! But you take my breath away. I hadn't the faintest idea!'

'Nor I. But he's masterful, and the result is that you will now run the shop. For a while, that is, or perhaps always. If you do well, I may give it to you.'

To her own surprise, Kate found herself crying. 'I don't want it! I was happy before. I want you to stay!'

'Don't you want me to marry?'

'Why, of course!' But she didn't feel honest saying it. 'No, I don't! We ought to stay as we are!'

'We? Don't you like your father-in-law?'

Kate flushed. 'I like you better. He isn't good enough for you!'

Marguerite smiled. 'He and I have promised to investigate that as we go along. Marriage, my dear, is, among other things, exploration. His friends will fear that *I* am the doubtful element.'

Kate tried not to think of Bob, though she still carried that letter of his in her purse.

'No one would be worthy of you, Madame. That's all I mean!'

'Well, I like to be flattered. Now, about the shop . . .'

'Oh, I couldn't run it! If some of those women grew difficult . . .'

'You've met the worst. You'll do beautifully! Tell Maude and Lila to come here.'

When Kate brought them, Marguerite wished the office door left open, not to miss any entering client.

'I've just told Kate I am to be married to-morrow, and shall be travelling for a while. She is in charge of the shop. Her orders are mine.'

'Married!' exclaimed Lila. 'Is it Mr. Bentoff?'

Resentment flashed across Marguerite's face. Lila's job had never been in such peril.

'I am marrying Mr. Lattimer Morton.'

Nothing could save Lila. 'Oh, the one who bought . . .?' She stopped suddenly. Maude had managed to step on her foot.

'We have few orders to fill at the moment,' Laval resumed, 'and though I hope you have much to do, the season will probably be quiet. Kate will order what you need.'

Maude was wondering whether she hadn't better seek another place for Lila and herself. Laval was the shop. Without her, they would shrink. She wished Laval had thought of a husband in a season less dull, but no one ever did marry sensibly.

'It's grand news, Madame!' she said. 'We wish you every happiness. He's a handsome man, isn't he? I liked him from the first. If I ever get a husband, I hope he'll be large.'

The street-door, Kate thought, slammed, and she had a half-impulse to see who had come in, but it was difficult to tear herself from these revelations.

'Will you go on with the business just the same?' asked Maude.

'Mr. Morton wishes me to give it up.'

'Men always think we can,' Maude agreed.

'But I shall keep it for the present. In fact, I'd feel lost without it. When we return, I'll finish out this season at least.'

'Please don't give it up! Lila and I enjoy it here! You've always been . . .'

At the door of the office, hat in hand, stood the foreign-looking man whose exciting talk with Marguerite a few weeks before Kate had overheard. The four women looked at him. Kate noticed that he seemed cheerful to-day, self-possessed. She glanced quickly at Marguerite, in time to catch a shade of annoyance just before it changed into decision.

'Come in, George! Since you are here, you might as well share the news.'

He bowed, and crossed the threshold. 'Good news, I  
\*hope!'

'The best. I am to be married to-morrow.'

Kate expected some disclosure of regret or disappointment, but his courtesy was perfect.

'No one,' he said, 'has a better right than I to wish you happiness. With all my heart!'

Kate saw Marguerite's face relax, suddenly kind. 'You are still as you were,' she said, 'magnanimous.'

He bowed. 'I am as always your devoted admirer, Marguerite. I do not expect to change.'

Apparently they had nothing more to say, and Maude and Lila, feeling out of place, slipped back into the shop. The man approached Laval's desk.

'I am sailing for Europe Wednesday.'

Marguerite took his outstretched hand. Kate had the feeling that she was inventing small-talk, to cover something deep.

'Europe again? How nice! What boat?'

'The *Manhattan*. My favourite ship is not sailing Wednesday.'

'But the American boat is of the best!'

'So I have heard.'

He bowed to her, then, remembering, bowed also to Kate, then at the door looked back.

'I came to ask you whether you had come to your senses, and had changed your mind. This marriage of yours is not a final answer; I merely postpone the question.'

His tone was courteous, but Kate heard a menace in it. She glanced quickly to Marguerite, and saw in the woman's face a glint of cold anger.

'We have said good-bye.'

He bowed, ironically. 'To you, Marguerite, I should not know how to pronounce the word.'

## XXII

'I'm glad you've found someone at last, and you can't be too happy to suit me!'

Fresh from the train, Bob stood facing his father, beside the study table. Since he received the telegram he had been preparing that simple speech.

'You've been grand to me always!'

Morton took his hand affectionately. 'There'll be no change between us now, son. I count on you!'

Muri, in his white jacket, came softly to the door.

'Which suit was it you wanted pressed, Mr. Morton?'

'The dark-blue.'

Muri bowed and stole away.

'How long shall you be gone, Dad?'

'Not beyond a month, at most.'

Bob nodded. 'I guess I'll get married myself in June. Or I might imitate you and go off unexpectedly.'

Morton laughed. 'Well, just give me fair warning.'

'Forty-eight hours,' said Bob, 'is what you gave me. I made a note of it.'

The older man put his hand on his son's shoulder. 'You'll like her! I want you to be very fond of her!'

'Oh, that's all right. I'd get on with anyone you cared for.'

An hour later he had his first sight of his father's new wife. At Marguerite's apartment Morton left him in the car for a moment, and when they came out together, he was touched by the happiness in the older man's face, a youthful joy. Though his eyes went first to his father, he looked hardest, of course, at that smart woman in the dark slender gown.

'This is my son,' Morton said proudly.

Bob admitted to himself that the black eyes were magnificent and reassuring, also a little teasing.

'Are you the paragon? I have longed to meet you! Kate gilds your portrait, your father points you out to me on your pedestal. I am prepared to worship!'

In her tone was no sarcasm, only a light heart, and fun, and friendship.

At the Mitchell home his father and Marguerite waited in the car while he ran up the stairs. Kate, with her hat

on, ready, opened the door. He wanted a long kiss, but Mrs. Mitchell interrupted.

'Don't forget the flowers!'

Kate picked up the box, and Bob tucked it under his arm.

'I don't know what you do with flowers at these civil weddings,' said Mrs. Mitchell. 'I never saw one myself. Does the Mayor wear a gown—or whoever does it? These middle courses puzzle me. I always understood it was either before an altar or under a hedge.'

On the staircase Bob stopped suddenly, rested the box against the wall, searched in his pocket, and found a letter.

'Say, Kate, have you got what I wrote you the other day, about Laval?'

That strong page of his was still in her purse.

'Let me take it, will you?'

He laid it on top of her letter to him, about his father, and tore them both into small pieces.

'That's done with, once for all!' he said firmly. 'I like her, and you like him, and we all start fresh!'

On the sidewalk, a house or two away, stood an empty ash-can. He dropped the bits of paper in it before he entered the car. Though Kate said nothing at the moment, he felt she agreed with him, and during the brief ceremony in the marriage-clerk's bare office, watching her face, he decided that the past was happily buried, and her scruples about his father would never return.

It was he who inquired into the honeymoon plans as the car sped towards Lynhurst for the wedding breakfast. He was teaching himself to call his new mother by her first name.

'Where's he taking you, Marguerite?'

She shrugged her shoulders happily. 'I leave it all to him, like a good wife. He plans a surprise for me.'

'I might as well spring it now,' said her husband. 'We're sailing to-morrow on the *Manhattan*.'

'No!' she cried, with a sharpness that stunned them. At once she began laughing, nervously, Bob thought. 'How



absurd of me, Lattimer! You caught me quite off my guard. I never once thought of Europe!

'Wouldn't that be the natural place?'

She smiled up at him. Something in the smile worried Bob.

'I was hoping,' she said, 'you'd take me to Palm Beach.'

Morton shifted his shoulders, to get a fuller view of her face.

'Of all places! Now, really, you amaze me!'

'I've never been there,' she said in excuse.

He sat back again. 'You haven't missed much! You'd find all your old New York friends, with those benefits of prohibition we've tried to discard—speak-easies, noise, bath-tub gin.'

'I ought to see it,' she insisted. 'Most of my clients are down there at this moment.'

'If I really thought that was what you wanted . . .'

'Lattimer, I want nothing so much!'

### XXIII

Late that afternoon she was reading the reports of her wedding in the evening papers. He had bought for her a sample of everything on the news-stand before they boarded the train. In their compartment a pile of discarded pages grew rapidly, as she threw on the seat opposite those portions of the news which did not concern her.

They were speeding past Rahway when she reached one account longer than the others.

'Lattimer!' she cried. 'Listen to this—it says we are sailing on the *Manhattan!*'

'That probably came from my office,' he answered carelessly. 'I let them give out our plans. You can return steamship tickets, but you can't recall a newspaper story.'

She read on, and he sat watching her, happy and contented.

'Marguerite, why did you insist on Palm Beach?'

'I told you—I'm curious about the place.'

Then, as it seemed for no special reason, she threw the papers down, and drew close to him, her face full of love.

## PART TWO

### PURSUIT

#### I

THIS SECOND EPISODE OF THE STORY, THE DAYS AT Palm Beach, I had from Lattimer and Marguerite, but chiefly from Lattimer. I shall always wish for Bentoff's version of it.

Once more I have tried to set down what I was told, and once more I take the liberty of commenting. To Lattimer these incidents of his honeymoon were exciting, in a hellish way; he gave me to understand that the tension grew from hour to hour, at first from his own poisoned thoughts, afterwards from his reasonable dread of meeting Bentoff again. But to the reader these chapters may perhaps seem tame, or even monotonous. Especially if the reader, himself or herself, has not yet taken part in a honeymoon.

I, having been through that curious ordeal, find in the monotony of Lattimer's holiday with Marguerite the very accent of truth. A marriage that can survive a honeymoon can survive anything. The newly wed remove themselves arbitrarily beyond reach of their normal occupations and diversions, on the theory, I suppose, that infinite ecstasy should have its head uninterrupted and unobserved. But no ecstasy is infinite. After the more clamorous demands of love are satisfied, there must be an interval to permit love to get under way again, and in the interval the husband looks at the wife and she looks at him, and both wonder how to fill in the time. Lattimer's idea of going to Europe was one of the safest, for in Europe a bride and groom can study architecture, which is unsurpassed as an interval-filling subject. But in Palm Beach you have only your fellow-tourists, whom you avoid, and nature, which there has an odd trick of making you think of yourself.

But in any place the honeymoon ends by wearing down your nerves, and you are glad to get home. Glad,

that is, to come again where you can love your mate without too specialized a concentration.

Poor Lattimer, like any other bridegroom, rang the changes on a limited routine. Even if he had not been jealous, the monotony wouldn't have made good reading for those who like melodrama. The poor, who cannot afford honeymoons, but simply marry and go on with to-morrow's work, are usually spared also the interruption of divorce.

But in this story I am a slave to the facts. I set before you the picture of a clever lawyer off duty for the moment and exercising himself in the role of happy lover. With another gentleman in the balcony spoiling the act.

## II

According to his own account, Lattimer began well. He says the thirty hours between New York and the Gulf were for him not an experience in time, like most journeys, but an immediate and ultimate condition of mind and spirit. He was a little sorry when the train pulled into West Palm Beach, and they must leave the narrow apartment which contained all he had sought from life, and until now had not found. His sudden passion for Marguerite had not surprised him; who of us, at any age, is unprepared to bow down once more, if the authentic deity is at last revealed? But he had abandoned all hope of the authentic deity, and his desire to wed Marguerite was a tribute to her intelligence and charm, tempered with charity in advance for whatever you regret in a woman after the better acquaintance of matrimony. Yet though he had not asked perfection, he had found it. Every exciting hour of their travel had been a revelation of beauty and wit and good sense and sympathy and enthusiasm. That is, on her part.

He was, in fact, much in love.

It would have pleased him to believe that she had made, so far as he was concerned, a comparable discovery. He found himself craving her admiration, which

is a man's most thoroughgoing way of acknowledging his servitude. Hers was a personality, as he now knew, developed to the extent of its powers, with no unfinished margin, and therefore the adoration she compelled was not for what she did or said, but for what she was. When she rested on the seat, beside or opposite, though she was silent, she counted in their companionship for more than he did, though he talked his best.

Being a man, he had told her she was what he had always loved, and he told the truth, but since she was a woman, the information doubtless gave her less satisfaction than he supposed. From boyhood he had dreamed of a friendly brilliance one could live with, a haunting body, an elusive spirit, a penetrating mind, and an amiable temper. He could fall in love with this miracle even though he never encountered it, but in case they did meet, he expected the miracle to fall in love with him. He was, as men go, intelligent, and among men, successful. In his search for the miracle, however, he had twice been over-hasty, beginning at the wrong end, and taking a cordial disposition towards himself as evidence that the quest had been achieved. Ruth Romain had been the second mistake. She had indeed several of the qualifications he had dreamed of, but not all. In Marguerite nothing was wanting.

'I have sought you all my life! If ever I imagined I cared for anyone else, I had you in my eyes, even then!'

He meant it with all his heart, and he was proud to say it, since it indicated a virgin constancy in the adoration he laid at her feet. He didn't know that a woman wants a man to love her for herself, not as a postponed illustration of his previous ideas. Marguerite, too wise to quarrel with the masculine processes, got what she could out of his praise.

If he was sorry the journey was over, perhaps some instinct warned him that the long-pursued dream must now be identified with the world he moved in, and

there was risk in descending at the last platform, exposing to casual contacts this young and exquisite serenity. But she apparently had no such fear. She had found delight in the journey, she found delight in its end, when she saw the green station and heard the coloured band playing a welcome.

'How picturesque! Did you arrange this?'

'I'm afraid they meet all trains!'

'Oh, let me believe it's just for me!'

'I'll let you believe it's noisy! What a row!'

Then he laughed with her, as they got in the car and drove across Lake Worth, and turned to the right, to the side-entrance of the Whitehall.

He had reserved a large room, on one of the higher floors. From their windows they could see the palm-shaded avenues leading to the beach, the nearest joining them to the Breakers, the hotel built on the shore itself, with bathing-umbrellas showing like painted mushrooms southward, and the Casino over to the north, with another railroad station, not the one they had just left, and beyond, still farther north, more palms.

'The private homes are there,' remarked Marguerite.

He was standing with his arm around her. 'What's that large building at the left?'

'Oh, that's the Royal Poinciana, an old hotel. They don't use it now. See all those chairs moving along the street! In Palm Beach nobody walks.'

He was not following the direction of her finger; his eyes were admiring her.

'You read places as you read people, don't you? You speak as though you had known it always!'

She laughed, and reached up to kiss him. 'Now I've come to the end of what my clients tell me. Every winter they chatter, and I must listen.'

Their life divided at once into private and public moments, privacy at Palm Beach being an achievement. They wanted to be alone. Whenever they were able to escape the regimented gaiety of the resort, he found her thoughtful,

noble, and tender, altogether the spirit he had divined in those early meetings at the shop. She, too, he was sure, enjoyed best those moments away from the tawdry world, sheltered in their room, or in the seclusion they made for themselves, sailing, or swimming, or walking along the keys.

✱ But he was glad he could share with her the less profound pleasure to be drawn from watching the conventional restlessness of their fellow-tourists, who moved as one herd through the appointed hours for eating, bathing, gambling, drinking—hunting amusement always at the proper place and in the correct costume. Had he been there without her, this parade would have bored him, but with her he could watch it with self-defensive satire, or in the kinder mood of comedy. Since their marriage the reserve for which she was known had disappeared, and she commented volubly on each turn of the scene, laughing at the costly weaknesses transferred, as he had foretold, from their northern city. The familiar cocktail-bars fascinated her, flourishing, in the old way, where drink was forbidden.

‘I love the expression on their faces,’ she confided. ‘It’s just like the Casino, in Central Park! Look at that table!’ She pointed to a group, not young, trying to galvanize hilarity by exchanging jokes. They had been trying for some time, and their good-will was great. They did not wait for the story to end, but laughed in chorus from the first word on. ‘They will be still more happy,’ she reflected, ‘when the New York papers say they were here this afternoon!’

He was glad their marriage had released her high spirits. For himself there was a new kind of peace, an ecstasy and a wonder such as he had not expected to meet again—indeed, had not met before. Her charm grew steadily upon him in successive revelations. The most casual thing they did yielded by-products of romance and excitement.

She had told him of her fondness for swimming and she wished to begin not in the ocean at the Breakers, but in the pool. When she emerged from the dressing-cabin, he

smiled at her costume. He had brought for himself a swimming-suit which he had considered rather advanced, a meagre thing, cut well away under the arms. Here, of course, the men wore only trunks. Marguerite came out to him wearing a blue girdle—trunks was too large a word—and she had added a striped handkerchief, a decorative gesture over her breasts, and another handkerchief, red, around her bathing-cap. The daring did not trouble him. In that primitive climate, under its courageous sun, he felt, with her, that it would be shame to hide so beautiful a body. His goddess had joined him in the bath.

His goddess could swim amazingly, with a skill that left him far behind. In middle age, with some effort, he had mastered the racing stroke so that Bob might not think meanly of him, but she flashed through the water, fish-like.

‘Where did you learn?’ he asked, catching up with her.

‘Oh, it just came natural.’

‘That isn’t nature, you’ve been well taught!’

‘Yes,’ she admitted casually, ‘a famous swimmer showed me tricks just after I came to America.’

Since it was pleasanter to watch her stroking through the water with incomparable ease, or diving in exquisite arcs, than to take his own exercise, he soon found himself resting by the side of the pool, marvelling at her gifts, wondering where she had found time to cultivate them, and digesting this new knowledge, that what he had admired in the city must have been only a fragment of her character.

Others besides himself liked to watch her, and gradually he realized this audience, and resented it. There might be a more perfect solitude, he supposed, in the ocean. When he asked her to try the beach with him, she was, as always, ready, the immediate companion. For a while they swam together, as far out as was safe, and for a while fancied they had the sky and the horizon to themselves, but when they wished to rest on the sand, he was conscious again of many interrupting eyes. The loungers under the beach-umbrellas, the groups and couples taking the sun unsheltered, all turned their heads in varieties of tribute to that frank figure.

It was then he thought of visiting the keys, those points of sand, swamp-covered near the coast, and green with Spanish Bayonet and wind-bent palms, but at the uttermost point flattening towards the water, bleak and barren. He could think of nothing which would more nearly resemble the desert island they both longed for.

The keys began some miles to the south. The day after their swim in the pool he engaged an express cruiser for the afternoon, and they went exploring with beach-costumes over their bathing-suits. The man who ran the boat had seen honeymooners before, or else he was bored with all couples. For whatever happy reason, he made himself obscure.

They chose a key with an immense point of sand, and Lattimer had the boat put in where the back of the peninsula was still high enough to screen the farther beach.

'Wait for us here,' he told the man. 'We shall swim on the other side.'

Apparently this was not a new idea. The man nodded, and got out his pipe to console a long vigil.

'Be careful about sharks!' he called out.

Beyond the slope of the ridge, where he could not see them, they reached their paradise.

'Let us stay here always!' she cried.

'Let's!'

Mindful of the sharks, they clung to the shallow waters, or came out to rest on the beach, forgetting time.

'You know,' he exclaimed, 'it's a kind of sin to be wearing all these clothes here!'

As though she had been waiting for him to say it, she slipped off the trunks and the handkerchief, and plunged into the water again, he following, a little abashed at their daring, yet glorying in it.

'The boatman may take a look at us any moment,' he laughed, 'to be sure we're safe from the sharks!'

'He won't!' she laughed. 'He's too wise.'

And in a short while he admitted it didn't matter anyway. Their old world had been left behind. They were



the two fishes in the sea that Whitman talked about.

Resting once more on the beach, he felt she ought to get into the trunks and the handkerchief again, but it seemed ignoble to speak of it. They dried in the sun, grew drowsy, for a moment fell asleep, then reluctantly surrendered to their beach-costume, and rejoined the patient boatman.

Perhaps this was their happiest moment, but it was hard to distinguish among so many satisfactions. Motor-boats, he discovered, did not please her, except for transportation to what became their favourite swimming-ground, but she adored sailing. A good omen, he thought. Small boats could be had on Lake Worth, and in late afternoon they would navigate those quiet waters well into the evening, she playing crew, or sitting beside him with her hand on his, guiding the tiller.

Golf they tried only once, a game of which she knew nothing, but which he assured her she would soon learn. 'Why waste time on so stupid a pupil?' she asked, and refused to go again. If he did not encourage her to learn his game, it was partly because she had still another charm in her sport-suit, and the crowd at the club were disposed to be sociable.

By the end of the first week the swimming and the sun-baths had deepened his tan, and added bronze to her dark skin. At the end of the second week he had reached that natural climax of a vacation where rest has done its work, nerves are renewed, and energy calls back to action. For him the loafing mood was about to close. Marguerite, however, after the diverting curiosity of the first days, gradually succumbed to the southern lassitude. She made fun of her laziness, but she liked a nap in the afternoon.

'I'm not really tired,' she explained. 'It's the climate. I've always heard that at first one relaxes, and later one goes native and amorous. Don't you ever come here without me, Lattimer!'

'If you'd like to see some other part of the country,' he offered, 'we might try New Orleans or Galveston.'

'Do let's stay here!' she urged.

'You still like it?'

'Not for itself, but because you are with me.'

'But I'd be with you in New Orleans!'

She was much in earnest. 'New Orleans would make us think of Europe, wouldn't it? Of old France or colonial Spain? Palm Beach is like nothing but itself. I want to remember our unique love in a unique setting.'

If he suggested an end to this southern holiday, it was because he foresaw still deeper stretches of happiness in the active world where they were to be comrades always. These idle hours, however beautiful, were only a prelude. This delicious loafing occupied only the surface of their powers. He was eager to be at their great life together, but since she cherished so tenderly every moment of this interval, he was glad to postpone the next stage of their beatitude. It would wait a few days for them.

Like the other Palm Beach tourists they settled into a routine, but of their own making. They would swim, and sail, or take long walks, with lunch sometimes at the Seminole, and with a visit now and then to the Casino to watch the roulette-wheels, and on occasion they found an amusing seclusion on the broad front-porch of the Whitehall, in two of the countless chairs, at a moment when other visitors were busy elsewhere. For the half-hour or so of her daily nap, now become a habit, he would walk to the beach, or read a book, sometimes by her side, sometimes out-of-doors. Their sky was cloudless.

### III

One afternoon his walk took him to the Casino. What led him there? He knew only that for this moment the crowded game-table was more diverting than the crowded beach. He liked to study the faces of the players, the masking of emotion, the irrepressible hope, the uncoverable despair. He had seen it in Monte Carlo on a larger and more desperate scale, but, as Marguerite had pointed out to him, one could recognize the same symptoms in miniature,

among these less jaded players who thought they were seeking only recreation and pleasure.

He stood for a moment at a little distance from the tables, then found himself a chair, well placed for a good view. Another man close at hand had the same purpose. Lattimer looked at him, and they both bowed, with the etiquette of travellers.

'An interesting spectacle,' remarked the man, counting on being understood.

'Very strange,' agreed Lattimer. 'Or not strange at all, according to the way we look at it. It's the oldest religion.'

The other man nodded. 'The worship of chance.'

In appearance he was exotic, a foreigner, perhaps of some Latin race, but his English was perfect; at least there was no trace of accent in the individual words, though perhaps the tune of the phrase was a little too careful to be correct. He was tall and well built, and even without his Palm Beach tan he would have been, like Marguerite, ivory-skinned. He wore flannels, white trousers, a blue blazer with metal buttons, white shoes patterned with perforations. The face struck Lattimer as fine, rich in intelligence and humour, and giving the impression, if not of breeding, at least of education. Lattimer questioned the breeding only because of the man's handkerchief, which was carefully pulled out to show at an angle above the pocket of the blazer. Morton couldn't approve of the handkerchief.

'Have you ever thought,' asked the man, 'by what fascination we are led to seek the great dangers of life? Under some guise men try to put themselves in the power of chance, and chance rules us all in any case. I say men, but I mean women, too.'

He smiled, showing the finest of white teeth, and Morton decided beyond question that he was from overseas, Europeans being trained to philosophical observation, whereas the American would probably leave the field to professors.

'Are we in the power of chance?'

'Entirely. It is the other name for fate, haphazard-look-

ing as we approach it, but inevitable as we glance back.'

Lattimer smoked on in silence, watching the players, but thinking of the accidents which had precipitated his marriage to Marguerite.

'Your point of view,' he remarked pleasantly, 'contradicts all our planning, doesn't it?'

'Quite,' said the man. 'If I were to write history, I would stress the ironic truth that human plans are the most complete articulation of human ignorance. We put our minds together to save the world, or to improve it, and we leave only one more monument to the unknown.'

'You aren't by any chance a Republican, are you?' asked Lattimer. 'The party is looking for campaign material.'

The man laughed. 'I have lived under no government which I could not escape. You have a law against this gambling, as against all this drinking, but you insist on being free. You say in your country you take a chance; that is, you hurry to your fate.'

'What fate is that?'

The man shrugged his shoulders. 'It will be clearer after it happens.'

Their talk might have ended at any moment, since the man had no wish, apparently, to force or develop this casual acquaintance, but Morton found him interesting. Here was the first play of mind he had met in Palm Beach.

'Your philosophy would work havoc with science,' he suggested.

'Ah, but science is the best illustration! Perhaps you are a scientist?' he asked with the courtesy of social caution.

'No, I'm a lawyer.'

'Ah! You worship chance under the name of logic! It is one of the most attractive forms.'

'I hadn't thought of it that way.'

'But doesn't it seem so when you consider the evolution of human justice, and also its ineffectiveness?'

'In the past, of course,' admitted Lattimer, 'but we flatter ourselves that we do better to-day. At least we can point to progress in individual cases.'

'Are there any?' asked the man. 'Isn't it merely an illusion to imagine we have a private or personal life? It maintains our conceit, but if we study the past, which alone is intelligible, we see that the individual merely illustrates some inexorable law.'

'You give the past a terrible importance.'

'But not too much. It is our only master.'

Lattimer smiled a little uneasily. 'I never before met a complete fatalist.'

'Then you never before met a free man.'

'You mean you don't plan your life?'

Though the man laughed, Lattimer thought he looked suddenly sad.

'I used to try, but I know better.'

The talk would have died once more if Morton had not questioned him.

'I assume you are not an American.'

'I am not.'

'And not a scientist.'

The man laughed. 'Very indirectly. I am, I suppose, a jeweller. That is, I deal in precious stones.'

'Well,' said Lattimer, 'if you sell diamonds to women, I can understand how you developed this fatalistic philosophy, in self-defence.'

The man corrected him. 'No, from experience with women I derive my sense of comedy.'

This note hurt Morton somewhat. He turned away from his thoughts. 'You know New York, I suppose?'

'Very little. My business is in Paris and Madrid.'

'But you must have some acquaintances here in my country.'

'Practically none.'

'I assumed,' said Lattimer, 'you were here on business.'

The man shook his head. 'It is another example of fate or chance. I crossed the ocean to see an old friend, who as soon as I arrived had an important errand in Europe. The trip was quite in vain, but since I am here, I satisfied

my curiosity about Palm Beach, of which we receive many bizarre accounts.'

Lattimer would have asked him more, had he not felt embarrassed by his own curiosity. The man, for all his cordial ease, was self-contained, and though he submitted to questions, it was with the charity one bestows on the immature. Morton reflected that here was the same profit of long experience which he admired in Marguerite. Face to face with it, an American would always feel still at school.

'I hope we may meet again,' he said. If the man had responded with any warmth, he would have asked his name, but the reply was merely polite.

'You are very kind.'

That was all. Lattimer strolled down to the beach and watched the sun-browned figures in the water or stretched on the sand, then he came back along the palm-shaded avenue to the hotel. Marguerite was dressed, waiting for him, her eyes rested and happy.

'Take me somewhere, my darling!' she cried. 'Let us do something quite brilliant! I am in the mood!'

He saw, as it were for the first time, how beautiful she was. 'Whatever you like.'

'But I want you to choose for me! What a glorious day! When I woke up I thought how fast time goes, and I haven't yet told you half my love!' She put up her arms for a kiss, and he held her to him, adoring the ecstasy of her eyes.

'I just met an unusual man,' he said, 'at the Casino, the only other intelligent person here besides ourselves.'

'But I don't care for intelligent men, except you!'

'He may cross our path,' said Morton. 'I think you'd like him.'

'Only you!'

'It's a bit late,' he reflected, 'for a visit to the keys today.'

'I know what we'll do!' she exclaimed. 'Let us get the boat and sail on the lake together till darkness comes on,

and then we can dine here in the room. I want hours and hours with you, and no one else!

It seemed to him she almost ran to the dock at the Club, as though someone were following her. Never before had she given way to this adorable eagerness, never yet had her mood brought her so near to him. Their spirits were in touch without words, as they sailed up and down the sheltered water, through the brilliant lights of the long evening, from sunset rose and green to the enchantment of tropic stars.

#### IV

In the background of all this happiness, Lattimer says he enjoyed a quiet sense of triumph that her prophecies of disaster had proved mistaken, and his confidence had been justified. Already it seemed ages ago that she had warned him against their past, against that jealousy of other bliss not his which she thought pursued every man. He had been right in believing that they could begin a new unshadowed life from the moment they were one.

It was true that at certain moments during this perfect fortnight there had been reminders of her warning. He laughed to himself when he recalled them. They would, of course, have presented not the slightest challenge to his attention if what she had said had not taught him to look for such incidents. It would be absurd to classify their effect upon him under the head of jealousy, or even of suspicion. His trust in her was as complete as his love. He put it to himself this way; his love had made him more alert, and he was grateful for this quickening. Indeed, he would have thanked her in words, if speech would not have made the topic too important.

He was amused at himself, for example, that first day in the pool when she spoke of a famous swimmer, who, since her coming to America, had perfected her skill. For a brief second he found himself wishing he knew more about that swimmer. He hoped it was a woman. If a man, he hoped it was an instructor in some impersonal tank, not an in-

timate friend. Then he remembered that whoever it was, the teaching had been done long ago, and the question therefore was outlawed. Then, recovering his balance, he had smiled at himself for unravelling so thin a thread.

In less detail he had been puzzled by her firm choice of Palm Beach instead of Europe. Having left the honeymoon for him to arrange, she must have known that the arbitrary shift at the last moment would be inconvenient, even though he had no preference. But that doubt, arising in the very hour of their wedding, was swept away in the large stream of joy.

At another moment he recalled their arrival at Palm Beach, when from the window of their room she had pointed out to him the various hotels and avenues, the residence districts and the Casino. He had commented on her gift for divination, but his real amazement was over the possibility that she had been there before. If so, with whom? She could have no reason for concealing a previous visit, except a wish not to hurt him. But her answer that her clients incessantly described the place was satisfying. Even if it had not been, he would have remembered once more that she must have come there before they met.

It was easier to ignore these three ripples on his otherwise calm peace of mind, because on the fourth occasion he had gone utterly childish, and his absurdity then illuminated the previous questionings. Impossible to tell her about it, if he was to keep her respect. No grown man, least of all a lover, should be capable of such imbecility.

It was during one of her nap hours. They had come from lunch in high spirits, and she had wished to go immediately to some diversion which he had proposed. Never had she seemed more loving. But just for a second she flung herself on the bed, in a happy kind of laziness.

'You're tired,' he said. 'Why don't you sleep a moment before we go out?'

'I'm an indolent woman! This soft air demoralizes me!'

'Well, shut your eyes for a while. You'll enjoy the afternoon more. I'll read here by the window.'



'You know,' she said, 'I *am* awfully sleepy, but you oughtn't to stay indoors. Go and walk somewhere, and in half an hour I shall be wide awake.'

'Oh, I'll stay here.'

'Please don't! I shan't be comfortable if you do!'

He took his book and started for the beach, but when he reached the front-porch of the hotel, there was a comfortable chair, and only a few people near. Remembering that the beach would be less secluded, he got himself a cigar and went on with his novel, until a large car drove up, and the porter came out to greet it. The car was a Rolls-Royce. Almost before it stopped, a rather handsome man, an eager blond, flung back the door and ran up the steps. He had no baggage, he was merely calling on one of the guests.

Morton did not like the man. The novel became dull. He resisted an impulse to go upstairs to see how Marguerite was resting. For an hour he stayed resolutely in the chair. Then the man came out again, looked pleased, and drove away.

In their room he found Marguerite awake, and kissed her tenderly.

'Darling!' she exclaimed. 'Did you have a good walk? You've been so long!'

He wanted to ask whether she had had a caller, but of course he committed no such folly. Later, while they were swimming, he put his mind on the fact that the gift of the Rolls-Royce had been only an exaggerated symbol. Before he returned to the hotel that night he was trying to understand how even for a fraction of an hour he could have stepped out of his happiness to chase a ridiculous fancy.

He told himself again that whatever hesitation he might ever fall into would be merely the result of the fervid debate which had prefaced their marriage. Her warning had made him sensitive, but there would be no real ground for fear.

'Miss Mitchell,' asked Maude, 'have you heard yet when Madame is coming home?'

Kate looked up from the desk where she was doubling as manager and stenographer. To save steps she had brought her typewriter out.

'Oh, not for quite a while, I'm sure.'

'You've heard from her, I suppose.'

'Just a line. She won't write unless I tell her we're in trouble.'

'Then you'd better tell her. I can't hold Lila down much longer.'

'Hold her down?'

'She's aching to wreck herself on that button-salesman from Bridgeport. She isn't honest with me any more. He's giving us all a big party next week, but I'm afraid she's seeing him on the side. Madame might scare some sense into her, but I'm beaten!'

'Well, if she wants to marry him, it's her own business, isn't it?'

'Marry nothing, Miss Mitchell! She wants to be an actress, like Ruth Romain, and I tell her he can't possibly afford it, but she won't believe me. Just because he came in here one day and priced some coats, she thinks he's rich. I tell her he was making an excuse to look us over, but does she believe me? And she's seen it happen before, too!'

Remembering what opinion Laval held of Lila, Kate doubted if the honeymoon would be shortened in order to keep the girl in the shop.

'Doesn't she live with her parents?'

'They're old-fashioned, and awfully good to her. So she stays out all the time. The flat's crowded, there's a lot of children. I don't blame her, only she oughtn't to fall for Stringer.'

Kate found it difficult to grieve as Maude expected.

'Just what do you want me to write Madame?'

Maude considered. 'Lila's afraid of her, and of no

one else. On the other hand . . .' She paused. For the first time since the shop was started, Kate saw her embarrassed.

'What were you going to say?'

'Madame has influenced her a lot!'

'Not enough, it seems.'

Maude's tone softened. 'Of course it was Miss Romain who influenced her most!'

Kate caught the implication and bridled. 'In what way has Madame influenced her?'

'I wouldn't utter a word of criticism,' said Maude, pathetically sincere. 'What other folks do I don't meddle with, particularly when they are foreigners. Madame's as good a woman as I know—I don't believe it hurt her a bit, but she's smarter than Lila, and to get any good out of it, you have to be awfully smart.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Why, you know, Miss Mitchell.'

'I do not!'

Maude's confusion was complete. 'Then I oughtn't to have mentioned it! I don't think myself it's true, but Lila believes it.'

'Stop this mystery-spinning!' said Kate sharply. 'Speak out!'

'Why, there's always been gossip about that man-friend of Madame's, the black-haired man who used to come here. Even if it's so, I wouldn't criticize anybody—least of all when she's been so good to me—but Lila thinks it proves you can let a man set you up, and after you're rich you can marry someone else and be happy.'

Kate's anger flared. 'She said that of Madame?'

'She wouldn't have,' explained Maude, 'if she hadn't been tight.'

'And that's the message I'm to send, is it? Well, I don't need to write. Lila can't stay in this shop and say such things!'

'You're not going to fire her, are you?'

'Unless she apologizes. Bring her here!'

'If she loses her job,' pleaded Maude, 'she'll go to him at once. You'd better send me away.'

'We'll clear this up now,' said Kate firmly. 'Go and bring her!'

The unconscious subject of their debate was enjoying an unusually pleasant moment in the front of the shop delaying, with what wiles she had, a tall, well-set-up youth who had inquired the whereabouts of Miss Mitchell. Vaguely he reminded Lila of Mr. Morton. She had been looking out of the window at the traffic when he came striding along, and she noticed with approval the swing of his step, and the easy hang of his clothes. Like Mr. Morton, she said to herself, with his mouth as though he were going to laugh. When Paul touched his hat and opened the door, he said something which Lila wished she had heard, since it evidently gave Paul pleasure. She jumped at conclusions.

'May I show you a fur-coat, sir?'

'Do you think I need one?'

At least, she reflected, she had his attention. He looked her over from head to feet, missing nothing, not the kind of look Mr. Stringer gave her, but open, rather, and friendly, and also more efficient.

'We have some very attractive things just now,' she informed him, turning to the show-case.

'I see you have,' said he, 'but I'd like to speak to Miss Mitchell—Miss Kate Mitchell. She works here, doesn't she?'

'She's the manager,' said Lila, with mingled disappointment and dignity.

'Where is she?'

'I'll take your name.'

'Thanks. I'll take it myself. Is it that door at the end?'

Lila was frightened. 'She doesn't like to be interrupted!'

'Doesn't she, though!'

He opened the office door softly, just far enough to stick his head around it. Maude stuck her head around the other side to see who was coming in. Their faces almost met.

'Good morning!' he said cheerfully. 'I'm looking for Miss Mitchell.'

When Maude withdrew her face, he saw Kate.

'Hate to interrupt,' he called, striding over to her, ready with a kiss, but her eyes signalled, to remind him of the general public.

'Will the manager let me have ten minutes of her busy day?'

The manager cleared the office. 'Maude, you and I must have it out with Lila. Please don't say anything to her in advance.'

'Who's Lila?' he asked between kisses. 'That vision you keep in the window?'

'Darling! Where do you come from?'

He gave her a hug, to end their greeting temporarily, and pulled up a chair.

'I'm playing hooky. I've an idea!'

She squeezed the hand which had just squeezed hers, and waited for him to go on.

'Father's a great man. I like the way he plunged in and got married.'

He looked at her to see if she had caught the idea. She gave no sign.

'Our apartment,' he said, 'lies idle these days. Muri sits twiddling his thumbs. I told him you and I would dine there to-night.'

'Oh, I'd love to!'

'And to-morrow morning, we'll pay Father the compliment of imitating him. That is, if I have bad luck. If the luck's good, you'll find you're free this afternoon, and we'll go down and get married before dinner.'

He was so abrupt and casual that she laughed, but she liked what he had said, no doubt of that. She gave him a hug and a kiss, and, to finish off, pulled his hair, and laughed again.

'What a boy you are! I adore you! I shouldn't have been surprised if you had asked me to step out and have a soda, but it's to be marriage!'

'There's a lot to be said for it,' he argued. 'We can spend the night at the apartment, and I can absent myself from the seat of learning for three whole days. After that, while your boss is still away, I'll commute. When she returns, you will leave the old clothes business and join me in the hub of culture.'

He spoke quite fast in a tide of joy, then began the kisses again.

'How about it, girl?'

'You *know* you're crazy!'

'Don't you want to marry me?'

'Of course I do!'

'The Bureau closes quite early,' he said. 'I suppose your mother would like to come along. I'll prepare her, and you join us for lunch, then we'll all go down.'

'I don't see how I can! I must watch the shop.'

He was keyed for any amount of resistance.

'Compared to your marriage, my dear, the shop is insignificant. For all the business you seem to be doing at this moment, you might just as well close it. Why don't you bring the outfit down to see you off?'

'I wish you wouldn't be flippant!'

She had her wish at once. 'You want to know why I came? Father, without intending it, taught me a lot! I see now that you either love or you don't, and if you can discuss it, then you don't. I'll get married to-day or I'll say good-bye! It's up to you!'

It pleased her to believe he meant it.

'You know she left me in charge of the shop!'

'Now, Kate, or not at all!'

'I promise—as soon as they return.'

'Now!'

'What a tyrant!' She paused for a moment with a smile on her lips, as though she might laugh at his eagerness, but her eyes had a suspicious shining.

'Not a tyrant,' he said, 'but I've made up my mind.'

She stopped smiling. 'I must think of Mother.'

'Nonsense! She'll back me up!'

'Really, I need a little more time! But it's wonderful, to think you want me so much!' The smile came back. 'You make me awfully happy! All right, let's marry soon! I agree, but not to-morrow! You really didn't think you could hurry so, did you?'

'It's to-morrow, or never!'

She laughed outright. 'You wouldn't say good-bye for ever! You can't keep that threat! We really do love each other, even if I'm not as impractical as you!'

He looked at her through half-closed eyes, rather fierce than tender. 'I love you, but I'll let nobody, not even you, stand in the way of what I think is good for me! We're either grown-up and ready to live, or else we're a couple of maudlin juveniles. If I have to be a juvenile, at least I decline to be maudlin. No more letters and telephone-calls for me! I'll have you now or I'll forget you!'

'Did you ask me to dine to-night? Let's talk about it then.'

He was on his guard. 'If you think you've put me off once, you'll try it a second time. I'm reasonable. Perhaps this afternoon's a bit sudden. Do you promise to marry me in the morning?'

She put her arms around him. 'I'd like to marry you this minute!'

'Now you're hurrying *me!*' he protested. 'The best I can do is this afternoon, and the option expires to-morrow, ten a. m. Yes or no!'

She looked up and smiled. 'I'd like to be crazy for once!'

'Well,' he said, relieved, lighting a cigarette, 'that took some effort and skill on my part! But you'll never regret it. I understand even a strong-minded woman at times likes to have the decision made for her. You're not busy, are you?'

He had the air of planning to spend the rest of the day.

'Now you *do* embarrass me!' she laughed. 'Really, I ought to put you out!'

'What's on the docket?'

She was glad to consult him. 'Trouble in the shop.'

'I'll bet it's the vision in the front, and the fat one was telling on her.'

'No, she was asking me to forgive the vision, or save her, or something.'

'Is it a case of misplaced affection? I noticed she is sensitive to male charm.'

'A man is involved, I believe, and Maude can't stop her.'

He laughed. 'I *thought* Maude had an unpleasant mind.'

'She's a wonderful girl!'

'The vision?'

'No, Maude.'

'Well, how do you come into this? You mean you're postponing your wedding just to keep the vision from her destiny? I tell you what, summon her to court now, and I'll help decide the case!'

'Oh, but you mustn't! They couldn't talk before you!'

'A delicate case, eh? She's the kind that would find trouble.'

Kate laughed. 'She's thinking of making an imprudent marriage. The man is very insistent.'

'Good for him! Don't spoil his game!'

'I'd merely like to keep her from being a fool!'

'That's all? Well, go to it, then! I'll come for you at seven, or how about six-thirty? Or even six?'

She had to wait till Maude and Lila satisfied two difficult customers, and the interval might have gone to letter-writing, but her thoughts wandered. She was supposed not to be a primitive person—not like her mother—but she was aware of quite primitive desires. He was her man, and she wanted him. After all, why shouldn't they be married at once? That very day? In an hour? What was holding her back?

Foolish reticences, perhaps, and inexplicable obligations. In her heart she had more disposition to slight



them than he could possibly guess, yet they were woven into her character by training and habit, and if she thought of them at all, she must obey them.

Her mother would not approve of a husband who lived in Cambridge while maintaining a wife in New York. Her mother's reasons for this prejudice she could anticipate, in all their racy candour. It would be an ordeal to hear them expounded to Bob. Then Marguerite might feel that the business had been neglected. Would she really? Wouldn't she say with Bob that the business was insignificant in comparison with this great crisis? Still, when you've been left in charge . . .

Besides, she had often thought of marriage as a ceremony, something sacred in any case, but, in addition, a ceremony, with your friends around you, and the outlying relatives. Of course any number of admirable people dropped in at the Municipal Building and bound themselves for life. Marguerite had married so. But when you looked at it squarely, it was frightfully casual, like buying a pair of gloves. To be sure, the really sacred part of it, the essential, was their love, and even without the ceremony . . . She knew that in this year of grace she would have seemed a stupid person if her contemporaries, or many of them, could read her thoughts.

On the other hand, while she hesitated to go down to the Licence Bureau to-morrow for hurried but legal wedlock, she could have given herself to him recklessly, with no wedlock at all, if he had chosen to take advantage of those moments when love made her weak. Once or twice there in the office, for example, talking to him. She realized the paradox. Marriage was hard to approach except with the right manners, but if you were overwhelmed by a tidal wave, you might be glad.

She was contemplating this mystery when Maude, frightened, brought in Lila, defiant.

'I think you ought to repeat before Lila,' Kate began, 'what you told me.'

'She needn't,' said the vision. 'I guessed it when I saw

her sneaking in here. I'm in love with Mr. Stringer, and he with me, and if anyone wants to meddle, it's just too bad!

'Maude wished to help you.'

'Yeah?'

'Are you and Mr. Stringer going to marry?'

'I am,' said Lila. 'He hasn't told me his plans, and I wouldn't be so rude as to ask. See here, Miss Mitchell, I'm no different from you, though you've got a better job. If we hold our tongue, you can too!'

'I don't understand!'

'Well, it ain't hard! You wouldn't enjoy having *your* affairs mauled over this way! When your young man comes and goes, you expect us not to talk, don't you?'

Kate was surprised out of her composure. 'Who?'

'He just left, didn't he? Don't think he's invisible! Maude says you've been out with him lots of times!'

Maude flushed. 'I didn't—not that way! I said you were engaged.'

Kate had to explain, though she condemned the weakness. 'I *am* engaged to Mr. Morton. He is the son of Madame's husband.'

Lila's anger was unappeased. 'Then maybe he's like his father. When he came in this morning, he gave me the once-over, all right! If I hadn't held myself very correct . . .'

'Good Lord! She's hopeless!' Maude groaned. 'She don't mean it! It's just to get even with me!'

Lila suddenly began to cry. 'I *do* mean it! You're all hunting me, but I'm telling the truth! If Mr. Stringer won't marry me, that doesn't make him different, or me either! Everyone has a beau!'

Kate turned from these general principles to the particular case. 'I don't want you to misunderstand about Mr. Morton. He wouldn't have come to the shop to-day except that we had to arrange for our wedding to-morrow morning.'

Even Maude looked a little incredulous, and Lila was sceptical in a large way.

'That's what I told *my* folks, but it doesn't go over twice! You ain't by any chance dining with him alone somewhere to-night, are you?'

'And what if I were!'

'Because,' continued Lila, 'if you haven't done it before, that's the time to watch out. Once they promise to marry you next morning, they have no conscience at all!'

Kate reflected that she was dealing with an unhappy girl, ignorant and ill-bred, and whatever was said in misery could be charitably overlooked, but the interview had somehow gone awry. They had accomplished nothing to stop that scandal about Laval, they had even lost ground, since Lila had managed to bestow a revengeful smear on Kate's own reputation. There was a wound, hardly felt at first, but soon festering. She could not believe that Bob was like his father. That is, conceding a defect of taste in the older man, which had permitted him to be misled by Ruth Romain. But if Lila told the truth, Bob had paused in the shop to appreciate her salient charms. And he had asked who Lila was, and had called her a vision.

She ended the unhappy conference somewhat hastily, with no final comment on Lila's behaviour, no warning against Stringer, no clue to her future in the shop. The girl was still angry and wilful. Maude, having for once in her life misdirected her good intentions, was crushed. Kate sat thinking for only a few moments before she seized the phone and called the telegraph office.

An hour later, at the very moment when he was reading her words, astonished and shocked, his father and Laval in Palm Beach were entering the Seminole for lunch. They were so handsome together, as they left the car and walked up the steps and into the patio, every pleasure-seeking eye turned towards them. Handsome most of all because they seemed unaffectedly happy.

When they came to the dining-room, and waited in line to serve themselves at the buffet, he was telling her some story which must have been delightful. She was

trying not to laugh too loud. Then, conscious of other guests close behind them, he looked back, and she turned, with the same idle curiosity. At his elbow was that foreigner, whom he had met at the Casino, the fatalist who had talked about the power of chance. His impulse was to introduce the man. Then, not knowing his name, he would have whispered to her that this was the person he had spoken of.

But he saw a look of recognition on both faces, and it was she who did the introducing.

'Have you dropped from the skies!' she exclaimed. 'Lattimer, this is my old friend, George Bentoff. You've heard me speak of him.'

The foreign-looking man held out his hand. 'Your husband and I have met. We were talking about chance and fate.'

Morton smiled. 'You furnish a prompt illustration of your theory! Marguerite, shall I get a salad? You and Mr. Bentoff might find a table for us.'

'Some cold meat with the salad!' she called, as he moved on towards the buffet.

## VI

She had spoken of him before, had she? Lattimer could not remember the name.

When he steered his way across the room to the table she had selected, he noticed the earnestness with which she was talking to the man, an earnestness which had in it also, he thought, some eagerness. Bentoff was standing, as though ready to take his departure, but he had an air of pleading. Morton set down the two plates he had managed to pilot through the crowd.

'Rather tiresome, waiting, isn't it? I hope this is what you wanted, Marguerite, but there are all sorts of other things. This is for you, Bentoff—I'll bring my own plate in a minute.'

'Thanks, indeed, but I'm not lunching here,' said the man. Morton knew, of course, that he had been standing

in line. 'I stopped in for a moment to see who was here, never expecting Marguerite in this part of the world. So glad to meet her—and you!'

When Marguerite held out her hand, he kissed it, bowed to Morton, and walked with great composure towards the door. Morton, no less composed, sat down and unfolded his napkin.

'Is the food what you want?'

'Delicious! Really, you've brought me too much.'

'Bentoff is the man I talked with the other day at the Casino.'

'He's an old friend,' she repeated. 'I thought he was in Europe.' Honesty made her add, 'Or on the way there.'

They pulled in their chairs and tried the food. She began talking rather fast, suddenly gay.

'It's like shuffling the cards, isn't it? The same faces come up, and the order only seems different. When that woman sat down there, the one at the other table, I was thinking how she looked on the beach when we saw her taking her sun-bath.'

Politely he turned to identify the subject. 'The one on the left?'

'No, the stout one.'

'After all,' he reflected, 'there's only a limited number of us. I wonder how many come and go each day.'

'The gowns are limited, anyway,' she suggested.

'Are they? I knew the bathing-suits were.'

At the poor joke she laughed almost too eagerly. 'I mean, they haven't brought many dresses after all. Once you've seen the place from morning till night, you learn to recognize old friends.'

'Well, it couldn't be otherwise these times. I marvel that your business has kept on so well.'

She made a gesture with her hand. 'It may go any day. I've had my bad moments, but people cling longest to the unnecessary things.'

Then the talk died, and they ate resolutely. Only once

she stopped and gazed towards the ocean. He made a mental gauge of this absent-mindedness, resolved not to recall her from the trance. It was a full minute, he estimated, before she came to.

'There's some ice-cream and coffee,' he told her.

When she looked up and smiled, he thought she was studying his eyes.

'Just coffee, please.'

He swore he would never speak to her about the incident. Bentoff, he was sure, would meet neither of them again. Certainly not him. It would be wise to let the memory bury itself, since beyond doubt, if he dug far enough, he would uncover dynamite. Marguerite had known him well—that might be considered certain—and if her husband had not been at her side, they would have had much to talk of. He couldn't help wishing he knew. Since she carried on a business which touched society at many points, perhaps it was only a commercial acquaintance of some sort, whom for natural reasons, or no reason at all, she wished to exclude from her intimate life. But remembering how Bentoff had talked at the Casino, Lattimer could not believe him ordinary or altogether uninteresting. Besides, he had called her by her first name.

Well, this was what Marguerite had warned him against. He must demonstrate now his good sense and his faith.

When he brought the coffee, she expressed more gratitude than coffee deserves. Her nervousness, he was forced to conclude, was growing upon her.

'What shall we do this afternoon?' she asked.

'Whatever you like.'

'You know what I like—anything which gives you to me alone. It's awfully crowded here, isn't it? Funny, I could be amused with all sorts of people before I met you!'

He wished he could think of some topic which would divert both their minds.

'We might try fishing,' he suggested. 'Have you ever caught a big fish?'

She was glad to discuss fish. 'Neither big nor small! I don't like the worms wriggling on the hook, and you have to wait so long for a bite, and if you catch anything, you feel like a murderer.'

'Then you *have* fished!'

'In Europe. When I was a very little girl,' she added quickly, to reassure him.

'Well, for deep-sea fishing you use other bait anyway, and it's tremendously exciting. You might enjoy it.'

She shook her head. 'Not to-day, darling.'

'Let's get out of here,' he said suddenly.

He held her chair as she rose, and was careful to walk behind her as they went towards the patio and down the steps. Again the eyes of the loiterers turned on them, and he noticed how resolutely she moved on, eager to get out, to recognize nobody. In the car he cleared his throat and spoke, cheerfully.

'Now where shall we go?'

She leaned against him and took his hand. 'Back to our room, if you don't mind.'

'A nap so early?'

'Perhaps.'

He understood her intention. It was like her courage not to run away. If he wished to ask any questions, she would give him a fair field.

In the room she took off her sun-hat and stood before the mirror deliberately arranging her hair. She must have known that he was watching her. With her eyes still on the mirror she turned once or twice and looked back, as though concerned about the hang of her gown, then she faced him and smiled, and came forward for a kiss.

'My darling!' she said. It sounded slightly like a groan. 'I love you. You know that, don't you?'

'I ought to.'

She sat down on the bedside, folded her hands and looked up at him. He could not take his eyes away. They stared at each other.

'Well?' she asked.

He looked around for a chair and pretended to be at ease.

'You want your nap, I suppose. I'll read a while.'

'Really, I don't feel like sleep.'

'Try—it does you good.'

He found a book, and opened it, but she did not move.

'What's the matter?' he asked.

She smiled sadly. 'Nothing with me.'

'Nor with me,' he answered firmly.

He turned a page, to find his place, and afterwards he could recall how that motion was accompanied by the thought that his jealousy was satisfactorily beaten down, and he had lived through the ordeal. But she sat with that patience on her face, and he heard himself saying, 'Rather pleasant for you to meet Bentoff.'

'Not entirely.'

He knew she would be utterly truthful if he asked more. He felt his better judgement slipping.

'You said he was an intimate friend of yours?'

'He once was.'

'You still like him?'

'I shall always like him—but I do not love him. He is gone from my life, and I was glad of it, even before I met you.'

'Did you know he was here?'

'Absolutely not! I was amazed.'

He took a turn or two around the room, knowing he was a fool to examine further.

'Lattimer, dear, I warned you this might happen, but I hoped it never would. Since you have met him, let me tell you whatever you wish to know. Put every suspicion into words, and let me kill it!'

He tried to smoke a cigarette. 'You know, I couldn't understand your not wishing to go to Europe.'

She laughed, somewhat harshly. 'That *would* have been pleasant! He was sailing on the same boat.'

'He was? How do you know?'

'He told me so.'



Lattimer sprang to his feet. He regretted the gesture, but the impulse was too quick for him. "Then you have seen him since you and I met!"

She got up almost as quickly, and would have put up her hands to his face to kiss him, but he held her away.

"Really, Marguerite, that wasn't playing fair! You said he was as far from you as two men who were dead!"

"But it's true! Let me explain what happened! Really, it ought to reassure you! He came from Europe hoping that I would take him back . . ."

"You mean he still loves you?"

"Can I help that, Lattimer? I told him he must go away where we would never see each other again."

"When was that?"

"To be precise, I think it was the day before you first came into my shop. You see, I had refused him for the last time before you and I ever saw each other."

"And then?"

"He's a gentleman, Lattimer, and something more than that. He called at the shop another time . . ."

"When?"

"Monday—the day after I promised to marry you."

"Even then!"

"But as soon as he knew—about you and me—he said he would do what I wished! He would return to Europe and never bother me again! That is . . ."

"Well, why didn't he go?"

"How do I know?"

"He knew you had promised to marry me?"

"I said I was announcing my wedding. At the moment I had just told the girls."

Morton dropped into the chair and, unconscious of his nervous fingers, took up the book he had laid aside.

"Then he's here, of course, to pursue you! I have a permanent rival!"

She fell on her knees and seized his hands.

"The only danger to our love is from you! I knew it would be so! I don't blame you at all, if now you ruin our

happiness. It will be because you can't help it. Think how I hate him for coming between us! No, I won't say that—not even to make you more comfortable. He means too little for me to hate him, and it's not his fault, either. We shall be happy only if we are intelligent and brave.'

He did not return the caress of her hands, nor stoop down to give her the kiss she longed for. He sat with head bowed, overcome.

'Now we ought to run away,' she urged. 'Those other places you spoke of, or back to New York, wherever we shall be safe. I would go to a desert island and see no other human being all my life!'

He got up. 'I think I'll take a walk.'

She welcomed the idea. 'I'll go with you!'

'No. I want to think.'

'Don't leave me!' she pleaded. 'We should see it through together! You will imagine other doubts, and I ought to be there to answer them. If we begin to live apart . . .'

He forced himself for a moment to play the lover, but his kiss and his embrace did not deceive her.

'I shall die if I lose you!' she cried. 'I have not deserved this! I have done nothing wrong! I have honoured you as no man ever was honoured!'

He seized his hat. 'I'll be back in half an hour!'

His walk took him up one row of palms and down another, an aimless threading of gay thoroughfares which in his mood had turned hideous. He carried with him a heartbreaking pain. Somewhere behind his fears and resentments and desires, reason tried to plead with him, but at first the voice was faint. If what Marguerite said was true, she was more a victim than he. It was her past, not his. If he loved her, he might well aid her effort to get free of her mistakes; that is, if she told all. He marvelled that he should doubt her, but the doubt was certainly there, walking about Palm Beach in the person of that other man. She had presented an argument, but the man was another kind of truth.

He foresaw that the bottom of this agony might never

be reached. The only question was how far he had to sink. Suppose the man now disappeared. There would be the possibility of his return. Even if he died like the other two, he might become an awkward ghost. If they wished, some day, to visit Europe, and if she went willingly, would it be because the man was in America? Could she ever make a decision now without the diabolical hint that the other man, not her husband, influenced the choice?

When his brisk pacing wearied him at last, he began to feel ashamed, regretting the panic which had exposed his heart too completely. If he was her final and only love, as he hoped, then he had tortured her, reopening old wounds. If by some dark chance she was not altogether his, then he had put himself in her power.

He turned back towards the hotel. What folly to let life beat you! Whether or not she loved him, he knew he loved her. Nothing could injure him, he repeated, if he kept his integrity. Distrust may be justified, but it is bad for the soul. He would not permit her to poison his nature, not even if she were faithless. He would be true to himself.

As he came up the steps of the hotel, he realized that this courage was not adequate. As he came near to her, he could not entertain the possibility that she might be false. What reason could she have for deceiving him? When he found her, she had her own place in the world. If she did not want his devotion, there was no other reason for accepting him. The other man was there, if that was what she preferred.

When he reached their room, she was lying on the bed. She had been crying. Pity swept him at the sight of so proud a woman in tears. He sat down beside her, leaned over, and drew her close.

'I've come to apologize! You won't have to forgive me again—not for this weakness. After all, darling, it only proves what I knew before, how wise you are. No one ever understood me as you do. You foretold this, and I couldn't believe it possible. But it won't happen again. I'm rather glad it happened so soon, to teach

me my lesson, and clear the air once for all. Now there's no danger left. I promise never to be jealous again!

She clung to him in a sort of cold frenzy, and they lay there clutching each other, exhausted by too much thought and too much pain, both reaching after the bliss which had almost departed from them. He stroked her cheek as though comforting a tired child.

'It *must* not happen again,' she said hoarsely. 'You could not stand it twice, and once is too much for me. One more such agony and we shall have to leave each other. I don't mean a threat—I mean we should just *have* to, in self-defence. We should become insane, and even destroy each other. It happens to other people. We should not be different. While you were away I was asking myself whether we ought not to part now.'

'For fear I might kill you?'

Her sad smile again. 'Perhaps I should like that! No, for fear you might become something I could not admire, and I might grow despicable. You know I wanted to live with you on trial first, just to be sure of this.'

He thought hard. 'All I can give you is my promise, and I admit I didn't keep the promise I gave before. If you wish to leave me, I think you have the right.'

She clung to him again. 'If I wish to! Yet some day I may, in order to keep on loving you. Perhaps so you may still love me. If I can't make you happy, I shall go.'

'There'll be no occasion. From now on we're safe. Here!' he cried, getting up and looking at his watch. 'We have a wonderful evening before us! I will celebrate my complete education! I adore you! I admire everything you have done, are doing, or will do! You couldn't be so beautiful without drawing every intelligent man to your feet. I'm proud of the compliment they pay to my judgement and to my fortune!'

His courage hurt her almost as much as his jealousy. 'There are no other men! There is not even this man!'

Lattimer paced up and down the room for a moment, then turned to her with a sudden smile.

'You are a darling!' he said. 'And since I am so lucky, I might as well stand off and look at myself and enjoy the comedy. It must have been rough on Bentoff, meeting us together. I'm sorry.'

'It may do him good,' she answered. 'That's what I was saying at the table, when you brought the food. Now that he has seen us together, he will go away, and perhaps he will forget.'

'Did he tell you . . .?' Lattimer checked the question, thinking it perhaps a little shabby.

'Tell me what?'

'That he was going away?'

'I assumed it, knowing his character.'

'Well, I'm sorry for him. But that's that.' He lighted a cigarette, went over to the window and stood gazing out.

'If we should not be always happy,' she said, 'I must blame myself, since I knew the danger.'

He turned, walked back to her, and leaned down for a kiss. 'No—when you warned me, the blame became mine.' He put the cigarette in the ash-tray, and took her in his arms. 'You are very beautiful, Marguerite. I love you very much. And not only because you are beautiful!'

With both hands lifted, she caressed his forehead and smoothed back his hair. 'I, too, love you very much, and not merely because you are beautiful!'

He laughed heartily. 'Let's go out somewhere! We're wasting a grand day.'

*23 minutes*

## VII

When Bob called Kate on the telephone, Maude by bad luck happened to be in the office, trying to repair the damage of Lila's outburst.

'She didn't mean it, but when she gets mad, she throws what's handy. Please don't discharge her! Not till Madame comes home!'

Kate was about to deny that she was more implacable than Madame, or less acute in discerning virtue beneath

bad manners, but the bell rang, and recognizing the voice she wished she could be rid of Maude, but didn't know how. Maude stood her ground, listening impatiently, convinced that Lila's fate came before shop business, and Kate chose her replies, to keep Bob's excitement a secret.

He wished to know what the joke was.

'The telegram means precisely what it says.'

She wasn't refusing to dine and talk over their marriage, was she?

'No, I just can't come to dinner.'

In the course of nature, didn't she have to eat?

'Yes.'

Then why not with him?

'I can't tell you why.'

Was there someone in the office?

'Yes.'

Well, couldn't she throw them out and be human?

'No.'

Then he'd come right up and join the party.

'Don't. I can't see you this afternoon.'

How about that night, at her home?

'I'd rather not.'

What the devil had got into her, anyway?

She racked her brain for a formula to make him stop talking, yet with a suggestion of good-will, not to say love.

'Thank you for calling.'

There, Maude couldn't get much out of that! She put down the receiver and looked at the worried sales-girl.

'You made the first complaint, remember! You thought Lila was misbehaving, and I ought to interrupt Madame's honeymoon.'

'I'm sorry, Miss Mitchell.'

'Well, she can stay, but she ought to apologize. That at least!'

Maude hurried out, happy. 'I'll make her!'

Alone again, she called Bob's number, but Muri an-

swered that young Mr. Morton had just gone out, and wouldn't be home till late.

Half an hour later Maude came into the office again, not to bring Lila with her apology, but to show Kate an opened letter.

'Do you know anything about this, Miss Mitchell?'

At the first glance Kate was startled to recognize an address in Gramercy Park.

'My dear Ruth,

'I have received from Madame Laval a cheque, with the information that you returned the coat, and wish me to take back the money. This I decline to do. The gift was made in sincere affection, it was yours once for all, and it will remain for you to use in whatever way you prefer. I should take it as a kindness and as a sign of good-will if you would use it soon.'

There it was, with his name at the bottom, and the date. She counted back on the calendar. It was the day before the wedding, the day Laval had surprised them with the news.

She looked up at Maude. 'Where did you get this?'

'Miss Romain asked me to show it to you.'

'She is here?'

'She wanted to buy two dresses, but Madame told us she wasn't to charge another cent, and we'd better not sell her if we could help it, not even if she paid cash. So I reminded her she told you in our presence to end that credit, and she said yes that was so, but Mr. Morton didn't wish his money back, and she understood he had arranged it with Madame. I said I'd have to speak to you about it, and she said show you this.'

In Maude's eyes was the thought which troubled Kate. Morton, then, wasn't finished with Ruth Romain! That affair was hanging over! Perhaps Ruth was trying to make it hang!

'I suppose,' said Kate, 'I'll have to talk with her.'

Ruth was waiting in the show-room, gossiping pleasantly with Lila, not woeful nor forlorn, but, on the contrary, exuding zest and cheer. Her face lighted when she smiled.

Draped over neighbouring chairs were the gowns she wished to purchase.

Kate brought the letter in her hand.

Ruth smiled cordially. 'How do you do? Are my credentials satisfactory?'

Kate tried to match the warmth of smile and tone.

'I'm sure they are, Miss Romain, but I know nothing about it. Madame told me the cheque had gone back to Mr. Morton.'

'Well, you see what his letter says. There must be something in your records.'

Kate abandoned the effort to be genial. 'There's nothing. If Madame had a note from Mr. Morton, she must have taken it away with her.'

Ruth laughed, admirably care-free. 'He was seeing her so much, I guess he didn't put it in writing, but she ought to have told you. Well, what am I to do about it? Can I take these dresses?'

Kate hesitated. 'If you'd like to leave a cheque for them temporarily...'

'I wouldn't like it at all!'

'Then I'm afraid I ought to telegraph Madame.'

Unconsciously, as she spoke, she was handing back Morton's letter. Her mind was on the annoyance and the embarrassment which Ruth could not hide. But the actress's face cleared again in a sudden good-humour.

'There's no hurry. Don't telegraph, write to her! And you'd better forward Mr. Morton's letter.'

Kate felt relieved. 'I'll do that, if you can wait.' Then she thought of Laval on her honeymoon, taking that particular letter out of an envelope from home. 'No, you keep it, Miss Romain; I'll telegraph.'

Perhaps Ruth guessed the cause of the girl's sudden embarrassment. She was wonderfully at ease, as you



would not expect a woman to be just after the breakdown of a great love. To Kate her beauty, her abounding health, her high spirits, were ominous. That woman didn't believe her romance had collapsed! Perhaps she was permitting Morton to try matrimony as an interlude, but she intended to get him back, and somehow this purchase of dresses, and the exhibition of this note, had a place in her strategy. She turned away and left Kate with the letter in her hand.

'Send it to her,' she urged. 'I'll write Mr. Morton it's on the way. He'll arrange everything with Madame.'

Then she stopped outside the door to enchant Paul, who thought her very beautiful. 'A kind lady,' he reported to Gloria. This time she had no impatient taxi circling the block for her. The passers-by turned to look twice as she walked briskly up towards the Plaza.

Alone with Maude and Lila, Kate began to feel angry at the skill with which Ruth had revived the intrigue and involved her in it. The motive, now she thought of it, might be revenge. Ruth could be in no need of new dresses, but the letter would hurt Marguerite, and Morton wouldn't be glad to have it raked up now, no matter what innocence had gone into the writing. She wanted to interrupt their happiness, and Kate was to be her agent!

'Shall we reserve these gowns,' asked Lila with her usual tact, 'till you've heard from Palm Beach?'

'Put them where they belong! We'll sell her nothing!'

Lila called, as Kate moved towards the office. 'But what shall I say when she comes in again?'

'I'll talk with her!'

She sat down at Laval's desk, read the letter carefully, to make sure nothing had been missed, then tore it into little squares and dropped them in the waste-basket. Ruth wished to hurt Madame? Very well, let it be war to the knife!

That evening when she came home to the flat on East Sixty-seventh Street, Bob was already there talking earnestly with her mother, in whom his conversation had

induced, apparently, a condition of pleasurable excitement.

'Daughter,' she cried, 'I am taken by surprise!'

'I'm sure I don't know why, Mother. Let me get my hat off.'

'You never told me you're marrying to-morrow!'

'I'm not!'

'Mistaken again,' corrected Bob. 'I've explained the plan, and your mother joins me in hoping you'll make a good wife, so we're all set for the experiment. By the way, I wired Father and Marguerite to be thinking of us, around ten-thirty.'

She stood in the middle of the room, and faced him, not her mother, though Mrs. Mitchell was touching her arm, happy and affectionate.

'I'm awfully sorry, but I had good reason to call off our dinner together, and better still for fearing we ought not to marry. Not now!'

'I've no doubt Eve said it first,' Mrs. Mitchell exclaimed, 'but it's the only remark a woman can make and be sure a man will take it the right way.'

Kate was not listening to her. 'You shouldn't have come here to-night! I want to hide myself and think!'

With a sudden gentleness he took her hands in his. 'Very well, I'll go! I've assumed all along that you loved me. Does that still hold?'

'I hope it does!' She wanted to brush her eyes, but he held her fingers down. 'If it were just ourselves, I'd marry in a minute!'

Mrs. Mitchell turned grave. 'Am I the obstacle?'

Kate snatched her hands free. 'It's not you, it's his father!'

'My father?'

She was crying now, ridding herself of exasperations which had been pent up all day long. 'That Romain woman is around again, and he's writing letters to her, and there's misery coming to Madame, and you'll take his side and I'll take hers!'

'I take his all right, any time!' Bob disliked to have even Mrs. Mitchell for audience if his father had to be discussed. His voice was quiet. 'What's that about letters?'

Kate finished mopping her eyes, and put the handkerchief away. 'I'm sorry I said that!'

'Let's have it all! What letter?'

'She came to the shop to-day, with a note from him, a credit for some dresses, and—oh, I don't want to talk about it!'

Bob's jaw set firmly. 'I'd like to read that letter! I'll stop at the shop to-morrow.'

'No, you can't. I tore it up.'

He stared at her. 'You said my father has been writing to Ruth Romain?'

'He has.'

'But you've torn up the letters?'

'There was only one.'

'And you tore it up?'

'I wanted Madame never to see it. It would break her heart.'

'What did it say?'

'He told her he was paying for that coat after all. It wasn't the words—it was the fact that he still writes to her. You needn't cross-question me! When she left the shop, she announced, with Lila and Maude listening, that she would write to him at Palm Beach.'

In an interval of silence they readjusted themselves, and prepared to go on. Badly puzzled by her story, and not a little troubled, he stood looking down at the floor, snapping the fingers of his right hand with his thumb. Having expressed her irritation, she repented that she had attacked his father, and in her mother's presence.

Mrs. Mitchell, with shining eyes, sat in her chair by the table, deeply concerned, but not discouraged, and watched the quarrel proceed.

'I'm sorry I spoke of this,' Kate said, 'but it made me unhappy all day.'

'I get your point.' He was measuring his tone. 'For

some time you have not felt secure, marrying into a family with such a man as my father at the head of it.'

She cried in protest. 'Bob!'

'It's true, you know. Now you have documentary evidence that he's faithless to his new wife.'

'I didn't say that!'

'This evidence was, of course, essential to anything you *did* say, and you've torn it up!'

'You mean you don't believe me?'

'You're asking me to believe a good deal, aren't you? Because of this letter, which you destroyed, you wish me to concede that my father is a cad! You wish me to take your word for it! Because of him, you don't care to marry me! Isn't that so?'

'Not at all!'

'Then I don't understand what you've been saying!'

Mrs. Mitchell tried to stop them, her voice trembling with affection for them both. 'You mustn't, children! You're quite off on the wrong foot! Marry or not, as you please, but don't say such things to each other! Not another word, Kate, I beg of you!'

Her daughter tried to begin more calmly. 'I've bungled it, I know, but it oughtn't to be so difficult to understand. It's probably Ruth Romain's fault.'

Bob grasped at the helpful idea. 'It always was!'

'If he loved her, before he met Madame, that's his own business, of course.'

'Right!'

'But now, when Madame supposes the affair is completely cut off...'

'Has that woman discussed my father with you?'

'You needn't call her "that woman"! She never said a word about him—not after they decided to marry.'

'Before then?'

She would have avoided the question. 'Let's stop here. We make it worse!'

'What did she say about my father?'

'Only nice things. When I first learned of Ruth, she

said he was a fine man, and he must love Ruth for other things than her vulgarity.'

Bob's tone went icy. 'Too bad you needed that comfort!' He held out his hand. 'Good night!' Because there was no warmth in his grasp, she let her fingers remain limp. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Mitchell.'

'Don't go now! You and Kate shouldn't part in this mood! I wish I could help you, my dear boy!'

'Thanks.' He bowed and turned away.

'I told the truth about that letter,' said Kate, 'but it may have been a mistake to tear it up. I think I can repeat every word.'

He had grown quite hard. 'Don't bother to try.'

She reached up with her arms towards him. 'If you don't believe me, ask Ruth Romain!'

'Precisely what I had determined! If my father isn't a white man through and through, I'll learn it now!'

They listened to his steps down the stairs, Kate drooping over the table, with her head on her arms, Mrs. Mitchell at her side, with an affectionate hand on her shoulder. A quiet smile lighted the older woman's face.

'What on earth is it about? I'm bewildered!'

Kate began to sob. 'I love him so!'

'That, certainly,' said Mrs. Mitchell, 'is not the impression I got!'

'I know—I'm a perfect fool!' She strove with another sobbing fit. 'He loves his father more than he does me!'

This highly debatable proposition Mrs. Mitchell chose not to examine. She drew a chair close to her daughter, and fastened a dreamy gaze on the table-top.

'When you put a problem up to a man, he thinks you are calling for action. He expects to do something about it. I was wondering, even if his father still likes that actress, what did you wish Bob to do?'

'Nothing. It wouldn't be pleasant to marry just now with this trouble dogging us. He wanted to spend our wedding night at the apartment. That's the way it would be always! I'd see Madame, and perhaps that other

woman, all over the place. It's just one big smirch!

The atmosphere was becoming more equable. Mrs. Mitchell pursued her meditations with obvious enjoyment.

'The only course he could think of was to talk with the actress. You rather forced him to that resolve. I can imagine his perfectly natural motives. He wants to clear his father's character, at least in his own mind. Do you know what will happen?'

Kate, with her head still on her arms, confessed no curiosity, but her mother's speculations were hardy, even without encouragement.

'She will undoubtedly tell him that the affair is ended. Self-respect would dictate that answer, and she's probably too clever not to use the occasion. She will convey the idea that she adored his father and would gladly immolate herself at any time for the man's higher good. That will win Bob's confidence.

'They will then exchange ideas as to what is Mr. Morton's highest good, and she will tell him that his father has found his proper destiny in Madame Laval.'

Kate could not disguise her interest now.

'Yes, that's what a smart woman would say, and at that point, since she has completely annihilated his unhappy suspicions, Bob will realize how noble she is. I should not be surprised if they found it necessary to meet more than once. Really, it's not at all improbable that he may become her next lover!'

'Mother!'

'It frequently works out that way in stories,' said Mrs. Mitchell. 'It seems to be a principle of novel-writing that if a son interviews his father's former flame, he can't possibly come away heart-free.'

Kate sprang up, and hurried towards her room. 'Absurd! She's old enough to be his mother!'

'Even then,' insisted Mrs. Mitchell, triumphantly.

## VIII

Lattimer and Marguerite were stretched out on the sand, near the Breakers. Quite frequently now he suggested that populous region for their bath, instead of the secluded key. It was a gesture of repentance, perhaps, or an attempt to show her that he was no longer jealous. She, as she told him, liked better the lonely spot, but he had his way, and their happiness resumed a quiet course.

He was wearing trunks, having adopted the mode, and she had on the two-piece costume which had first startled and delighted him. The sun had done well for both of them, and every muscle of shoulder and back, chest and thigh, was darkened to an unabashed mahogany. The bathers whom they were now idly watching wore in some cases even less, but in that strangely liberated climate frankness seemed right, and modesty an affectation. You could recognize the new-comers by the whiteness of their skin, and by the prudery of their shoulder-straps.

Moving along the sand were two perspiring young men, fully dressed, with cameras, snapping the socially famous among the unclad, for the Sunday supplements.

Some of the bodies were worth unveiling; if not beautiful, they had health to show, and a practical trimness. Others, however, gave you pause—enormous bellies, prodigious thighs, thick knees or ankles. One such apparition passed them, a young woman sweet of face but otherwise badly out of line. Her arms and shoulders were slender, her bosom well modelled. In the evening, across the dinner-table, you would draw the wrong conclusions about the rest of her, but now in her bathing scanties you had a memorable revelation of buttock and mountainous leg.

Marguerite rolled over on the sand and laughed softly.

‘What she needs,’ said Lattimer, ‘is gland treatment.’

Marguerite thought the trouble simpler. ‘She eats the wrong things.’

Lattimer stretched comfortably. ‘I suppose that’s so. The best gland doctors put you on a diet.’

Marguerite raised her head to pursue the disappearing figure. 'Her mother was a peasant, or at the latest, her grandmother.'

'What has that to do with it?'

'On the soil they need rough food, so that's the only kind they like. When they come to this country and live in the cities, they give themselves the same food, though they no longer work in the open air. After a hundred years they will learn their mistake.'

'You don't think there could be a fat aristocrat?'

'Never! Not while she stays an aristocrat. I don't like pigs.'

Since his own body was sinewy, the idea remained impersonal. 'You think she comes from the city?'

'All the big stomachs come from New York or Philadelphia or Chicago.'

'Not Boston?'

'My Boston clients are thin,' she said. 'It's their thoughts.'

After a moment he raised himself on his elbows and looked down at her.

'Is it time to go back?'

'To the hotel?'

'No, to New York. I was wondering whether you'd had enough of this.'

She reached up her hand, patted his cheek, and smiled. 'You wish to find out what has happened to your boy. Those telegrams disturb you.'

'Not the first. He said he might marry suddenly, but I don't understand the postponement.'

'Oh, there might be a thousand reasons, none important. Perhaps they thought of a romantic spot far off, where there's an old church, or a Justice of the Peace with a long beard. At their age the scenery for the play is important.'

'Quite aside from them, Marguerite, ought we not to go back soon?'

'I've been very happy here. Can't we stay another week?'



'Of course, if you wish. I thought you might be getting tired of it.'

He rolled over on his back, for more sun, and she watched him lying there, with his eyes closed. She thought she knew why he was eager to leave, and she wondered if he could guess why she wished to stay. He was afraid of meeting Bentoff again in Palm Beach; she feared they might come on him in New York, before he caught his steamer. That he had left at once, after that accidental encounter, she did not doubt, but Lattimer, poor fellow, was haunted. He had done his best to live down the ghost, and she wished she could tell him how she admired the effort.

The camera-men were working in their direction, the two who had taken her picture with Lattimer a few days earlier. It might be appearing in the New York papers now, and perhaps George Bentoff had already seen it, with a pang. She was sorry. She wondered why she wasn't completely sorry.

How deeply Lattimer was suffering she couldn't measure, but her heart ached that he should suffer at all. Strange that the pain of his jealousy should touch her when she felt no such concern for Bentoff! They had thought they loved, and he still held to the illusion, or perhaps it wasn't an illusion. Yet no occasion for sympathy there. It was only the natural cost of life. But to be truly loved and yet be jealous was insane, she had no doubt, and men, as she had warned Lattimer, were susceptible to this disease. When she had encountered it before, she had simply walked away, to get free of the unwholesome atmosphere, but it would not be easy to leave this husband of hers even if the madness did not quickly die. She knew she loved him. How grateful she would always be to fate that they had met and recognized each other! How much more grateful if the jealous fit should be brief!

Once George Bentoff was safely in Europe, their lives would be clear. She would wait another week to guard

against every risk, then they would go back to their permanent happiness.

She must persuade Lattimer that she needed to keep on at the shop. She was aware of that proprietary disposition in him, to save his wife in the home, but he didn't realize how much of her personality, how much of that thing he called her charm, sprang from her wrestling with the practical world. She would tell him she was too deeply bound up with her little business, that the work had become a permanent part of her, and he probably would be annoyed. She could foresee his claims on all her affections. Well, that was just the point. He possessed all of her, though he might make it difficult for himself to believe it. In order to hold his devotion she would continue to play the woman slightly inaccessible and mysterious. Instinct warned her never to tell her history, and never to spread out completely before his eyes the daily chronicle of her hours.

He had fallen asleep there in the sun, his head resting on sand-covered arms. If it were wise, she could wake him and offer a full report of all that ever occurred between her and Bentoff, between her and those two lovers now dead. No doubt her generosity, her complete devotion, would be demonstrated, and his jealousy perhaps cured, but she was quite sure that his adoration also would be less. It was in her power to end both glamour and pain, and substitute serene domesticity, but the risk would be fatal. It wasn't to domesticity that he had lost his heart.

The camera-men came nearer, inspecting each group on the beach to make sure they were overlooking no news. They had to approach at close range before they could recognize who owned which sprawling, tanned body. Usually it turned out to be someone they had already snapped. They were experts at their business, with a memory for names, agile at picking information even when they didn't want another picture. The sound of their voices, chatting with the group under the umbrella to the right, roused Lattimer.

'Well, I must have dozed. What a marvellous day!' He was smiling at her. 'What are you thinking of, my darling?'

'You,' she said. 'I've been watching you sleep.'

He laughed. 'That's not much to look at!'

'On the contrary, I never saw a man sleep more gracefully.'

His face did not change. She pressed on.

'My father, whom I adored, used to snore.'

'Did I?'

'You never do.'

He lay there contented, half awake. Perhaps he hadn't noticed that unlucky remark, perhaps she was becoming more sensitive than he.

The chatter grew louder in the group near them.

'What's going on there?'

'Reporters with their camera.'

'Well, they've done us already, haven't they?'

'Every soul on the beach. They're just mopping up.'

He talked on, with his eyes closed. 'What an amusing contrast between publicity and sunlight!'

Now the camera-men were passing them, stumbling in the sand.

'Oh, there's Madame Laval! Wait a moment!'

The one who kept the statistics for the team got out his pad.

'Say, Madame, I want to ask you a question or two, if you don't mind.'

Morton opened his eyes and sat up.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Morton. I'm awfully glad I found your wife here. She knows more about the people on this beach than God Almighty Himself.'

'Does she?'

The reporter studied the pad to remind himself of some questions.

'Have you seen Mrs. Smythe here? The Long Island Smythes, you know. I heard she was at the Whitehall, but they know nothing of her. The society editor wired me—'

on account of the divorce,' he added, as though to explain all.

Lattimer glared at the fellow. Whose divorce? Marguerite found that she had not seen Mrs. Smythe.

'Gosh, I'm sorry! Well, maybe you can tell me about the Pettibones.'

'I don't know any,' said Marguerite quickly.

The reporter looked incredulous. 'Surely you know Mr. Pettibone? Raymond Pettibone?'

Marguerite was a little sharp. 'I never heard of him!'

The reporter groped for other questions. 'Are you and Mr. Morton staying on till the end of the season?'

Marguerite smiled. 'I am but clay in his hands. You must ask him.'

'We go home next week,' said Lattimer.

The man wrote down this information at considerable length.

'I want to ask you about one other person we're looking for. You probably know him—that diamond man from Europe. What's his name?'

'Bentoff,' prompted his team-mate.

'Oh, yes, I've got it here—George Bentoff. He's staying either at the Whitehall or the Breakers, but he likes to travel under another name, I guess. They won't tell us anything about him at the hotels.'

On an impulse Lattimer answered. 'He's not at the Whitehall.'

'Then it must be the Breakers.' The man wrote on his pad. 'You know him, Mr. Morton?'

'By sight, merely.'

'I thought Madame and he . . .'

'We've met,' said Marguerite. 'He is, as you say, a famous jeweller—one of the best.'

The reporter recorded her opinion. 'Well, thanks ever so much! Hope we didn't disturb you.'

He and his co-worker moved over to the nearest group on the left, and woke up someone else. Lattimer met Marguerite's gaze.

'Shall we take one more dip before we go up?'

She seized his hand and pressed it lovingly. 'He isn't here, you know! He won't come out of the hotel and make us miserable! We needn't run away!'

He lay back on the sand again, and for a while said nothing, then he turned his head towards her. 'Of course we needn't!'

Then, after another pause, 'How do you know he isn't here? Have you seen him? Or spoken to him? Or written?'

She flushed, slightly angry. 'Take back those questions!'

'I've a right to know,' he persisted. 'You speak as though he kept you informed.'

She withheld her reply until she had mastered her temper. She even managed to smile a little as she spoke.

'When he found us here unexpectedly, he would of course leave. I've no doubt he is already half-way to Europe.'

'You haven't heard from him?'

'Lattimer!'

He sat up, angry. 'Why don't you answer?'

'Because I have pride! Some questions should never be asked!'

He stood up and brushed the sand from his body. 'Shall we go?'

'No, I stay here!'

'You're not coming back to the hotel?'

'Not just now.'

He kept his place, looking down at her, while she gazed off to the sea, avoiding his eyes, as he thought.

'Oh, well,' she said at last, 'since the harm is already done, I may as well tell you. Get what satisfaction out of it you can—I have not seen him, nor spoken to him, nor written! He has not spoken or written to me! So far as I know, he has not seen me, except for that moment at the Seminole. Do you feel better?'

Involuntarily he glanced up at the Breakers. 'Then he may still be here, after all!'

She rose from the sand, and put her robe over her

shoulders. 'Don't you think you're making a mistake? The accident of those men and their questions is natural, isn't it? Why exaggerate?'

He repeated the word. 'Exaggerate?'

'I'm sorry, darling—I'm as sorry as I can be! But I love nobody but you, and if that doesn't make you happy, I'm helpless!'

He found his senses. 'You're quite right, and once more I've been a fool. I beg your pardon, Marguerite. Be patient with me. I shall learn.'

By the time they reached the hotel, they had taught themselves to be cheerful again. He was trying hard to make amends.

'When I spoke about going home this afternoon,' he said, 'I suppose I was missing what we could do in the city. I'd like to take you somewhere to-night for beautiful music, or for whatever would lift us out of the ordinary world. We ought to be moving on wings!'

'Let's go sailing again! I like that best. Let's go now! And dine late, as we did before.'

He liked the suggestion.

'I'll be ready in ten minutes,' she said, as they entered the room. 'Oh, here are some letters! I'd almost forgotten what mail is!'

Impulsively she seized the envelopes from the table. 'Here's one for you!' She handed it to him, and he knew the handwriting.

'It's from Bob. Now we'll hear about those telegrams!'

He tore the envelope open. While he was buried in the letter, she was turning over another envelope, addressed to him. On the back of it in plain type was the name of Ruth Romain. She laid it down gently on the table, and opened a letter from Kate.

'This is pretty bad!' Lattimer exclaimed. 'They're not marrying at all! I'm afraid they've quarrelled.'

Marguerite read on. 'Why, Kate says nothing about a quarrel! They have merely postponed the wedding till our return!'

She handed him the girl's letter to read, and he seized it, she thought, somewhat feverishly. He did not offer her Bob's letter.

'Don't worry,' she urged. 'It can't be serious.'

He put the letters in his pocket. 'It's too bad! The boy isn't happy!'

'We'll make him so the moment we return! Would you like to go sooner? We needn't wait till next week.'

He looked at her gratefully. 'That might be a good idea! Let's go back Saturday night.'

She gave him a comforting hug and a long kiss.

'Well,' he said, 'let's be off for that sail meanwhile.'

'Good! Just a moment till I powder my nose. There's another letter for you here on the table.'

## IX

*promised 23*

That evening the wind was gentle and the boat on the flattened lake barely crawled. A light hand on the tiller served to keep the course, and Marguerite had no excuse to play crew. She stretched out on deck-cushions, enjoying the purple heavens and the fast-coming night, and when her eyes were turned away, Lattimer watched her face. The repose of it baffled him. She must have recognized the name on the back of the letter, yet the discovery had left her, so far as he could see, absolutely untroubled.

'This,' he said, 'may be our last sail together. That is, on this pond.'

Did the idea please her? At least, her face lighted. 'How we read each other's mind! I knew you were thinking of that! It has been happy, hasn't it!'

'Very!'

'You're not sorry you married me?'

'What a question!'

'But I like to be told.'

'The better we know each other,' he answered gravely, 'the more I love you! I never imagined how fine you are, how wise.'

She turned, so that she could laugh in his face. 'You

don't know me at all, or you wouldn't say that! I don't care to be admired for wisdom.'

The sail flapped as he put about in the sluggish air.

'It wasn't because you thought me wise, was it?' she persisted. 'I like to believe you married me because you were mad.'

'Not mad. I loved you with my eyes open.'

'Oh, you did!'

Her voice caressed as well as teased. It was one of those not infrequent moments when he felt keenly her superiority. She loved him, but she was amused. He wondered if after all she had recognized the letter.

'I wish,' he blurted, with unexpected penitence, 'I wish I could make you much happier!'

'But why? I have everything I ever wanted!'

'Those jealous fits—I'm rather ashamed.'

'Don't speak of them—we must forget! It was only a dash of bad luck, his coming here, and as you saw for yourself, it was rather funny. The best is, a chance like that won't repeat. Now we start fresh.'

Because his encounter with Bentoff seemed from no point of view funny, he watched the water ahead, and let his regrets subside, undiscussed.

She reached for a pleasant topic. 'Have you planned what our life will be, now that we go back to New York?'

'Mind-reader, again! I was just considering the changes in the old apartment. I must stop spreading myself all over the place. You'll need room, poor woman! If Bob marries . . .'

'Oh, but that's not what I meant! Not the apartment, but our life. We have had our holiday, now we must begin our day together, ordinary days, and so many of them! I'm glad there are so many!'

'Well, what's the question? We'll go on as we are.'

'I hope not!' she cried. 'Here we have been unreal.'

He repeated the word, astonished, but she would have it so. 'Yes, unreal. Now we shall come down to earth, and see what we are. A better happiness, I am sure, but we must con-



trive it somewhat. Kisses and ecstasies come of themselves.'

'What is it we ought to contrive?'

'To understand each other.'

'But we do!'

'You don't understand me.'

The ignorance, then, which she feared, was one-sided. He accepted the idea no less reluctantly because she probably was right. He did not know what she thought about that letter. Was she waiting for him to speak of it first? Though it involved the shop, and might therefore be treated as a mere routine of business, he doubted if either he or she could so treat it. Did she mean they would have to discuss Ruth as soon as they returned to New York? But he did not answer her at the moment, and it was easy to drift along the silence. The southern night with its brilliant stars inspired thoughts far removed from these heart-searchings. He wanted to drink in the enchanted air, and be at peace.

The breeze grew fainter, and for a while died completely. She moved the cushions nearer to him, and reached out her hand for him to hold. Since the boat could look after itself in the twilight calm, he lifted her up and held her close, stirred by the magic of her body, but more deeply by the desire to throw down all walls between them, and to be one in spirit. There was no need of words to tell him that this longing was hers also. In that quiet moment they found a clear companionship.

When the wind came again he steered to the dock, and they walked silently back to their room, each conscious of the passionate harmony, and eager not to disturb it. In a profound sense this was another wedding night, and he marvelled a little that so ecstatic a mood could rise out of what had seemed embarrassment. When they had walked away from the hotel with Ruth's letter fresh in their thoughts, he could not have foreseen this return in more than perfect love. He yearned to possess her, body and soul, so utterly that he might be all the world she knew, or could imagine, or could remember.

From his kisses she freed herself only long enough to slip out of her light summer things, and make ready for his ardour. If he ever had doubted that her need of him was as complete as his of her, her shining eyes would have cured the error as she lay in the soft light of the room, surrendered, waiting.

Why should his conscience play a trick just then? He found it necessary to begin explanations.

'That letter,' he said, 'was from Ruth Romain.'

She broke into a laugh. 'Of course!'

'I want to tell you what she wrote.'

The laughter continued, and he was annoyed.

'It isn't funny.'

'But it is! Who but you, darling, would have the inspiration to mention such a thing at such a time!'

'But you ought not to worry about it!'

'I don't!'

He opened the wardrobe where his coat was hanging, and found the letter in the pocket.

'I'll read it to you.'

'But I refuse to listen! Her letters don't concern me!'

'This letter does. It's about the credit at your shop.'

'Oh—she wants some new clothes!'

His eyes were on the page. 'Your secretary told her there was no credit.'

'As you knew very well! When you refused to take back your cheque, I told you I would owe the money, but not to her. It's quite simple—you ought to transfer the credit elsewhere.'

'But that would be misunderstood.'

'Doesn't she wish it to be?'

'I mean, I made this gift before I met you. If I bought a coat for her now, it would look as though I were still giving her presents.'

'Of course! She hasn't overlooked that possibility. She doesn't really need any clothes. She went to *my* shop, to *my* secretary, she wished me and all my people to learn that you were still buying things for her.'

He saw the point clearly enough. He had seen it from the first.

'I was sorry to get that letter to-day. Really, I thought too well of her to suppose she would do that.'

'She loved you, you see.'

'But this is no way to show it!'

'It's one way. She drops a bomb in the middle of your honeymoon.'

He tore up the embarrassing paper, and looked around for the waste-basket.

'That's that! I just wanted you to know what was in the letter.'

When he came near to her, for a moment she held his face away from hers.

'Let her have the coat, or whatever else she wants. I'll write Kate.'

'Really, I don't want you to.'

She smiled. 'But I ought to show you how not to be jealous! I will punish you by giving you a lesson. The coat, as you say, belonged to the days before we met. There is something very satisfying in letting her come to the shop and take away whatever belonged to those days. Then we shall owe her nothing, and it will be very awkward for you to be jealous again.'

He had to justify himself a little. '*You* aren't entirely comfortable about *her*—you were on the point of flaring up, a moment ago!'

'Yes, but I remembered to set you a good example. And it wasn't jealousy—I just understand my sex. She was bound to take her revenge on me.'

'Well, how can I be sure that George Bentoff hasn't some designs too, since he still loves you?'

She reached up her arms. 'You promised never to speak of him again! There will be no occasion—he doesn't write to me.'

When Bob asked Ruth Romain whether he might come to see her, she hesitated. Over the telephone he caught the quality of the pause.

'To-day?' she said. 'I have an engagement at four.'

'It's only two now. I could be there in twenty minutes.'

She waited so long he wondered if the line had been cut.

'Hello! . . . Hello!'

'I was just thinking,' she answered. 'Yes, that will be all right—come now.'

Elise, the maid, must have understood the special meaning of this visit, for when she opened the door, she studied him sharply. She was loyal to Ruth, and at the moment hostile to all Mortons.

'Is Miss Romain at home?'

It was his father's question, almost in his father's voice. Elise admitted against her will that Miss Romain was waiting at the end of the hall.

She was smartly dressed, ready to go out. The appointment of which she had spoken was a fiction, but the street costume would make him feel he was received only by special favour, and must not detain her.

Seen at close range she was younger than he had supposed. Indeed, the stage—lights had been less kind than the softness of her room. He was glad that this private meeting explained what his father had talked of. Yes, she was a beautiful woman, and, in a sense, good-hearted. He had often heard that women with those wide, steady eyes are kind and reliable.

Moreover, her costume, to his surprise, was in excellent taste—a close-fitting suit, a small simple hat, tilted to one side in the mode, but not too small for her abundant size, and not tilted to the degree of absurdity. The severe costume pleased him. It gave no handicap at all to her wonderful figure. He liked the way she stood, very straight, waiting for him to speak.

'I'm taking a liberty, coming in here, but it's on Father's account. I hope you will forgive me. I'm very fond of him.'

He made the acquaintance of her white teeth in her famous smile.

'He's very fond of *you!*' Her hand motioned to a chair as she settled herself in the corner of the divan, facing away from the window.

'I thought,' he began again, 'if I told you plainly what you're doing to Father at this minute, you might not object—you might even thank me.'

Her interest was of the mildest. 'Am I doing anything to him?'

'It's no use being subtle, Miss Romain. He told me once you were a straight shooter.'

'Even so,' she said, 'you leave me slightly in the dark.'

'He has just had a letter from you.'

'Really?'

'I say, Miss Romain, you oughtn't to pretend! You've been writing to him about that coat he wanted to give you.'

'On the contrary, he wrote to *me* about it. I gave his letter to Miss Mitchell, the secretary. Perhaps you have seen it.'

'She didn't show it to me,' he answered hastily. 'But you said you intended to write to him at Palm Beach.'

'Miss Mitchell must have told you.'

'She did.'

'Then you come representing Miss Mitchell, is that it? Or perhaps Madame Laval?'

'I represent nobody. I come because Father thought you a fine woman, and you once loved him, and if I explained what harm this correspondence might do . . .'

'One moment!' she interrupted. 'Your father and I have been good friends for a long time, and still are. I don't wish our relation misstated.'

He pushed on with the courage of youth. 'You two were lovers!'

His fierceness moved her again, to something which resembled a smile.

'Was it nice of your father to kiss and tell?'

'More than nice. He wanted to marry you. He was terribly serious.'

For a moment she watched him, thoughtful.

‘Now what about those letters? Go on.’

‘If you and he had married, it would have been all right with me. I’m for anything Father does.’

She smiled more broadly. ‘I shall remember your goodwill!’

‘But since you decided not to, and he married someone else, these letters, coming under the eyes of Miss Mitchell, and I suppose a lot of other people, look bad. They may start gossip. I don’t think you ought to write them. I took a chance on your being what Father thought you were. I ask you to stop.’

Had he realized beforehand how difficult this mission would be, he would not have ventured so far. Now, sitting there in the room where no doubt his father had often sat, talking to this person whom his father had seen with quite different eyes, he feared he had made a mistake. To hide his faltering will, he was forcing himself to speak boldly.

She answered in subdued tones, with a dignity which increased his embarrassment.

‘If your father thought me frank, I should like to justify his good opinion. I loved him dearly, and I should have been glad if we could have married. I treasure every kind word he said to me, and every generous gift. These letters, as you probably know, would be mere matters of business if they did not refer to the last thing I am ever likely to have from him. He bought a coat at Laval’s which did not fit. Because he gave it, I should like to have it made right. The coat, you will understand, is of no importance in itself, but even though he has married another woman, I thought the sentiment need not be forbidden.’

Her variation of the strict truth gave him courage to take a still bolder tone.

‘Miss Romain, I think I understand your motives. There is more than sentiment.’

She laughed outright, sincerely amused. ‘Do tell me my motives!’

He found himself getting angry. ‘I don’t believe you

would have thought twice about that coat if he hadn't bought it from the woman he afterwards married! Of course your feud with her does not interest me, except as it will affect him, but you showed his note openly in her shop to the sales-girls and to her secretary, and you wrote him at Palm Beach where his wife might see the letter.'

'Did she?'

'I don't know, but . . .'

'Do you really think she reads his correspondence?'

'I didn't say that—I meant . . .'

'Are you even sure that I wrote to him?'

He reflected. 'You said you intended to.'

'What proof have you that I did?'

He was silent.

'As a matter of fact,' she went on, 'I did write, but nothing to which Laval could object, even if she has begun to open his mail, and though I don't like her, I doubt if she's so clumsy. That secretary of hers—a nice girl, but not very intelligent—said your father no longer wished me to have the coat. Naturally, I asked him if that was so. If he says yes, the incident is closed.'

'Otherwise?'

'Why, if he still wants to give me the coat, I'll buy it.'

'And you won't write him again?'

His awkward questions continued to give her satisfaction.

'You're a very attractive boy!' she exclaimed. 'I had no idea anyone could be so like your father! I can imagine him sitting there, talking to me. In other matters I suppose you are very clever!'

His face showed her how keenly the words had stung. She stopped smiling and leaned forward, friendly and sympathetic.

'Very well. Since we understand each other, what do you wish me to do?'

'Give him a fair chance to be happy with Laval!'

Her eyes turned shrewd. 'Is their happiness in doubt? Does it need to be protected?'

'Only as all marriages need it, I suppose.'

The shrewdness left her eyes, and the laughter came back. 'You're not married yourself, are you?'

'Not yet.'

'Then you are wise beyond your years! I agree with you that those two will never get on.'

'But I didn't say so!'

'You were delicate about it, and I respect your reticence, but we both have noticed the same thing. I never believed she was the right woman for him.'

Annoyed at the ease with which she pushed him around, he struck back.

'I never thought *you* were! I advised him against marrying you.'

Once more his brusqueness seemed to give her nothing but delight.

'But you know I had the same doubt myself! If I had been sure I was altogether equipped to make him happy, we would have married years ago. Your father is rather a special case, but I needn't tell *you*; you know him.'

All at once it occurred to him that his errand had come to an end, whether successfully he could not tell, but, either way, the talk was beginning to ramble.

'Thank you for seeing me. May I count on you?'

She stood up and offered her hand.

'Come any time, if I can help. I've enjoyed your plain speech, and you've satisfied an old curiosity. I wished to see what you looked like.'

For a moment he suspected her of flattery, and grieved that she could be so cheap, but her next words dispelled the misapprehension.

'You as much as anything prevented my marriage. Your father always put you first. You really are his career. That's one reason why Laval is in danger. Since you don't admire her, she is doomed.'

He was horrified at the opinions put in his mouth. 'But I do . . .' He was too honest to add an insincere word.

'Would you say you'd have chosen her as the one woman for him?'



'I have no right to discuss that.'

Seeing that she had gone far enough, she changed her tone. 'Thank you for trusting me! I'll try to show you my appreciation. There will be no more letters. I value your father's friendship, and I'd like to have yours. Tell Laval, if occasion offers—her secretary will do just as well—that I have no further interest in the coat. Please tell your father for me that you and I have agreed to end the whole thing.'

'Oh, but I can't tell him that! He wouldn't like my interfering.'

'Then he doesn't know you are here.'

'Of course not!'

She nodded, thoughtfully. 'Well, it's ended, just the same.'

He was about to leave, with a sense of triumph, and he could afford to be gracious.

'I beg pardon if I didn't quite say the right things. You've been very generous.'

She stared at him, and he saw in her face, for the first time that afternoon, the hardness which he had disliked in her on the stage.

'Not generous at all! Utterly selfish! You have brought me precisely the help I needed. I will do what you wish because I shall benefit. Frankness did you ask for? My dear boy, I still expect to marry your father! I am sure now that this present experiment of his will prove, as I hoped, temporary. When he has learned his mistake, I shall take him back.'

## XI

The last day at Palm Beach began with a brilliance of sunlight and weather which set their mood.

'Did you ever suppose,' he asked her, 'that nature could be so real a thing? I've used the word all my life, and I've read about it with a capital *N*, but now for the first time I am aware of it.'

She understood. 'Drawn both ways, aren't we—towards earth and towards light. As though a force laid hands on us.'

'Towards water, too,' he corrected, 'all the elements except fire. I want to swim! How about the Breakers?'

He asked in a tone so light and care-free that she couldn't tell whether he was proving to her his complete indifference to Bentoff, who might or might not emerge from the hotel portal, or whether Bentoff had really disappeared from his consciousness.

'I'd rather get the boat and go off to that tongue of sand, where we can be alone, be ourselves.'

He laughed. 'Our sun-bath, eh?'

'Yes—I like it.'

Their discreet boatman ran them out, and buried himself in a newspaper and a pipe, while they wandered along the magical and empty shore with only the pelicans for companions.

Marguerite laughed at the birds fishing. She carried her cap in her hand, and once out of sight of the boatman, she slipped off the scant bathing-suit. Lattimer watched the figure of bronze health as she ploughed and stumbled in the sand.

She turned suddenly with a smile. 'You happy?'

'I'm not sure I'm awake! I used to dream of this when I was a boy.'

'Already? You dreamt of me?'

He shook his head, laughing. 'Did you ever notice how easy it is to be honest with your clothes off? No, my darling, when I was a boy I never thought of you! My most delighted visions merely prolonged the fun of the swimming-hole. It never was large enough nor deep enough, and the shore was muddy. Have you ever tried to dry yourself after stepping out on a muddy bank? What I longed for was no end of clean sand, no end of water, no end of sun, and me wearing nothing but air!'

She was delighted at his vehemence. 'And now you have it all—with one superfluous woman!'

He stopped there alone with her in that immense scene, and the pelicans paid no attention to their kiss.

Later, when they were swimming side-by-side, along the

shore, he spoke to her in snatches, as he turned up to breathe.

'Almost a pity—to leave this—ever!'

'Why leave?' she called back. 'I'll go native—with you. Everyone else—has thought of—a South Sea island. Maybe there's—an island—to rent.'

He turned over on his back. 'It's not practical, I'm afraid. This desert-island business would be all right if you could be sure you wouldn't have a toothache. And I have always had one vulgar doubt about it.'

'Which one is that?'

'What do they do for a nail-file?'

When they were on the sand again drinking the sunlight, she turned her dark eyes towards him in drowsy thoughtfulness. 'I'm glad we are not young.'

'But we are!'

'I was not speaking of age. I am glad we have lived so long that we can enjoy the end of some circles which we saw begin. You used to slip into that swimming-pool when you were not much more than a human frog. You know you weren't, Lattimer! And then you grew into a very serious man, important to the world and a great care to yourself. You know you are! And then you come to this most artificial place, with automobiles and motor-boats, and since you have earned the money to enjoy it all, you arrive at a stretch of wilderness, just ocean and shore, and you take off your clothes and are happy. How amusing! So long a way just to come back!'

His eyes were closed against the sun, but as he listened, he smiled. 'Oh, I don't know! How about yourself?'

She waited a moment. 'Perhaps there is this difference between us—perhaps between any man and any woman—you, when you contrive so good a moment as this, suddenly remember that you once had it, and that you have been wandering after ambitions much less satisfying. A woman will wander after them too, but all the while she knows they are unreal. Perhaps that is why I am always about to laugh. At myself.'

He sat up and looked at her. 'I suppose we ought to be getting back to the hotel.'

She laughed. 'There you go! Is the hotel important?'

He leaned over her, looked down into her eyes. 'Woman, our food is there! Never have I wandered from food! And I'll tell you this—if I hadn't followed a few civilized ambitions, I might never have met the one person . . .'

In the boat speeding home they said nothing, but each knew the happy mood was still strong in the other, and when they reached their room she was not surprised at the boyish exuberance with which he poured out his plan for the rest of the day.

'First of all,' he explained, 'we'll get a car and ride out to the Seminole for lunch.'

She asked herself, of course, whether this was another gesture of confidence in his fate or of trust in her. Did he wish to prove that the Seminole would not remind him of their meeting with Bentoff? Or had he really forgotten?

'I'd love to go,' she said. 'Let's see all the other interesting places to-day!'

She chose her costume with special care, and got out a large sun-hat which gave her a note partly of grace, partly of bravado. From the top drawer of her trunk she selected a thin chain for her neck holding a tear-shaped pearl, and because the colour seemed joyous, she put on a ring with a magnificent ruby.

In the car she talked rapidly, as though good-humour had to find words, and he listened, contented, holding her hand.

'It's like all the vacations I've ever had, since I was a child,' she remarked, as they found a quiet table in the corner of the buffet. 'The last hours are the best—you taste the flavour then. I have been very happy, Lattimer!'

Her praise roused in him self-reproach. 'I wished you to be happy, but I've gone at it stupidly.'

'Please don't revive that. We have both been happy. I will remember my wedding journey no other way!'

He told her he was moving at that moment through unclouded bliss.

But as they sat there lingering over choice food, his eye fell on the chain about her neck, and the lovely pendant. Perhaps it was the place which brought back that other visit. Suddenly he was thinking that George Bentoff dealt in jewels and precious stones. What he saw had perhaps been Bentoff's gift.

He glanced at the slender watch on Marguerite's wrist, and at the ruby which he had not seen before.

Of course she might have bought them for herself. Or some other man might have given them to her. If they had come from Bentoff, would she be wearing them now?

Or did her liberal philosophy make it possible for her...?

His beautiful day was quite ruined. The up-surge of jealousy drove him quite mad. He found himself praying that he might hide the sickness from her, and act the part of magnanimity to the end.

Driving back through the Everglades, the eight miles or so, she kept her hand in his. There were not languages enough to tell how much she loved him.

'When we go back to New York next week,' she said, 'I must dispose of the shop. You wish me to give it up, don't you?'

He knew she was really asking no question. She was offering a sacrifice to his peace.

'But I thought you were fond of it.'

'Naturally! I created it!'

'Well, then, keep on.'

'But you'd rather I didn't?'

He tried to explain, with affectionate gentleness. 'It must take all your energy, and you'd be absent through the day.'

'But you, too.'

'I could be home quite often if you were there. Besides...'

'Yes?'

'I don't like my wife to be in business.'

She laughed. 'That's the man speaking! The world must know that you support your family.'

He agreed. 'I'm not ashamed of that point of view!'

When they had ridden a short distance, she spoke again, quietly. 'I shall close it up.'

'Isn't there someone who could carry it on for you?'

'I thought of giving it to Kate, but there would be the same problem again. Your son, no doubt, has his father's ideas.'

Lattimer looked worried. 'I wish I knew what has happened between him and that girl. Do you think well of her? Is she the right one for him?'

There was caution in her answer. 'I don't know him, of course. She's very fine. I love her.'

'She's not his equal.'

'That may be. I meant only what I said—I don't yet know him.'

Harmless as this talk was, it left them both a little thoughtful. He wondered whether he had made the right reply to her offer. Did she expect him to insist that she continue to sell coats? Had he accepted her generosity too easily? He glanced at her there in the car beside him, to catch a hint from her face. She glanced back and smiled, serene as ever, and self-sufficing. In the car she had taken off her sun-hat. She wore one of those simple things for which she was known—a summer print, which almost boasted its modesty. He was conscious of the slender line, perfect and cool from chin to feet. He noticed the patrician ankles, idly crossed on the cushion before her. He noticed also the jewel at her neck.

'If your heart is in the business,' he began again, 'you might as well keep it going.'

She shook her head, in the best of humour. 'You don't know my character yet, do you? It's all or nothing. I've enjoyed my work, and if you did not object, I certainly would not bring it to an end, but since I know you do object, I shall try to make you happy, so long as I am your wife.'

'How about my trying to make you happy?'

She squeezed his hand. 'You succeed!'

So long as she was his wife! The words did not leave him. He found himself turning them over, with a sudden fear. Did she still look on their marriage as an experiment? Was another possibility reserved somewhere in her thoughts, where he could not follow? Twice he was on the point of asking, but foreseeing the kind of talk which such a question would start, forced himself to be silent.

When they reached their room, he made quick use of the privacy; standing just inside the door he caught her to him, pushed away the large hat, and kissed her madly. She wished him to be mad just then. From far beneath her natural poise and her habitual reticence, the craving for companionship, the elemental protest against loneliness, appeared in her eyes and in her voice.

'I love you! Now I adore you!'

At that moment he felt far from worthy of adoration. He listened to the tender syllables with a pang of self-reproach, wondering if he could bring to her what would deserve such magnificent worship.

'Now,' she cried, 'how shall we spend the rest of our happy day? Have you plans for me, my husband?'

'I have. First you will take your nap, and then . . .'

'No nap to-day! I'm not sleepy. I'm wonderfully rested!'

He assumed a playful tone. 'Did you ask what your husband's plans were? You are to take a nap! If you feel rested, it's just because of that half-hour each day. When we return home, you may not have the chance. Take it now!'

'But, really, Lattimer . . .'

'Don't argue! Close your eyes for an hour, and I'll be back . . .'

'Where are you going?'

'I'll walk down to the beach, I think, or the Casino.'

'How absurd! I shall come too!'

'Marriage,' he insisted, 'is all or nothing. You will obey me completely!'

When she was comfortable on the bed, amused and resigned, he leaned over for a parting kiss, and stroked the

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white forehead and the black hair, and at the door, just before he went out, he stopped to wave his hand and catch the eyes which followed him.

Sincerely he did not know where his walk would take him, but, once on the avenue, he found himself drawn inexorably to the Breakers. He may have been asserting his courage, since it was there on the beach that he had last heard the mention of George Bentoff, and had lost ground to his jealousy. It was a good thing, as he was learning, to face these terrors. The lunch at the Seminole had gone off well. He would now exorcize the ghost at the place where Bentoff might or might not have stayed.

For a while he vibrated up and down the boardwalk between the two gates which reserved the area for the guests of the hotel. This ghost was a hard one to lay. If he hadn't met the fellow there at the Casino! And if he hadn't liked him! That was the worst of it. Bentoff was dangerous because he was interesting.

Down on the beach the usual afternoon crowd were taking the sun, or running into the water, or coming out. The picture had perhaps more youth in it, he thought, than when he and Marguerite had watched, the other day. He noticed one particular group of boys and girls, and he wondered if Marguerite had met Bentoff long ago, when they were careless and unacquainted with life, like his own son. It wasn't easy to think of Marguerite as ever inexperienced, yet she must have begun, like all of us, with gorgeous expectations and no facts as yet to contradict them. It was natural, of course, for him to wish they might have met in that state of innocence to plight their troth, and to go on hand in hand for ever, yet these girls and boys chasing one another around the beach, in their fashionable, and to say truth, quite harmless nakedness, were not much to fall in love with, and perhaps Marguerite at their age had acquired little of her present splendour. Perhaps, if they had met as boy and girl, he would not have liked her, nor she him.

Such reflections, he regretted to admit, assigned vast



credit, indirectly, to Bentoff and the two who were dead. If it was experience which had developed her charm, then he was in debt to the lovers who had provided the experience. The thought made him squirm. Perhaps she was grateful to them—to all three. He wanted her to be grateful only to him.

Why had she spoken of their marriage as though it might not last? Had that encounter with Bentoff unsettled her? He had read in more than one book that women never escape entirely from love of the first man to whom they give themselves. Suppose now she really thought she was through with Bentoff for all eternity, and yet, when he appeared again, suppose that the first affection had returned! Such reversals, he had no doubt, frequently occurred. It would put her in a wretched plight. She would try to play the game out faithfully, but all the while, even though against her will, Bentoff would be first in her secret thoughts.

He must find out, if possible, whether Marguerite was trying to conceal or to stifle any persisting affection. Then he ought to be sure whether Bentoff had outgrown his passion, or whether he was still pursuing. Then he would have to decide—he saw this coming—in decency, in self-respect, he would have to make up his mind what was best for Marguerite. If she belonged to Bentoff by some kinship of temperament, or by ineffaceable memories, then Bentoff should have her.

Could Marguerite have read his thoughts just then, she would have known how far along in his education love had brought him. Now he was really thinking of her, and unselfishly. He was learning that he could not be happy unless she was happy too. She would have observed, no doubt, that this generous wisdom was still mixed with baser matter, that even if she were entirely happy, he would be miserable until in one way or another he had got rid of Bentoff, and one way to get rid of him, strangely enough, would be to surrender her.

As he paced up and down the boardwalk, he fell to re-

examining the evidence. Bentoff had perhaps stayed at the Breakers. Well, that meant nothing one way or another. According to the newspaper-men, he was not now at the Breakers. Marguerite was ready to swear he had left Palm Beach, but she admitted she had no ground for this opinion. Bentoff might be much more than a ghost. He might come out of that door. He might at this very minute be talking with her over at the Whitehall.

Lattimer strolled towards the door of the Breakers from which he had just imagined Bentoff emerging. He entered without haste, and approached the information-desk, the most casual-seeming of visitors.

‘Is Mr. George Bentoff stopping here?’

The clerk nodded. ‘I think so, sir.’ He turned to look up some cards.

Lattimer came to his own rescue. ‘I understood he was here, but now he has left.’

‘I don’t find his name,’ said the clerk doubtfully. ‘Just one moment, sir.’

He seized the telephone. Lattimer leaned on the desk, and planned what to do if Bentoff were found. Meet him at once, or come back later when Marguerite would not be waiting? The talk, once started, might lead far. He was roused by a light hand on his shoulder, and turned to see Marguerite herself standing there, under the broad hat, in the summer gown. Her eyes were shining.

‘Mydarling! You didn’t come back. I couldn’t wait for you!’

Before he could answer, the clerk put down the telephone.

‘Mr. Bentoff was staying with us, but he left a few days ago. Would you like his address?’

‘He’s not in Palm Beach?’

‘No, sir, he left for New York.’

‘Thank you, that’s sufficient.’

He walked out of the hotel, hardly conscious of his wife at his elbow, and altogether blind to the effect upon her of what the clerk had just said. He was turning towards their own hotel when she stopped him.

‘Shall we walk here for a moment?’

'Here? I've been pacing these boards for hours, till they drove me crazy!'

'So I see.'

He looked sharply at her, alarmed. Now there was another shining in her eyes, not love but danger. 'You have walked here until you lost your good sense, and much more besides! It is the right place for me to walk now while I say to you something unpleasant, which must be said.'

He stared at her, and at first she returned the gaze firmly, but soon her eyes grew tearful.

'It is as I told you,' she went on. 'You cannot forget. To-day of all days! I thought we were never so happy. I was absolutely yours! The little shop, everything that belongs to my past, I wanted to throw away so that our love would include only what we always had known together! Yet you didn't trust me!'

'Of course I trusted you!'

'No, you came spying here, to make sure that he wasn't, after all, pursuing me, or that I wasn't carrying on some intrigue with him. You couldn't put him out of your mind, as I put out that letter you received from Ruth Romain! It's as I told you; it's hopeless.'

They were walking slowly between the two gates which blocked off the promenade. She spoke without raising her voice, but with a ground-swell of indignation and reproach. He struck back, to justify himself.

'I did want to be sure he wasn't here! You are quite wrong to say I ever suspected you of carrying on an intrigue with him, but since you yourself came to the desk of the Breakers, I wonder what brought you!'

'I was looking for you.'

'Why here?'

'Oh, Lattimer, I've seen this coming, for days! At least, after that camera-man talked to us, I expected you to do some investigating.'

He tried to keep down what he wanted to think was injured pride, though he knew it was the jealousy she had foretold, and in unexpected volume.

'You must admit my curiosity has some grounds to work on. Your wish to come here at all was sudden, and very strange.'

'I explained it! He was going to Europe, on the very boat you had picked out. I hoped never to meet him again.'

'Then why didn't he go?'

'For the same reason—he wanted not to meet you and me, certainly not on our wedding trip! He must have seen in the paper that we were sailing on his ship.'

'He is waiting for you now in New York! You knew that, I suppose?'

She bit her lip, but said nothing. They paced a brief silence.

'Have you received any visitors since we came here?'

She looked up at him, startled. 'No one! What made you ask?'

'I thought a man called one afternoon, while you were taking your nap.'

She declined to defend herself against this absurdity. In his wretchedness he was aware that each additional word was a new folly, but the demon drove him on.

'I'd like to ask one thing.'

'I will answer whatever you ask.'

'Was it Bentoff who taught you to swim?'

She laughed outright. 'How unimportant! Lattimer, how childish!'

'Was it?'

'It was, if you insist on knowing! What difference does it make now? You already knew he was once my lover, and I made it clear that he is a fine man, even though he has altogether left my life, and we had parted before I met you. There is no secrecy about it at any point, and no reason for jealousy. I have never loved anyone as I love you, and I am yours entirely and for all my life, unless you insist on throwing me away.'

He managed a quieter tone. 'Shall we go back to the hotel?'

'As you wish.'

They left the boardwalk for the avenue, and started for the Whitehall.

'This offer of yours to give up the shop, is it another attempt to put Bentoff out of your life?'

'Attempt? What do you mean?'

'I was wondering if the shop made you think of him.'

'Why should it?'

'I thought perhaps it was he who established the business for you.'

She was quite calm, she even smiled. 'When I promised to answer any question, I did not suppose you would strike quite so low. I owe nothing to him—he owes nothing to me.'

Her dignity was so perfect, and the grace of her movements so untroubled as she walked by his side, that he supposed the episode was coming to a hopeful end. As usual, when the jealous fit had run its course, he began to be ashamed of his weakness, and he saw that he must apologize.

'I'm afraid I disappoint you.'

'You do.' She admitted it cheerfully.

'Well, I'm disappointed in myself.'

She did not meet his eye, but her voice sounded friendly and forgiving. 'It is quite natural. I knew it would be.'

Just before they reached the hotel, she asked about their return to New York, and the question gave him pleasure; it seemed to imply so thoroughly a new beginning.

'Is it Monday we go?'

'As you like. Monday or Tuesday.'

'The morning train?'

'No, late afternoon, somewhere around six. Does the train make any difference to you?'

'None. I merely wished to know when my trunk must be packed.'

From that moment she was cheerful again, and the happiness which he had all but ruined came back quite unimpaired. In their room, when he put his arm around her, she looked up affectionately.

‘Can’t we take a walk along the lake before dinner?’

Her wish for more exercise at that moment surprised him, but he was eager to please her. He looked at his watch.

‘It’s half-past five now.’

‘Well, you go down to the front-porch and wait for me. I’ll be with you in a moment.’

‘Why not go down together?’

She reached up on her toes to give him a long kiss. He noticed the intensity with which she gazed into his eyes, and the caress of her hand on his cheek as she drew away from him again.

‘You owe me something, don’t you think? Humour me this time without a question.’

Bewildered, but not warned, he carried his hat down to the chair on the front-porch and watched the passers-by, as he listened for her step behind him. When she did not come, he taught himself patience, refusing at first to look at his watch, but when the wait became unendurable, he pulled out the timepiece, and saw it was five minutes to six. Terror struck him, with a flash of understanding. Perhaps she had said farewell! This affair with Bentoff, perhaps . . . Perhaps she had killed herself!

In the room he could find no trace of her. Her hat was gone and the light coat she carried sometimes to the key, but the wardrobe-trunk stood partly open, as she left it, and so far as he could account for them, her bags were still there.

If she had left the hotel, it must have been by the side-door. He hurried down, trying not to show his fear. Yes, the porter at that entrance remembered distinctly, Mrs. Morton had gone out a short time before. She was apparently bound for a walk. She had gone towards the lake.

For two hours he searched for her, with increasing agony, not ready to tell the police of her disappearance, nor in any other way to admit openly that she could have sought disaster. He went to the Breakers again, through the lobby, along the beach, then to the Casino, then once more along

the lake. From his room in the hotel he telephoned the Seminole Club, and inquired whether Mrs. Morton were there.

His intelligence was paralysed. Conscience-stricken over what he had said to her that afternoon, he could not now imagine the next step. He sat slouched down in his chair, staring at the floor.

Until the bell-boy brought him a telegram. She had sent it from Daytona, where the north-bound trains stop.

'IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE, AS I FEARED. DO NOT FOLLOW ME. I SHALL NEVER COME BACK.'

PART THREE  
BEYOND

I

I ASKED MARGUERITE WHY SHE BROUGHT THE HONEYMOON to this abrupt close, but she could not or would not tell. If she had already put up with Lattimer's smouldering jealousy, why should she walk out just because he was inspecting the hotel register?

My own opinion is that something flared up in her which she doesn't wish to remember, or which died again and is hard to recall. There is more to this part of the story than I know.

The third and last section, the return to New York, is the most fragmentary. In their report of it, he and she had extraordinary lapses of memory, both seeming, in fact, a little ashamed. I can't guess what Lattimer was doing in Long Island.

The dialogue here is purely my own invention. I am not sure that Marguerite called Lila a fool, or was so sharp with Maude and Kate, but she says she was abominably irritated, and I have tried merely to indicate that understandable condition.

As to what happened to Lila and Maude, I have imperfect data, but again my own opinion. I think Maude became interested in Mr. Stringer; I doubt if she slapped his face. I shall be greatly surprised if at the Day of Judgment it appears that she reported correctly or completely what happened at the wholesale fur-shop.

Lila's relations with Mr. Stringer will also, I believe, be fully revealed only at that remote date.

My own opinion is that when several women are closely associated, and one of them acquires a lover or a husband, the effect on the others is upsetting. In the sculpture of the ancients love carried a lighted torch, to show that this passion is incendiary. Mr. Stringer at that moment was the only object towards which the conflagration could move. I find here possible light on Marguerite's previous affairs with Bentoff and the two men who were dead.



## II

She had left the apartment at East Sixty-sixth with all the windows shut tight, for a long absence, and the shades drawn. Now, when she unlocked the door and let herself in, the dead air of the place, camphor-flavoured, rebuked this irregular return. Before she laid aside hat and coat, she went from room to room, pulling up the sashes and drawing back the curtains, so that she could breathe.

The heat had been turned off, and the clamminess of the house became sharply chill as the wintry morning swept in, with the city noises. She opened the closet in her bedroom and found a heavy coat, instead of the light thing in which she had fled from Palm Beach. Then she made another tour of the house, and started the radiators. There was dust on the tables and the chairs—she noticed it when she wished to lay down her summer hat. With a cloth and a mop she made a hasty neatness here and there. Because the heat came on too slowly, she lighted a fire in the living-room. Then she called the shop.

‘Is that you, Kate? Yes, indeed. Here I am. No, at *my* apartment. . . . No, he’s not, we didn’t—I’ll explain when I see you, and that must be at once. I’d like to talk with you here. . . . Yes, now. . . . Well, let Maude look after it.’

She held the telephone with one hand while with the other she turned a list of numbers, to find the astonished Gloria.

‘I was hoping you were still free. . . . Good! As soon as you can. . . . I’ll be here for another hour. Set things to rights and get supper for this evening. You and Paul both well? Good!’

Having enough of ventilation, she closed the windows again, on both floors, ending with her own room. From the closet she took a cold-weather street dress and laid it on the bed, slipped off her clothes and went to the shower. When she appeared again, in underthings and stockings, she put on the fresh costume, and went down to the living-room, to be ready for Kate.

The girl came breathless, and at first sight of the deep

tan, the work of those hours on the keys, exclaimed in admiration.

'You never looked so well! How glad I am to see you!'

But when they had come away from the door, and the light from the living-room windows showed rings under Marguerite's eyes, she was frightened again, as she had been at the unexpected telephone-call.

'What's the matter?'

'You've lost a career, my dear. Sit down, and don't take it too seriously. Will you have a cigarette? I've come back to the shop, and we'll go on as before.'

'Oh, Madame!'

The girl's quick sympathy, guessing all that would be difficult to tell, broke through Marguerite's armour. Her eyes filled.

'We have parted, and I came back alone.'

Kate flared up. 'I never liked him! It's that Romain woman, I suppose!'

'Who? Oh, heavens, no! And you're wrong not to like him. I love him! I never thought I could be so outrageously devoted!'

'Then why . . .?'

Marguerite played again the role of detached philosopher. 'I must confess to a great humiliation,' she said, smiling. 'I'm afraid he doesn't love *me*. That is, not enough. No one else, of course, but not enough *me*. There, we shan't speak of it again, but I'm thankful it's said, since you ought to know. From now on, it will be as it was, before I consented to be foolish! How with yourself? Are you married?'

Kate shook her head.

'You quarrelled? What about?'

The girl flushed, and hesitated. 'It would sound ridiculous, or worse.'

Marguerite was impatient. 'I deserve a confidence—in return.'

'Well, I didn't trust his father—that was because of Ruth Romain—and he worries about you.'

'Me?'

'He finds you too mysterious.'

Marguerite started to laugh, in a burst of her old good-humour, but she remembered, and became grave. 'You mean he would like to know what I was doing before I met his father?'

'I'm afraid that's it.'

'But you love him, don't you?'

'Not when he talks against you!'

'Oh, nonsense! You can't marry a respectable reputation for me! Where is he?'

'At Cambridge. He comes down the middle of each week.'

'And you always see him?'

'Yes.'

Marguerite reached to the table for a cigarette. 'Then I shan't worry about you.'

'I made one mistake,' the girl added, to relieve her conscience. 'I practically drove him into calling on Ruth Romain, and now he thinks she's rather remarkable.'

This time Marguerite laughed with no restraining second-thoughts. 'How did you bring them together?'

'I said his father was writing to Ruth, and beginning the affair over again, though I knew he wasn't, but I had lost my temper, and he lost his, and swore he'd go at once to the woman and learn the truth.'

'Of course!' said Marguerite, still showing vast pleasure. 'The boy had probably been trying to keep down his curiosity for weeks, and you furnished an excuse, and now you're not sure what kind of truth he learned.'

'Oh, I didn't mean . . .'

'Yes, you did, and you were right. She did her best not to make a bad impression. Who wouldn't? . . . How are Lila and Maude?'

They both seized on the question as a temporary escape. 'You should have come a week ago!' Kate laughed. 'They're murdering each other! Lila's beau, Stringer, took them both to dine at the Casino de Paree, because Maude said

it was the best place for a wild life, and unless you had a boy-friend with plenty of money, you might go to your grave in virtuous ignorance. She said that to Stringer, with Lila standing by, and he thought it cute of her, so they went and had too much champagne, and—well, it was a vulgar row.'

'That's no reason for suppressing the story!'

'I mean, Stringer forgot it was Lila he admired, and took a fancy to Maude, and the fight began when he wanted her to share his room at the hotel, then and there.'

'So now they play over the hand in the shop, when they ought to be selling clothes?'

'Madame, they almost pull each other's hair!'

'Maude taking Stringer's side, of course, proud that at least one man wanted to seduce her, and Lila wishing she knew which poison is most painful. Among you all, I suppose my business is a wreck!'

'Rather quiet, but we've sold some things.'

'Paul at least has behaved himself, I dare say.'

She rose from the chair with her old alertness. 'Give me a kiss, my dear! Now hurry back to the shop and tell the girls to forgive each other, or I'll dismiss them both. I'll be over after lunch.'

Kate looked around the room. 'Have you unpacked? Can't I help?'

Marguerite shrugged her shoulders. 'The trunk and the bags are in Palm Beach. I walked out.'

They looked steadily, eye to eye, the girl frightened once more, the woman weakening again, to tears. 'Run along now,' she said, holding out her hand. 'It's all right.'

Kate did not let go the hand. 'Is he still there?'

'I don't know—it's immaterial.'

When Kate was gone, Marguerite went back to the telephone, called long-distance, asked for Harvard University, and created havoc with the routine of that institution, until Mr. Robert Morton, by special dispensation, and in view of what the authorities understood to be dire emergency, was summoned out of a class. He had been told that New

York was calling, and he jumped to the wrong conclusion.

'Hello, Kate. What's on your mind?'

He was surprised to hear Marguerite's laugh. 'It isn't your wife; it's your mother-in-law. When you come to the city this week, will you talk with me for a few moments here at my apartment? It's about Kate, and indirectly your father. Do please come soon! Kate doesn't know I am asking this. Will you keep my secret?'

She surprised him, of course, but it was pleasant to be so urgently needed, and he made ready for his New York visit with even more than his usual zest.

Marguerite found it something of an ordeal, returning to the shop that afternoon. As she walked over to Fifth Avenue and down along the Park, she remembered a much brighter sun and a more passionate landscape. At Fifty-eighth Street, when the traffic stopped her, she crossed to the east side and so down to where Paul was leaning, somewhat indolently, against the side of the door. Catching sight of her, he grinned with pleasure, stood up straight and saluted.

'Glad to see you back, Miss Laval! I mean, Miss Morton!'

She accepted the amended greeting. 'You and Gloria are both well, I understand?'

'Splendid, Miss Morton!'

Maude and Lila, having seen her talking to Paul, were waiting inside the door, each giving the impression that she wished to welcome Marguerite without the aid of the other. Lila had lost weight, and her eyes were red. Marguerite attributed the redness not to tears, but to late hours. Maude was good-natured and cheerful as usual, but because of what Kate had told her, Marguerite fancied she could detect a lurking combativeness, a new firmness to the set of her jaw.

'Oh, Madame!' she cried. 'We've missed you a lot!'

Marguerite shook hands with them both, glancing from one face to the other.

Maude went on. 'Is Mr. Morton going to let you run the shop?'

'He has consented to that arrangement.'

'I told Lila you could manage him! Any man would just have to do what you wanted, in the long run.'

Marguerite had questions to ask, but this insistence on Mr. Morton drove her at once to her office. With the door closed she felt she had reached a safe refuge.

On the familiar desk Kate had arranged in two piles the letters which ought to be seen at once—those already answered, with the replies fastened on the back, and the more recent ones which still needed decision. At sight of the correspondence Marguerite pretended to groan. Kate encouraged her.

'They're not so many as they look.'

'Well, anyway, I can't escape. I'll begin at the top and go right through. Let no one disturb me. If there are telephone-calls, you take them.'

For nearly an hour she sat studying the letters and estimates and bills, trying to recover the mood which a few weeks earlier had been natural, but now between her and every page came thoughts of Lattimer and a consciousness of the pain which she had brought away when she left him. She wondered how long she could pretend to be wise and firm.

Nothing in these papers seemed to her important. The substance of them all, if you read shrewdly, was vanity or greed. She wanted to be back in his arms.

At the bottom of the pile lay a newspaper-clipping and two slips from the yellow office pad, with pencilled remarks. Marguerite did not at first read these documents, supposing them to be what in all that mass would concern her least. When she did examine them, it was merely to make a final clearing of the desk.

The clipping was a society note in a New York paper of that morning, a dispatch from Palm Beach.

'Mrs. Lattimer Morton, who has been spending her honeymoon at the Whitehall, left for New York last Saturday on the evening train. Mr. Morton followed her on Sun-

day. Mrs. Morton is well known to fashionable circles as Madame Laval, of Fifth Avenue.'

Kate must have left it there, so that they would not need to speak of it. He had followed the next day. She wondered if he would call her up, or come to the shop. If he did, could she maintain her stand and refuse to see him? Or if he got in, could she send him away?

For the moment she had forgotten the bits of yellow paper. Now she looked down and read on the first in Kate's hand:

'Ruth Romain called. She says you know her number, and will you please call her back.'

Marguerite tore the memorandum into vicious bits.

On the other slip Kate had written, 'Mr. George Bentoff called.'

### III

It was late when she reached the shop next morning. She had risen in good time, and lingered no more than usual over the newspaper, the fruit and the coffee, but just as she was ready to start out, her trunk arrived, and the bags. Lattimer had sent them on, with no comment. So he accepted her departure as final!

She let the express-man carry the things up to her room, and with her own hands put away the gowns, not wishing to emphasize the fact of her return before the already too puzzled Gloria. As she hung up each garment she remembered the happy mood of that hasty packing, only a few weeks before.

Though it threatened rain, she walked to the office, delaying her steps. In the damp air it would be easier to think, she knew, than in the routine and the interruptions of the shop.

To go there at all was now difficult, as she had discovered yesterday. Since his relation to the place was slight,

she had thought, when she left him in Palm Beach, there would be solace in taking up her work again, but the old interest, she now was sure, had died on her wedding day. Often she had told herself, and preached the doctrine to others, that in life you can never go back, yet for a moment she had forgotten this wisdom. Now it recalled itself. She could not wear again those dresses she had just taken from the trunk, and only by violence to the soul could she go on with that coat-selling which had brought Ruth Romain to her, and then Lattimer, and then the risky happiness which had ended even sooner than she feared. To live experience twice, one must forget.

The arrival of the bags and the trunk reminded her, curiously enough, how genuine her marriage had been. Love she had met before, or what seemed love, and the brittle philosophy with which she had warned Lattimer against another experiment had been, until then, not brittle but sound. Always before the glamour had worn thin, or she had waked from the illusion with which nature tricks us. Even now, in a sense, she had waked again, realizing Lattimer's lack of faith. If there had been nothing but love between them, she could have weathered a new disappointment to reach a new release. She might even have taught herself to think of him as she thought of Bentoff, with a kind of unregretful friendship.

But this last tie was more than love. Though she still thought it right to leave him, she had left part of herself. He really was her husband, and she was his wife. If they were not to be happy, they would still be entangled.

She wanted to believe that only an intelligent frankness made her recognize this plight, but there was mingled with the intelligence some instinct of the will. Could she have her choice that morning, she would not escape from the entanglement. Though she had decreed the separation, she would belong to him.

The strength of this instinct, this blind feeling, startled her. In the lonely years to which she had, as she thought, grown accustomed, she had been not a little proud of the



intellectual detachment which seemed to distinguish her from other women. One month ago she would have said that her success in life came from her ability to see things as they are, with only so much disturbance of the heart as teaches charity. An interesting world, she had held, if you can go through it untouched!

Now, though she saw Lattimer's shortcomings, and though she had doubtless taken the right course with him, her common sense gave no satisfaction. She could not explain why she cared. He had not treated her well. Or had he, after all? Didn't the painful jealousy mean something which in part, at least, would always be precious to her?

She wondered where he was, and whether he was unhappy. She told herself several times that if ever they addressed each other again, the first word must come from him. She was telling herself this when she came to the shop.

At the door Paul was waiting with his umbrella and his smile, but she was too preoccupied to acknowledge the greeting. Lila was alone in the show-room, her looks spoiled, as yesterday, by redness of the eyes.

'What's the matter with you?'

'Nothing, Madame.'

'You do me no good with that face. Are you still hankering after the Bridgeport man?'

Lila flared. 'I wouldn't be seen with him! He's only a salesman anyway!'

'That's a poor answer. Even salesmen are sometimes loved.'

'Not by me, he isn't!' said Lila disdainfully. 'Maude can have him, if his wife will give him up.'

'Oh, is he married?'

'I suppose so. I don't know anything about him.'

Marguerite shook her head. 'You're a fool to be so much in love.'

'I'm not in love!'

'Well, you're just a fool then!'

She left Lila to think out this trenchant opinion, and went into the office. Maude was holding forth to Kate, in

an excited voice, which Marguerite's appearance did not subdue.

'Oh, Madame!' she exclaimed. 'Could you give me some time during the day? I need advice! I was asking Miss Mitchell when you'd be in.'

'What's *your* trouble?'

'It ain't trouble, but it's something where I don't want to make a mistake.'

'Well, when the mail is answered, if no one comes in.'

She supposed it would be the Bridgeport pest again, and she was in no mood to hear another woman's love-grievings, but Maude stood there, good-natured and loyal—and also, not disposed to go.

'Well, if it's very pressing, I can see you now.'

'Oh, later will be all right—any time to-day.'

She went out and shut the door, and Kate brought pencil and pad. Marguerite sat down to the morning's task.

'Before we begin, Madame,' Kate said, 'I've a question too. Will you take me on after you're through with Maude?'

Marguerite laughed. 'This shop is going to pieces!'

'Oh, it's not serious—I'll ask you now. May I leave a little early to-morrow afternoon? Bob's coming down and wants to see me at once. It isn't convenient in the office.'

'Not with me here!' Marguerite agreed. 'From now on we'll keep the men out of this place.'

'He won't come again.'

'Oh, won't he?'

'I shan't marry him. He won't believe my letter, so he's coming to argue.'

'And you, of course, will be firm!'

They both knew the subject would be thrashed out later; the morning's work would be only a truce. When the dictation was finished and Kate was moving towards the nook where she typed, Marguerite called after her.

'I want to thank Mr. Morton for my trunk. Get him at his home.'

Kate dialled, much surprised.

'No one answers, Madame.'

'Then,' after a brief hesitation, 'try his office.'

Once more the dialling, the sound of the signal, and this time a distant voice. 'Madame Laval to speak to Mr. Morton.' The distant voice again. Kate looked at Marguerite. 'Mr. Morton is not back. They don't know where he is.'

'Thank you,' said Marguerite. 'I'll speak to him some other time.'

But disappointment showed in her face, and Kate was sorry for her. It wasn't ended, after all! She too could be weak!

'Shall I tell Maude to come in now?'

The woman put her hands to her head, and Kate was sorry again, this time for her own misdirected good-will. 'Or if you'd rather not be interrupted . . .'

'Go on with your typing! I'll speak to her.'

She rose, plainly irritated, and stepped quickly into the outer room. Near the door Maude was watching while Lila entertained a stout woman, whose taste was difficult. Marguerite went towards them.

'Good morning, Mrs. Randal. Do you find something you like?'

Mrs. Randal aimed at her with a lorgnette. 'I wondered if you really were here, Madame. The papers so often misrepresent us! How well you look!'

Marguerite bowed without smiling. 'My health is excellent. Are the girls caring for you properly?'

Mrs. Randal was tolerant. 'We shall work it out, if we all live long enough. Why do you go in for such trying styles, Madame? Some of us don't want to be thin. You've lost a little weight, haven't you?'

Marguerite went to the racks and selected heroic sizes. 'Show these to Mrs. Randal, Lila. . . . I'd like a word with you, Maude.'

She led the way to the end of the room, just outside the office, where they could keep a distant eye on Lila. She did not ask Maude to sit down. Bridgeport would be dismissed promptly.

'Well, what is it?'

'Madame, I hope you won't mind . . .'

'Speak up! I'm prepared for anything!'

'It's not because—you know I always wanted to stay with you—but . . .'

'Does he wish to marry you?'

Maude's face went blank, convincingly sincere. 'He? Who?'

'Isn't it Lila's beau?'

'That mut? God, Madame, I got a real job! My brother told me last night—managing the models in the wholesale place where he works.'

'Oh, then you just want to leave me!'

Maude protested with large eyes. 'I'll never work for anyone I like so much, but I ought to get on, don't you think? Your business doesn't need to grow, and most of the day I just fight with Lila.'

'Is it on account of her you wish to leave?'

'I think I've got a better job.'

'Is she going with you?'

'Not if I can help it!'

'Why, I thought you couldn't do without her! I'd have discharged her a year ago!'

Maude hesitated between strong feelings and a wish to be magnanimous. 'Lila and I have gone about as far as we can together.'

Marguerite paused, a thoughtful moment. 'Is there anything except Lila you don't like here?'

'The clients,' said Maude, 'are getting vulgar.'

Marguerite raised her eyebrows.

'They *are*, Madame—you don't notice it as much as we have to! There don't seem to be any ladies any more, or else ladies don't buy clothes. What we get is people like Mrs. Randal out there. If they take off their dress in the fitting-room, the more they take off the rougher they get, and then when they get into their clothes again, they put back their polite smiles and their English voices.'

Marguerite shook her head. 'They're not all like that!'

Maude wanted to make out a case. 'Besides, there's too many men coming in here.' She reddened, suspecting in Marguerite's eyes a thought of Morton and Bentoff. 'I mean Stringer, and that kind. They drop in just to date us up.'

'Very well, go if you like, but you'll find the same thing, and worse, in the wholesale places.'

'But it will be the toughness I'm used to, Madame! What I can't stand is these fakers on Fifth Avenue.'

Marguerite nodded, as though considering a profound truth. 'When do you wish to leave?'

'They want me right away, but I told them you should have a week's notice.'

'You may go to-morrow. Miss Mitchell will give you your cheque to-night.'

She spoke with some energy. Hurt by Maude's readiness to leave her, she was glad to see that the girl was not entirely grateful for this abrupt permission.

'I could stay a week, Madame, or as long as you need me.'

If her feelings had not been running strong, she would have recognized the man who was coming down the show-room towards them, walking slowly. She took for granted that he was a customer approaching the unoccupied sales-girl.

'I shall give Lila a week's notice.'

Maude looked penitent. 'But I don't want her to lose her job on account of me.'

'I've had only one reliable sales-girl. Now I shall have two.'

Instead of answering her, Maude glanced at the man, waiting patiently. When Marguerite turned to follow her glance, she could not believe what she saw.

'You!'

'Don't let me interrupt,' he said courteously, somewhat triumphantly too, perhaps. If he had not caught her there in the large room, if he had sent in his name, she would not have received him.

Maude was still upset. 'May I speak to you again about this, Madame?'

Marguerite burst into a firmness almost savage. 'It is settled! You may go to-night!'

Then she walked quickly into the office, with him behind her, leisurely and confident.

'Kate, will you go out and see what Lila is doing to Mrs. Randal?'

Passing through the office, the girl recognized George Bentoff, and understood that Mrs. Randal was for the moment not a coat-purchaser, but only a symbol and an excuse.

Alone, the two faced each other, he, courtly, as he had always been, but with a new confidence.

'Since you have left him,' he began, 'I have naturally come back.'

She went over and opened the door which Kate had just closed. 'Will you go?'

'I have no intention of going—none whatever! I did as you asked, but you should not have asked it. It is not our fate to say good-bye.'

She closed the door again, and stood in front of it, with her eyes flaming. 'First we loved, then we were friends, now I hate you! You waste your time! You have already done me all the harm you can!'

He turned out his hands in surprise, but she pressed on with her reproaches:

'You followed me! You placed yourself where we must see you! You broke up the only true happiness I ever met!'

He was deeply concerned. 'But you don't believe I went down there on purpose?'

'I believe you are a devil! You are my curse! You are here now only to gloat over what you have done!'

She was quite out of her senses, he saw, and he began to plead gently, making allowance for her aberration.

'Marguerite, I went down there only to avoid you! The news of your wedding said you were sailing on my boat. Until that day at the Seminole, I thought you were on

the other side of the ocean. It was you who found me; I was doing my best to hide.'

The fact that she herself had urged this argument on Lattimer did not appease her anger now. 'But even then...' she began.

'One moment!' he interrupted. 'You cannot deceive yourself! Don't pretend! It's not me you are finding fault with—you are disappointed in him! You give me greater encouragement than I dared hope for, if he left you on account of me.'

'It was I who left,' she explained quickly.

'But on account of me?'

She walked over to the desk, and leaned against it, unconsciously telling him how far the point had sunk in. He thought he had scored enough victory for the time being.

'I came,' he said, 'to say once more what you ought to know well, that you have my devotion, now and always, and I still believe I can make you happy. If in anything I fall short of what you want, teach me what it is, and I will learn. If you had found someone, as you hoped, who would be perfect, I should have stayed away.'

There was a long pause, painfully long, as though she could wait hours for him to leave. He did not budge.

'I *have* found what I want. Him, and no other man.'

'But it's true you are separated?'

'I can't discuss our relation. Enough for you to know that I love him.' In a lower tone, she added, 'And I hate you! Only imagine how much! Don't protest that it's unjust; in any case it's a fact. If you had not been there, I should be happy. I shall never forgive you!'

It was he now who flushed with indignation. 'Aren't you a little mad? You *know* I've done nothing wrong!'

'You wrecked my life! Whether it's intentional or not doesn't help! At least you refuse to do as I wish. You should not be here at this moment. If he came in and found you, he might well believe I let you come.'

'Do you expect him?'

In despair she sat down at her desk and occupied her hands with some papers lying there.

'Very well,' he said, with a sigh. 'I shall wait till you are once more reasonable. I do not give you up. That would be untrue to myself, but I can wait.'

At the door he looked back. 'From now on let us not misunderstand. I am here in New York with my mind on nothing but you. I shall follow your fortune. If you go elsewhere, expect me to be there too.'

She did not answer. He walked over towards her.

'I do not like to think that even for a moment you hate me. It would be decent of you to admit you have no cause.'

She did not look up. He walked again to the door.

'In a day or so,' he said, 'I shall telephone . . .'

'I will not answer.'

'I will telephone,' he repeated, 'to ask whether you begin to be yourself again.'

#### IV

Waiting for Bob at her apartment next morning, Marguerite tidied up the living-room and set the scene. She attached importance to this meeting. Her costume had been chosen after much thought, and she had let sentiment decide it. She was dressed precisely as on that morning when Lattimer had found her—the same dark-red pyjamas of soft crêpe, the beige stockings, the red mules. He was his father's son. If she succeeded now, another happiness might date from that hour, this time better managed and more enduring.

Only in a general way had she planned what she would say to him, but the objects of her strategy had been clarified through a sleepless night. Had she and Lattimer met when they were young, had there been nothing to forget, their course together would have been smooth. Had she not taken Kate into her office, had not Ruth Romain wanted a coat, these children would have finished their destiny unworried. It was not for Kate and Bob, however, that she would make this effort. She had told Bentoff the truth



—hour by hour she knew more clearly that she loved Lattimer, and resented with increasing bitterness whatever had spoiled their happiness, or whatever might bring to him, through her, however indirectly, another sorrow.

When Bob arrived, though her maid was there, she herself opened the door, as on that Sunday morning when his father rang. The tall boy was embarrassed by the cordial welcome.

‘I hoped it was you,’ she said, holding out her hand. ‘I hope Kate always waits for you as impatiently!’

Not knowing the answer for this greeting, he stalked into the living-room behind her.

‘Throw your coat down anywhere,’ she said. ‘Have a cigarette?’ She reached up to light it for him, then dropped into her large chair and stretched back, wishing to seem casual. ‘Now,’ she began, in the tone of easy comradeship, ‘you want to marry Kate, she wants to marry you, but I’ve been in the way. Also, I understand, Ruth Romain has been an obstacle. Now she’s removed—and so am I.’

He frowned. ‘I don’t understand either statement. Ruth Romain isn’t disposed of—she intends to marry him, if ever you and he fail to get on—she told me so herself. And you’re very much in the picture, so long as you’re his wife.’

He put meaning into these last words, or so it seemed to her; he was assuming that her wifehood might be temporary, and he had some curiosity about the present state of it.

‘Ruth intends to marry him, does she? That’s as I would have expected, but I’m astonished she warned you.’

He was cautious, yet willing to let her know he understood the world. ‘In my opinion, she wished to prove that her affection for my father was genuine and lasting.’

‘Even to the point of hoping,’ said Marguerite, ‘his marriage would break up! No, my guess is, she intended that threat to reach my ears. Or she wished your aid in separating us!’

Recalling with some distinctness what Ruth had said, he could not defend her with a free conscience. ‘Father loves you. There won’t be any separation.’

'But there is already! Don't you know?'

She was sorry for the horror on the boy's face. 'I haven't been home yet—I came from the train—he didn't write.'

'I thought he would tell you before anyone else.'

He leaned forward in the chair, staring. 'Why—did you?'

Her smile was a trifle wan. 'Because you were right. Because I am not good for him. In short, because I love him.'

Bob rubbed his forehead, agonized. 'He won't get over this! . . . Where is he?'

'I left him in Palm Beach, but he has come north, I don't know where.'

He rose and began pacing the room.

'Please don't worry about that part of it,' she said. 'To you he is sure to come back. You have his greatest love.'

What Ruth had said! Both women!

'If you wish to help him,' she went on steadily, 'marry Kate. At once. To-day, if you can.'

'But she won't.'

'Don't argue with her—just have your way! That's what she wants of you.'

He thought it over. 'Why do you say this?'

'He needs to go back to the world he believes in, as it was before he met Ruth—or me. He expected you to find a wife and carry on the home. I can't bear to cheat him of this too!'

She had her reward in the look of understanding which drove some of the pain out of his eyes. 'It's fine of you!' he exclaimed. 'I—I don't see why you and he can't get on. Could I—could I help patch it up?'

She raised her hands, then let them fall limp. 'If it were possible to go back twenty years! Or if his nature could be changed—and I don't wish it changed. He loves me, but against my will I disturb him, so I must withdraw. It's your turn now, and Kate's.'

He was silent, looking at the floor.

'That is,' she added somewhat wearily, 'if you still wish to marry her.'

'I ought to find him first—he must be in a bad way. Don't you worry about him at all?'

She shook her head. 'I miss him.'

He sat down again, and drew his chair nearer. 'He can't know how you feel, or he'd never give you up. I'm glad you called me to the city, before the news of this got around.'

At this innocence she laughed, with her old good-humour. 'Why, everyone knew it, the moment I appeared in the shop! What are friends for? Ruth knows it, and . . .'

She paused at the thought of Bentoff. Bob laid an impulsive hand on the arm of her chair. 'He isn't at Ruth's, is he?'

She hadn't thought of that, and the impact of the idea made her wince, but she answered loyally, 'He would not do that! Never!'

'I wouldn't trust that woman, not if Father's in trouble and she had a chance to comfort him! Do you know her?'

'Well.'

'She's quite remarkable,' he insisted, 'and I can see how she could take his fancy in certain moods. She's so hail-fellow, and that sort of thing, and such a straight shooter.'

'Is she?'

'Don't you agree?'

For a second he saw that world-old smile Kate had spoken of. 'My dear boy, are you speaking of a woman? None of us shoot straight! We twist around after what we want. Men, too, except that they're bulkier and have more momentum, so they must keep going longer, once they get started. When a woman is through with you, she turns. When a man is through, he stops.'

Not liking the cynicism, he sat back in his chair, baffled and once more estranged.

'You are to see Kate this afternoon, I believe,' she said. 'At her home.'

'That's what she telegraphed, but . . .'

'Don't change the plan! Take her down-town, get married, bring her here for a glass of champagne—yes, please! Give me that privilege! I'm fond of her, you know! Then you can find your father, and you couldn't take him

news he'd listen to more gladly.'

He stood up to go. She tried to be cheerful, in tune with the happiness to which she was encouraging him. 'You will do what I ask?'

'I'm going to marry Kate, all right,' he said, with sudden firmness. 'I determined on that before I came down. But I'll get hold of Father.' His eyes met hers with something like defiance. 'I think I'll call up Ruth Romain.'

'No!' she cried.

'I really think I ought to.'

'I forbid it!'

They faced each other, as though the battle was drawn.

'After all, you know, he's my father!'

'He's my husband!'

'I thought you said you gave him up?'

'Not to her! You've no right to bring her in!'

She had dropped every pretence of indifference, knowing well that he would be harder to persuade than the elder man, to whom in looks he bore so striking a resemblance. She was dealing with another Lattimer, who could touch her heart, but whom perhaps she could not guide. He paused for a moment, meeting her gaze steadily, and thinking his own thoughts.

'I'll talk with Kate,' he told her simply, holding out his hand.

'And you promise to marry her?'

'She has that promise, already.'

His dignity was Lattimer at his best. She was afraid her voice would tremble. 'Forgive what I said about Ruth! Do whatever you think you must!'

Because she was generous again, he lingered. 'If I don't look for him at Ruth's, is there a chance you and he could get together again?'

It was not a lucky question. 'Since you believe he might be there, find out! He would never believe such a thing of you!'

He wanted to explain, but she turned her back and looked out of the window upon the stone carvings in her little court. One of them, she noticed, had been cracked

by the frost. Behind her, he was putting on his coat. She listened to his footsteps as he went out alone.

V

That afternoon Marguerite kept shop with the doubtful aid of Lila. Maude was gone. No worse day could be chosen for Kate to be absent, but having told the girl that she could take the afternoon off, and having urged Bob to get married forthwith, Marguerite accepted the unexpected combination of an empty office and an undermanned show-room. It was useless to bother with the mail, since there was no one to answer it. She spent the time rescuing the customers from Lila, or running back to see who was calling on the telephone.

The clients came that afternoon in numbers which roused suspicion. She was quite sure they had heard the gossip and wished to see for themselves whether she had left Morton. It was not easy for her to be gracious, as they expressed their welcome, mixed with surprise, and looked her over, and tried on garments, and postponed the purchase. She wanted to run away from the shop, from the city, from these people who were her business, but not her life.

At five o'clock, when she sent Lila and Paul home and closed the place, they went off frightened, since she gave no explanation. She wished to get ready the champagne to celebrate the wedding, if by chance there was a wedding. She took a taxi home. Bob and Kate might have been married early in the afternoon, she knew. They might have come to the apartment with their good news—but in that case they would have looked for her at the shop. No, she was still on time.

The apartment seemed particularly dismal, in spite of the fire which her maid had lighted. The glasses and the cakes were ready. She changed into a smart gown, and schooled herself to be joyful for their sake.

But they did not come. Later in the evening she telephoned Mrs. Mitchell, and learned only that Kate had gone off with Bob just after lunch, and had not yet returned.

Thursday morning, however, the girl was already at the desk when Marguerite came in.

'What happened?'

'Oh, I ought to have let you know, but it was so late when we got back. We went hunting for his father on Long Island.'

'Why there?'

'Bob had what he believed was a clue. I really think Mr. Morton *is* staying at a house near Oyster Bay, but at midnight we had to give up.'

'Are you married?'

'We're going to be, the moment he finds his father. I agreed to that, and I promised to help him look.'

Marguerite made no reference to the cake and wine which had been waiting in vain.

'There's a grand pile of letters—let's get at them. Leave the door open, and tell me if anyone comes in.'

When the mail of the forenoon had been accounted for, Kate stood in front of the desk again, rather self-conscious.

'It's a terrible thing to ask with Maude away, but could I have this afternoon, too?'

With her frayed nerves, Marguerite took the request badly. I have no excuse for her, except the state she was in.

'Will none of you stand by me?'

'I thought you wanted me to stand by Bob! He just telephoned he thinks he knows where his father is. If he's right, we'll get married.'

'This shop of mine,' said Marguerite, rather unreasonably, 'might as well close its doors!'

Kate stood her ground. 'I'd do anything for you except desert Bob when he has asked my help!'

For all her weariness and irritation, Marguerite liked the answer. 'Run along then, and finish it up! But married or not, I'll expect you to-morrow morning! And for all the day! By that time I can find some human being heart-free! There must be one!'

'You mean, you'll have another secretary?'

'If not you, then someone else!'

I dare say this was not the kind of farewell she wished to bestow on the girl, if the troubled search for Bob's father was again to end in disappointment, still less the sort of blessing she would pronounce if they were to find him, and go on to their wedding. Doubtless she yearned to be, at that moment, affectionate, but all that had happened, for the past week, made her false to her wish.

Kate put on hat and coat, and manipulated her compact before the little mirror over the typewriter. Job or no job, she would stand by her man. When she crossed the office floor Marguerite stopped her.

'You are right to go, my dear! I am very fond of you! I never liked you so much! When you backed and filled about him, you were rather childish, but now you're grown-up. Since you have found what you want, never let it go!'

The girl was touched. 'I shan't leave you! It's only . . .'

Marguerite pushed her through the door. 'Run along! He is waiting!'

'That was better!

Now she could reconcile herself for a few hours to the lonely shop, and perhaps Lila would rise to the opportunity and sprout brains.

The amiable hope, however, proved vain. Lila had suffered a staggering blow in the departure of Maude, to some extent because she prized their old friendship, now wrecked over Stringer, but much more because Maude had been at her elbow for years, and she had not realized what she owed to the stout, good-natured comrade. Though she stood in awe of Marguerite, the office now became a retreat from the three or four clients who punctuated the afternoon.

'Mrs. Meredith says she won't pay so much!' She was in the doorway, holding up a coat.

'Well, show something less expensive!'

'But I brought out this first, Madame.'

'And she won't pay so much? Try again!'

'But, Madame, this is the one she wants! I told her the wrong price, and then all of a sudden, I remembered, and she says I'm just adding on five hundred dollars because she likes it!'

Marguerite went out with her, to soothe Mrs. Meredith, and for most of the midday stayed in the show-room, to curb Lila's talent for entanglements. It was annoying to be kept from the desk, and still worse to be called back by the telephone. Just before three o'clock, hearing the bell, she decided to let it ring itself out, and surrendered only when the operator refused to be discouraged.

Very distinctly she heard a woman's voice. 'May I speak to Madame Laval?'

One of her clients perhaps. 'This is she.'

The voice spoke lower, with the evident intention of producing an effect. 'This is Ruth Romain. If I come to your place, may I talk with you?'

'No—I'm sorry.' She might have put down the telephone then, had she not been curious.

'Perhaps you are right,' said the voice. 'It would be better if we met in a less public place—your apartment or mine. For obvious reasons, I should much prefer yours.'

'I cannot meet you,' repeated Marguerite. 'If I must speak plainly, I do not care to meet you!'

She could hear the short laugh at the other end of the telephone. 'Nor I you, when it comes to that! But we'll just have to hide our feelings. You'll find it more than worth while. I want to ask you a question about something which involves us both.'

'We have nothing in common!'

Ruth dropped even the pretence of courtesy, and spoke with a sharp challenge. 'See here, this is one of the times when I'm trying to play fair, and you'd better not discourage me! Come up to my apartment this afternoon at five o'clock, or a little earlier. I want to lay my cards on the table, tell you what I'm doing, and find out whether it's all right with you. You know what I'm talking about! Of course, if he doesn't appeal to you any more, you can stay away, and I'll understand I'm free to act in my own interests.'

Marguerite hesitated a second, but when she did reply, she tried to sound final. 'I shall not come!'

'When you think it over, you will. I'll tell the maid to



have tea at a quarter to five.'

Marguerite waited, as though ready to hear more, but the wire had gone dead. She held her hands to her forehead. She would go, of course! She saw that as clearly as Ruth did. If it concerned Lattimer, she would go at whatever cost to pride! Even though she might now learn beyond question that he had looked up the woman, the moment he was left alone! If that were true, she might as well know it! On the other hand, if Ruth were victorious, why would she call Marguerite in for consultation?

She found the next hour long, glancing at her watch so often that Lila noticed the impatience.

'Are you going somewhere, Madame? You won't leave me, will you?'

'I have an engagement at four-thirty. Keep the place open till half-past five. I doubt if anyone comes in so late to-day.'

'But if they do?'

She turned on the girl. 'It's your chance to prove you're not so big a fool as I fear you are! Use your wits! Just as though this were *your* business, and your living depended on it!'

When she came out of the office twenty minutes later, hat and coat on, ready to leave, Lila was in the midst of a sale, and it seemed human as well as prudent to encourage her with a friendly smile. Lila excused herself from the client, and came over where she could whisper.

'If I need to ask something, is there any place I can get you?'

She couldn't give Ruth's address, of course. For one moment she was glad both Kate and Maude were absent. To them, telephone-numbers meant something. On one of her cards she hastily scrawled the central and the four figures.

'Call me there! Or at my home.'

As she rode up Fifth Avenue in a taxi, through the cut at Sixty-sixth, across Seventy-second and up Riverside Drive, she could not ward off the memory that Lattimer must have come this way, many times, when he was eager for Ruth. The thought hurt, with an unexpected agony. She resented this strange invitation, which had made her recall his old life. Had Ruth the subtlety, even the devilish-

ness, to ask her there that afternoon just to revive what would be sure to give pain?

When she reached the apartment and Elise opened the door, she had resolved to be calm and untouchable, but the fact that she made the resolve consciously, was a tribute to the anger rising within her, ready to explode.

## VI

When she entered the living-room, she could not fail to notice, and sharply resent, the assurance in Ruth's manner. She thought she recognized the confidence which comes of unfair advantage. She thought she detected also, as in the half-smile with which Elise had greeted her, some slight apprehension. The atmosphere of the little apartment was roused and intense, ready for something momentous, or perhaps steeled to some desperate venture.

Ruth had waited there in the centre of the room, letting her walk down the hall alone—a bit of pose, Marguerite thought, an attempt to build up an effect. The afternoon frock she wore, a light blue, concealed most of the lavish charms she would have counted on if Lattimer had been calling. Under Marguerite's gaze she apparently was not inclined to that sort of boasting; she preferred to be regal, with the note of simplicity which advertises power. All poise, except her eyes! In them, an uneasy shining made you think she was preparing for conflict, or plotting a surprise.

Elise had brought the tea-table next the couch, with a chair on the other side for the visitor.

Ruth held out her hand. 'You are very good to come.'

Because it would have been too obvious, Marguerite did not decline the greeting. Her fingers touched Ruth's.

'Won't you sit down?'

Marguerite accepted the chair, but with a tentative posture, sitting well forward, as though at any moment she might rise and leave. Ruth busied herself with the spirit-lamp under the kettle.

'I started it a moment ago, but it's awfully slow when you really want it.'

Marguerite waited.

'I shouldn't have asked you to come if I could have thought of any other way. I don't blame you at all for balking!'

'What,' asked Marguerite, 'do you wish of me?'

Ruth lifted an amused face from the kettle level. 'As though you didn't know! I want Lattimer Morton, of course, if you and he are through with each other, and it seemed sensible to ask you before I did anything. I'm not the kind that takes a man away from another woman!'

'I did not take him away from you!'

Ruth smiled, with a marked increase of confidence. 'Did I say you did?'

'He told me,' explained Marguerite, 'that you sent him away! Had he been still under any obligations, I would not have accepted his suit.'

Ruth sat back in the chair, watching her more sharply, considering each word. 'That is correct, of course—I sent him away, but now I confess I made a mistake! I go so far as to believe that it may have been a mistake for him, as it certainly was for me. I draw that conclusion from what is, perhaps, only a rumour, and no one but you can set me right. Is it true you have left him?'

The weakness of her own position made it easier for Marguerite to lose her temper.

'Why should I answer that? Why should I discuss my life?'

Ruth feigned indifference. 'For no reason, if it's distasteful. I once believed he and I would marry, then I thought I saw why it would not be best for him. Now I am convinced he needs me, whether or not he knows it. Look here, Laval, I intend to have that man! That is, unless you and he are still living together! I never break up a home. They say you walked out on him. Did you?'

The dark woman refused to answer. The tall blonde kept hunting her down.

'If it isn't so, you have only to tell me. Sooner or later I'll find out, but you can save time, if you wish.'

Marguerite was still leaning forward in the chair, on the defensive. From the moment she came into the room she

had hardly taken her dark eyes off the enemy.

'Since you don't reply, I understand you're through with him. If you could give the other answer, you'd be only too glad to!'

'He and I,' answered Marguerite slowly, 'are separated. There is no secret about it, and I need not resent your question. I resent only your bringing me here, where the question is difficult to discuss.'

'But I wanted it to be in the shop, or in your apartment! I *knew* this room would hurt you! Here you can't see I'm trying to be fair! You keep thinking only of this, that in this room we were lovers! As we talk, you're asking whether he occupied the chair you now are using, or whether he preferred this couch by my side. Couldn't I foresee all that? Had we met at your apartment, the pain would have been the other way. *I* should have been the one to guess what might have happened there, to reconstruct out of my envy and disappointment each attitude of his devotion to you! But the shop would have been neutral. There he never kissed me, nor you either, I dare say. You ought to have faced me in public. Since you wouldn't, I offered to take the hard end of it, and look for you in your home. Don't invent a grievance now, since you insisted on coming here!'

They eyed each other in silence, till she remembered the tea.

'How careless! I'm letting the water boil away! Do you take lemon or cream?'

Marguerite did not see the cup placed on the table before her. 'I still wonder why you asked me here. That you wanted to get him back, I knew, I have no doubt of your charms. Why should you and I be meeting at all?'

'I telephoned his apartment,' said Ruth frankly, 'but Muri pretended to know nothing. At his office they say he is still absent from town. If you really are finished with him, you might tell me where he is.'

'I don't know where.'

Ruth took the answer for granted. 'I probably would say the same thing if I were in your place, yet it wouldn't be to my credit, and it's not worthy of you. When you

loved, you went after him. I admit you could get him back now, if you wished; that is, I assume you could. Do you want me to stay off and give you a second chance? Or will you step out and leave the field to me?

Marguerite smiled bitterly. 'You might as well enjoy this moment—it won't come to you again! I have already stepped out, as you call it. I know I could get him back. At present I don't care to.'

'Yet you won't tell me his address?'

'But I don't know it!'

Ruth's eyes went narrow and cynical. 'Of course I can't believe you.'

'As you please!'

'Is he coming to New York?'

'I haven't the slightest idea!'

'If I wanted to be mean,' said Ruth viciously, 'I could point out the satisfaction I get from this complete ignorance of yours!'

Marguerite flushed. 'I was thinking of that! Perhaps you asked me here just to measure how little I know about him! Perhaps you gloat over the fact that you know more than I! Maybe he returns nightly to this very room for whatever he thinks you give him, and you summoned me for a little quiet torture, to make your revenge complete!'

Ruth stared, mouth open. 'Are you pretending to believe he has called on me here, since you came back?'

'You are an actress,' said Marguerite, 'and I pay my compliment to your skill.'

'You're crazy!' cried Ruth. 'I haven't laid eyes on the man since the night he left me—I mean, the night I sent him away!'

'It is my turn,' said Marguerite, 'not to believe.'

The door-bell rang.

'How awkward!' exclaimed Ruth, frowning. 'Elise, I'm not at home!' She faced again towards Marguerite. 'I cross my heart and swear by anything you wish! If he had already looked me up, would I waste a moment on you? I appealed to your generosity. I'll have to go after him—I don't pretend he'd ever come back here of himself.'

They both stopped at sound of a quick, heavy step down the hall. In the doorway stood Lattimer.

In his face there was an unmistakable fear, and also, Marguerite imagined, a shameful embarrassment. She was on her feet at once, but he spoke first.

'What are you doing here?'

The form of the question, quite as much as the tone of authority, maddened her. She began in cold sarcasm, but as she went on her temper mounted, and her voice grew husky.

'Have I invaded your private property? Does this place belong to you? Is that why *you* are here?'

He stepped towards her, pleading. 'Marguerite . . .' he began.

'You needn't defend yourself,' she interrupted, 'and I don't expect you to apologize, even if that could help! I am here because you lured me into a trap! You and this woman of yours planned to humiliate me, and you've done it well! First I had to admit that I lost you, and then she staged this brilliant entrance, to show how thoroughly she had won you back!'

'Marguerite!' he pleaded again. 'If you will listen one moment . . .'

'When I said good-bye, I was sorry to go, but now I shall always ask why I stayed so long! How did you fool me? Those letters you and she were exchanging—I took your word for it that they meant nothing! *You* pretending to be jealous! Were you scheming even then to drive me off, so you could be free?'

He tried to take her by the hands, but she pushed him away, and suddenly resuming her calm, leaned down to pick up the gloves from the chair.

She inclined her head towards Ruth. 'I have not drunk your tea! You did not need to put poison in it! The harm you offer your guests is much more dangerous. But I, too, take my revenge—I leave you to him!'

The satisfaction in Ruth's face maddened her. All this time the woman had said nothing, leaning back there in her chair, insolent and happy. Down the hall-

way Lattimer followed.

'For God's sake, Marguerite! Be sane for one moment! Listen to me!'

He was so close, she fancied his hand stretched out to catch her shoulder, and she wheeled around, in sudden fury.

'If you touch me, I shall strike you!'

She thought she saw horror in his face as she went out of the door, and she might have stayed a moment to drive that look away, had she not also seen Ruth, standing in the living-room, for a better view, vivid and pleased, hoping perhaps that she really might lift a hand against him, or he against her.

## VII

When Marguerite reached the office next morning, she was disappointed not to find Kate waiting for her. Paul was there, and Lila, and the shop was open, but the mail lay on the desk untouched.

'Have you heard anything from Miss Mitchell?'

'No, Madame,' answered Lila, 'not a word. But I'd like to tell you what happened after you left.'

'I'll hear it later,' said Marguerite sharply. Lila's troubles were far from her mood just then. Kate would not stay away, not a second time, without giving fair warning. Surely something had happened—something regrettable, perhaps. Could they have found Lattimer? And could he possibly have confessed that he had gone back to Ruth? If he was capable of so straightforward a self-revelation, his son would be disappointed, and perhaps Kate would be too shocked to go on with the wedding.

So she opened the letters, one by one, and began reading. She was half-way through the pile before she came on an envelope addressed in Kate's hand, and mailed in New York the night before. Marguerite tore it open. The letter-head carried the address of the apartment in Gramercy Park. There were only two or three lines of writing.

'I could not believe you would refuse to come to my wedding. You will understand why I shall not return to the office. You know I am grateful for your kindness to me—before all this happened.'

What in heaven's name was the girl talking about? Who had refused to go to what wedding? Why must Kate never come back? Marguerite stepped to the door, and since there were no clients, called Lila.

'Did Miss Mitchell telephone yesterday?'

'No, Madame,' Lila walked towards her.

'You know she was married?'

'Goodness me! When?'

Marguerite went back to her desk without replying, and curiosity brought Lila in.

'Did she really get married?'

'Yesterday.'

'To Mr. Morton's boy?'

'I believe so.'

'Isn't that grand! You must be awfully glad! I wanted to tell you, Madame—after you left . . .'

Marguerite was impatient. 'Another time! Please watch the shop while I telephone.'

When Lila had backed out, rebuffed, but still with something on her mind, she called up an agency, and described the kind of secretary she needed—each virtue, as she specified the most desirable, a tribute to Kate. The agency hesitated to promise a paragon, but would ask a few samples to drop in during the afternoon.

With an involuntary sigh, she put down the receiver, and for a moment rested her tired head on her hands. This really was the end! Was it worth while to fill up the office again? Lattimer's treachery had struck harder than any disaster she had yet lived down, and so vast a disillusion, she told herself, was at her age final. Why believe again in any human being? Looking back on those scruples of hers, when he first proposed marriage, she saw her old self, unbelievably innocent and inex-



perienced. She had supposed then that the masculine possessiveness and consequent jealousy were the only pitfalls. It had not seemed possible a lover could within a month betray her, and join her rival. Her disappointments had not been of that kind. So crude a change of heart was unthinkable in one she loved, surely in a nature like Lattimer's, rooted and steady.

Well, so it was, and he would mean nothing more to her, now that she saw him plainly! She would forget him—that is, she would forget the actual man; the finer person she had imagined would, she hoped, still walk beside her, a figure of regret.

If she had misunderstood him, she also had failed to know Kate, or even Maude. How blind she had been! Maude she had accepted as a household animal, faithful, and for the most part silent; Kate she had thought of as a spirit over-sensitive, not disposed to strong decision. Yet merely for a better job Maude had turned against her, and Kate, contrary to all forecasts, had proved resolute and a little hard.

Only Paul left now, and Lila, the least competent! She might, of course, include herself among the inefficient remainders. Her little shop had seen a demonstration of fate, with herself the chief example, the chief victim. From the day Ruth came to choose the coat, they all had been busy discovering themselves! That bold leopard-skin had brought on, in swift sequence, Lattimer and the marriage, and the separation, had nearly wrecked Kate's wedding, and then had precipitated it, had indirectly given Lila and Maude a reason for their quarrel, had driven both Maude and Kate away.

By desperate effort she made herself return to the world. As she came out of the office again, Lila, near the front windows watching her approach, caught a startled glimpse of what the mysterious woman would look like when she was really old.

'Madame! Are you sick?'

'You had something to tell me about what happened here yesterday?'

Lila's face took on another kind of perplexity. 'Oh, yes, Madame. Your husband came in.'

Did accident or perverse intention teach the girl to dig into the wound? Marguerite caught herself in time, and kept down her voice.

'Never say that to me again! I have no husband!'

Lila's eyes bulged, in agony of confusion. 'Not Mr. Morton?'

'He and I are no longer married.'

'Then I *have* done it this time!' In the tone sounded all the possibilities of human error. 'When he came in here, he looked awfully disappointed, and I thought you'd be glad to see him, so when he asked where you were, I said I had no idea, but you had left a telephone-number, so he sat down at your desk to call you, but when he saw the number, he said, "My God!" and grabbed his hat and ran out of here. Paul says he got into a taxi almost without opening the door. It worried me a lot, thinking something must be wrong. What is it, Madame?'

Marguerite turned and walked back to her office, grasping slowly the meaning of his visit, and the consequence of her blunder. He had, then, been looking for her! Perhaps—no, it was almost certain—Ruth had told the truth!

Suddenly she grew weak in the knees. Once inside the office, she closed the door, and sank into the chair which he had used—and Bentoff too, for that matter. There was the desk where he had stopped for the last time, to call her!

Did his return mean that he was still her lover? No matter now. Not after that meeting at Ruth's. Her own words would have killed the roots of any affection. She had held her happiness in her hands, without knowing! Now she understood his question—'What are you doing here?' He had come back, to be hers once more, but had misinterpreted her visit to that place, of all places! Perhaps he thought she had gone to spy on *him*. If she could but speak to him now for a moment!

The entrance of two or three clients during the morning saved her intermittently from herself, but between

their appearances she reverted to this new kind of agony, mixed of the knowledge that he still cared, and of the fear that she had murdered his devotion. To make the day possible, she invented work, even attempting, with no great success, to pick out a few letters on the machine, and so shrink the task for the new stenographer, whoever she might be.

After lunch she had reached such a state of hysterical desperation that she engaged the first candidate the agency sent, a thin creature with heavily rouged cheeks and a hesitating manner. But better than nothing! The girl at least could type. She engaged her on condition that for a while, at least, she might have to take Maude's place if the number of clients at any moment should increase beyond Lila's capacity. For the present, she told the girl to start in at once, get her pencil and pad ready, and draw up a chair to the desk.

The dictation was almost at an end, when Lila showed an unusually white face at the door. Marguerite did not wait to hear the complaint in detail.

'Very well, I'll come. Show her something else till I finish this letter!'

Lila stuck her head farther in the door. 'It's not a customer—and after what you said this morning, maybe you want to be out. Shall I say you're not here?'

Marguerite rose from the table, bewildered. 'How absurd! Of course I'm here!'

She was almost across the threshold, to investigate, when Lila pushed her back, leaning her head close to whisper.

'If he doesn't see you, I can send him away!'

Marguerite did not catch the warning. Annoyed at Lila's management, and resenting the hands on her shoulders, she slipped out and looked down the room towards the street. Lattimer was waiting near the door. The length of the room, they stood there a moment, watching each other.

'You may stay in the office,' she told Lila quietly. 'Take the telephone-calls.' Then she walked towards

him, deliberately, at first vaguely self-conscious, then resentful that he was waiting for her, and making her come. Instinctively she prepared that kind of attack which is said to be excellent defence.

'You were here yesterday. Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Why do you take me by surprise now? If we have anything to say to each other, there are more convenient places than . . .'

'Than Ruth Romain's home? I agree with you.'

'My shop,' she answered, somewhat awkwardly, 'is public. These girls hear us talking, the people who pass on the street can see us!'

He looked at her with clear eyes, with that power which she had admired the first time he came there. She did not like him less because, after these weeks of passion and of jealousy, he had suddenly recovered his competent self-sufficiency. He was a free man once more—she did not like to think it—perhaps he was free because she now meant nothing to him.

'I shall stay but a moment,' he assured her. 'Yesterday I came to ask your forgiveness, to-day I leave with you the address of a friend who will represent me in the divorce. It's hardly a case I could take myself.' He held out to her a card. 'I should be obliged if your own lawyer would call upon him, so that we can get it over with quickly.'

She turned the pasteboard in her fingers without looking at the name, Ralph Allen. 'As you will.'

'As *I* will?' His fierce bitterness surprised her; he was *not* free, after all! 'That boy of mine made me believe you still cared, and would perhaps be glad to know that I still worshipped you! Because I wanted to believe it, because I was finding it impossible to live without you, I hurried here much more your lover than I have ever been! I knew at last the foolishness and the shame of my behaviour, the unnecessary fears, the ingratitude for what you were giving me, the shocking insults in many of my words! I promised the children I'd bring you at once to their wedding. They had persuaded me to be as

childlike as themselves. I thought I had only to ask you.'

She interrupted. 'Do they know what happened?'

'I told them you would not come.'

Again they faced each other for a moment. Though he had said the purpose of his visit was to cut off their relation ruthlessly, he showed no more wish to leave her than she to let him go. Her eyes were lowered to the card in her hand.

'I'm sorry!'

'When I learned where you were,' he continued, 'I dreaded what trick Ruth might be playing. From what Bob said, I knew she was your enemy, and, in a sense, mine. Perhaps I had no right to follow, but you might need rescue.'

'It was just as well that I went! Much as I disliked the treatment you gave me, it is satisfying to know you as you are, and to see that our accounts are balanced. If you could speak to me in such terms, you don't love me!'

'Did I say as much as you did, in Palm Beach?' she pleaded. 'Did those rantings of yours prove you didn't love me?'

He was quite frigid. 'Our accounts, I repeat, now balance. I need hardly apologize now for my vulgar madness. You said it was only a man who could so lose his reason, but I have listened, against my will, to a woman worse than I.'

When he paused, she did not try to defend herself. She accepted the indictment with a courtesy which seemed to him rather out-of-place. He had expected argument or contrition. He was a little confused when her next words changed the subject.

'Where are the children?'

Very well, if she wished to part on the note of friendly gossip, she could have her way! 'At the apartment, I believe. I persuaded them to go there last night. I went back to this friend of mine on Long Island'—pointing to the card in her hand.

'Will they go at once to Cambridge?'

'They're dining with me this evening, then they're off

on the nine-thirty for a short trip, then they will take rooms near the University.'

'I am glad,' she said. 'I am very glad—that they, at least—are happy.'

Since he had come into the shop he had hardly moved from that spot. Looking past him towards the street, she saw a woman turn in. Paul saluted, but, by a sudden whim, the woman changed her course and walked on. If she had opened that door, Marguerite thought, the feeble chance of reconciliation would have died.

'Did you really come to tell me we could begin again?'

'That was yesterday.'

'Couldn't we—could you forgive me to-day? If I were the one to express regret? After all, your anger is extreme because you have met no jealousy before. In you I met so much of it that I learned to be patient. Think of all those times when you were running away from the shadow of poor Bentoff—who was only a shadow, remember—and yesterday I had to find the right words, in Ruth's home, with Ruth facing us, very much flesh and blood. Is it odd that I said everything wrong? You had to see Bentoff only once, and that was an accident which he did not desire. He had not the slightest intention of breaking your peace of mind. He wanted only to vanish from our world. When you think of it, Lattimer, you had little excuse. But if I lost my head once, just once, misunderstanding your coming to her home, can't you match my weakness with something in your own behaviour? I know Ruth wants to get you back. I shall probably have to meet her again; that was one reason why I grew so angry. I'm sure I should have behaved sensibly had I known that she was removed from your life, as you know Bentoff has passed from mine.'

In the office she could hear the telephone ringing, and from habit turned back to answer, but remembered that Lila was there.

'When you think of it that way,' she continued, gaining confidence, 'doesn't it seem worth while to try again?'

Or don't you want to? I was wrong to leave you at Palm Beach. I thought I had to, but I was wrong. Can't we forget our mistakes, and remember the good things?'

The resentment was fading from his lips and his eyes.

'Madame,' said Lila, at her elbow, 'there's a call for you.'

'You take it.'

'But it's personal.'

'Who?'

'Mr. George Bentoff.'

She saw the smile come over Lattimer's face, an instinctive armour against the blow, as he fastened the top button of his coat, bowed ironically, and went out to the street.

### VIII

When he had closed the door and disappeared, Marguerite turned to Lila, as though resuming a casual routine.

'I don't care to speak with Mr. Bentoff. Tell him I am not in the shop.'

'Oh, I am so sorry—I said you were!'

'Tell him you were mistaken.'

Badly puzzled, Lila went off to accomplish this difficult fib, and Marguerite followed, her mind on other matters. She had refused to answer Bentoff not because his call had done her harm, but sincerely because he had ceased to count. He had become an annoyance, to be brushed aside.

The breaking-off of that promising moment with Lattimer left her undiscouraged; in fact, when she took her place at the desk in the office, it was with a marked cheerfulness. The new secretary, still a stranger, noticed the change. The tendency to smile lightened once more the corners of her mouth, and the pain disappeared from her eyes.

What she had told him impulsively had been excellent medicine for herself. They really had nothing to quarrel about, least of all, cause for jealousy. What seemed her own defeat, when she forgot her wisdom at sight of him and Ruth Romain together, was, as she was now sure,

a stroke of redeeming fortune. She knew he could forgive her more easily since he too had something to explain. He could see how utterly he was wrong, since she also had made that one glaring mistake.

The main point was that he still loved! Even though Bentoff's call had frightened him again, he could be won back! To believe so made her happy.

'Look after the show-room now,' she told Lila, 'I must go out on an errand. Don't worry if I'm detained.'

Lila at once looked worried. 'You're coming back this afternoon, aren't you?'

Marguerite was putting on her hat. 'Perhaps. In any case, you two can get on.'

'If we need you,' asked Lila, 'where shall we call?'

Marguerite burst into a clear laugh. 'My dear girl, I shall be unfindable! This once you will not know where I am!'

'But suppose we needed you?'

Marguerite was already on her way to the street door. 'If you could guess how little, at this moment, I'm thinking of you and your troubles, you'd be surprised! You can sink or swim!'

With that, she hurried out and turned north up the Avenue, leaving Lila to stare at the back of Paul's head, the only remaining focus for her dumb meditation.

For a few blocks Marguerite walked quickly, then she turned into the Park, where the city, by a rare inspiration, was rebuilding the Zoo, and bringing back the old Arsenal to the shape it wore in the 'sixties. Apparently the errand of which she had spoken was not pressing. She permitted herself to examine rather closely the new accommodations for elephants, bears, snakes, and other public pets. She studied with an even deeper interest what was happening to the roof of the old Arsenal.

The sight precipitated philosophy in her. Why were they restoring it to its original plan? Why should these Americans, these strange people, who were Americans



only because they had been transplanted a few years before her—why should they develop this unexpected zest for restoration? She had noticed it elsewhere in the city, had read about it as a mania spreading through the country at large. Why should people feel stronger or more at ease when they have rebuilt the past which fate intended them to outgrow? Why should it be so difficult for men and women to enjoy the pure present?

She had told Lattimer that American men were less intelligent than the males of other countries, because they could not forget. Apparently they did not wish to. The past was becoming for them a cult.

Through the park she made her way to the Spa, the little house near the west drive where you can buy sparkling waters, in the proper season. Just now it was boarded up for the winter, but even in its eclipsed state she liked it. Vaguely it reminded her of the more splendid pavilions in the European cures, and the recollection of a world she had put behind her was pleasant. She did not notice that it was also outside the logic she had tried to teach Lattimer.

The sheepfold, too, was undergoing a radical transformation. There were to be no more sheep, and the quaint enclosure, as you could see, was suffering various amputations and major operations in the hope of eliminating such antique odours as would not be relished in a café or beer-garden. If the smells could be successfully coped with, the old bricks would go back into the walls, there would be a floor where the sheep had stamped bare earth, tables would take the place of troughs, and the shepherds would wear white aprons and serve drinks.

These changes Marguerite foresaw without enthusiasm. Her past had contained no sheepfold, and her ambitions did not run to beer. But she continued to evaluate this rebuilding which occupied the city, this return to older customs and to long-abandoned forms. The Americans whom she had occasion to observe, really did treat the recapture of beer and wine as a spiritual recovery of

something or other—obviously of a world which they had unwillingly left behind. It was not the alcohol which charmed them, but their sense of the past.

Perhaps she had been wrong in what she had told Lattimer! Perhaps no one should escape from the past. These antiquarian activities in the very street were a rebuke to her.

She continued her walk around the reservoir, and out to Fifth Avenue, having no regard to the lunch-hour nor to that engagement which for Lila's benefit she had invented. She wanted wide air, for her thoughts, and the long walk gave her the seclusion she could expect nowhere else, not even in her sheltered home.

As she turned down Fifth Avenue towards her own street, the past met her once more, her own past. These gardening operations upon which the city had launched itself extended outside the walls of the Park, along the Avenue. She noticed how many trees they were planting, and how many of the trees were sycamores—practically all of them. Such trees she had seen in the parks of her own country.

Also, the city fathers apparently had abandoned a too long protracted optimism about grass. The wretched pretences at turf which formerly stretched between tree and tree, had now been dug up, and the empty areas filled with pebbles. That had been the custom long ago, in her childhood world. There, in her home, the greenness came from the trees, and no one told you to keep off the pebbles. She liked that provision for liberty.

Perhaps New York would take on other resemblances to Europe—at least, to France. Last summer there had been tables on the sidewalks. Rumour promised more open-air eating-places for the summer to come. Though she had believed herself glad to escape to a new world and begin again, yet she did not wish to escape altogether. Her apartment had seemed destined to be hers, because the view from its windows over the garden brought Paris to mind.

No, she would not forget! Neither the scenes through which she had moved, nor the people on whom her eyes or her heart had fallen. They were all part of her; they would hold hands and walk by her side till her time was up, and just because of them, because what they had taught her remained sensitive and persistent, she could bring to Lattimer an unembarrassed and enduring love. She saw it clearly now.

Turning east on Sixty-sixth Street she reached her apartment and searched in her bag for the keys. Gloria was surprised to see her so early.

'You have had your lunch, Madame?'

'I want none.'

'But you must not starve!'

'Nothing now,' repeated Marguerite, mounting the little winding stair. 'Have a chop ready for me at seven.'

'But some tea, or some broth, Madame, before that!'

'No, thanks.' Kindness could be something of a bore. She was, in fact, quite hungry, and enjoyed the temporary elation which comes from abstinence and moral vanity combined. Her head was singularly clear, she knew she was more than usually intelligent. She would rest now, through the afternoon, so that when she talked with him later, her mind would be at its best.

'There's a letter for you, Madame.'

A feminine hand, which Marguerite did not recognize. The briefest of notes.

'My dear,

'I wheedled your address out of that man of yours. He has no sense at all, but he loves you. Can I be of any help?

'Yours for more intelligence in males,

Hope Allen.'

She smiled at the words, and remembered the pleasant lunch at the New Yorker, ever so long ago, and felt weary as well as hungry, and mounted the stairs, carrying the letter in her hand.

In her room she put off her clothes, got into pyjamas, stretched out on the bed under a light coverlet. After an hour or so of such rambling thoughts as muddle you when you are horizontal, she fell asleep. The maid knocked on the door at five-thirty.

'It's Miss Gill, Madame. Will you see her now, because it's very important?'

Marguerite came out of sleep, and tried to remember Miss Gill.

'Oh—Maude! Very well, I'll be down in a moment!'

The serenity with which she had finished her walk and fallen into the nap, still possessed her as she came down the stairs in her street costume. Maude, stout and sanguine as ever, but with signs of distress, paced back and forth in front of the unlighted fire-place.

'I hate to crash in here, Madame,' she began, 'but Lila wouldn't tell me where you were, though I'm sure she knew, so I just had to scout around, and of course I tried this first.'

Marguerite motioned hospitably to a chair. 'It's quite all right. I wished to get up now, anyway. What's wrong?'

She could see Maude fumbling for a diplomatic preface to her request, whatever it might be, then resolving, in a precipitation of sincerity, to throw finesse to the winds.

'I say, Madame, will you take me back? I'm fed up with wholesale!'

Marguerite smiled. 'Unless I've lost count, this is only your second day there.'

'I've had enough! The job's fine for pay and hours, and all that, but if you'll believe it, Stringer's there!'

Marguerite did not immediately grasp the devastating consequences of Mr. Stringer's presence; she did not even identify Mr. Stringer.

'He's that mut from Bridgeport, you know—the one that was soft on Lila and then tried to make me. I didn't know he did his heavy work at the wholesale—I mean, that's really where he buys—and on the side, he mauls the models, and when he saw me—say, Madame, he thought

I moved down there just to save him the trouble of coming up-town! He really did! Will you take me back?’

It was not in Marguerite’s code of discipline to grant such a request promptly, though she breathed at ease, listening to the words.

‘I’ve just engaged a new girl, a part-time secretary. She’ll have to stay, of course, if she does well, and I think she will.’

‘Then you’ve no room for me?’

Marguerite pretended to find difficulty. ‘Let me think it over.’

The girl’s regret was too genuine to trifle with. ‘Come to-morrow morning.’

‘You take me back?’

Marguerite narrowed her eyes. ‘I don’t want Stringer around.’

For a second Maude’s usually firm jaw slackened with the effort to do some quick thinking. ‘Look here, Madame! I didn’t leave that place—I got fired! I pulled Stringer’s nose.’

‘In those circumstances, of course,’ Marguerite conceded blandly, ‘you may consider yourself reinstated. Don’t thank me—I dislike gush. Be there to-morrow!’

But when Maude was moving towards the door, she called her back.

‘It’s on one condition, and I shan’t be sure for a week or two. Your return may upset Lila. You can tell her for me, my problem is whether to dismiss both of you or only one. Yes, that’s what I said!’ as Maude got ready to ask for an explanation. ‘Tell her my exact words, and think them over, both of you!’

For a while she stayed downstairs, and went through the ceremony of reading the evening paper. The news was not exciting that day—what was happening in Germany, in Japan, or among the Turks, paled beside her own experience from hour to hour. With the paper in her hands she was wondering what Lattimer would say when she surprised him, and what course her clo-

quence would take. This time she would be eloquent; she would stake all.

At seven Gloria brought her her chop, a leaf of salad, and a little coffee. A few minutes after nine she called a taxi and drove down-town.

## IX

In Lattimer's apartment Muri had just cleared away the dinner-things. They had dined early so that Bob and Kate could catch their train without haste. Muri came back for the empty coffee-cups, retired to the kitchen, and closed the door. It was the signal for freer conversation.

Lattimer, in his dinner-coat, had tried to make the evening happy for his son and his daughter-in-law, yet they would have enjoyed themselves better somewhere else. Their delight in each other needed no encouragement, not even from him, and they had found him in a condition not likely to make them cheerful. He had fortified himself through the afternoon with highballs. The cocktail he had served with the dinner, and the Burgundy and champagne which he insisted on for the bridal note, had worked gradual havoc in what was left of his self-control. Any mention of Marguerite was spark to tinder. Kate and Bob groped for subjects to talk of which would not bring the woman to his mind.

His plight, Kate felt, was undeservedly pitiful. The sharp lesson of these two days had taught her to shift her allegiance. Marguerite was to blame, not the deserted husband. Besides, if Marguerite had loved her, she would have come to her wedding.

Bob was less severe. Though his admiration for his father had never wavered, the Laval woman, he really believed, was sound at heart, but a foreigner, and if his father was going in for a cosmopolitan marriage, he ought to wrap himself in a cosmopolitan epidermis. The areas of sensitiveness, he was sure, differ with each nationality.

'Have some brandy,' asked Lattimer, 'a stirrup-cup?'

'No, thanks. I don't believe it's good for you, either. We've all had enough.'

Lattimer poured himself a drink with a steady hand, ignoring the advice. 'Don't miss your train,' he said. 'I've tried to say how much I love you both. Be happy, and come back soon!' He lifted his glass to Kate, who reached up and gave him a kiss.

'I'll get ready,' she said, looking at Bob. 'It won't take a minute.'

She reached up for another kiss. 'I'm glad Bob has this father! He and I wish you were happy too! I wish—I wish you'd find someone and marry her! I mean that! There must be someone who would be—I mean, you oughtn't to be here alone. It makes us sad, going away, and you here . . .'

He stopped her. 'I've had my day, now it's your turn—yours and Bob's. Don't be late—run along!'

When she had left them, the two men faced each other.

'I'll say it just once more,' Bob began.

'Don't, please.'

'But I must! You've got her all wrong! If I could talk with her, I bet I could explain it. How would you feel yourself if you found her with that Bentoff fellow, in his apartment?'

'That might easily happen,' said Lattimer, 'if I were fool enough to take this adventure further! The amputation is less painful now than later.'

'You know,' said Bob, 'I don't believe you understand women!'

His father glared at him. 'At one time I thought I did, then I feared I didn't, now I hope I never shall.'

Bob laughed, but his father could not be shaken out of his seriousness. 'I doubt if all the handsome things men have attributed to women ever did them or us much good!'

'Oh, come now!' put in Bob.

His father shook a finger at him. 'Men are seldom frank on this subject, even to themselves, but those of

us are not the least wise who treat women with the manners of the cave.'

'Old stuff, Dad!'

'Not old until women change. Watch yourself, my boy! Whisper from time to time, "delightful, delicious, and dangerous", but dangerous only if you give them too much.'

Kate could be heard opening the door of her room. Bob rose.

'I'm to step on her, am I?'

'You will,' answered his father gravely, 'if the gift is in you. But it's rare!'

With this blessing he let his son go, to begin another chapter of the old house, and carry on the line. Bob left his home with a secret from his wife, the first thread of cleavage between them. He thought it better not to share with her his father's advice.

After they were gone, Morton sat down in the little library, at the table at which he had written his letters to his boy. At that moment the boy, just departed with his bride, should have occupied his thoughts, but when Lattimer leaned head on hands in complete weariness, and closed his eyes, what he saw before him was a slender, dark woman, rather more than the average height, who stirred your senses with a patrician clarity of figure and face, and whose noble hands suggested a harmony with her high forehead. He was leaning forward in this posture contemplating this vision, which should have been happy but which was not, when the door-bell called Muri from the kitchen. Lattimer listened to the soft feet pattering down the hall, and to a low voice, which for an instant he did not recognize, not until he heard the door close, and realized that Muri had let the visitor in.

'I am not at home!' he called desperately. 'Muri, I can see no one!'

He was standing up, leaning on the table, when she came looking for him round the corner of the hall, the vision he had been framing in his thoughts, wrapped



now in a dark, close-fitting coat, and covered with a small, slanting hat. She waited till Muri had left the silence to them.

'You cannot keep me out,' she said at last. 'I cannot leave you! I have come to tell you the truth about us both.'

He bowed. 'If you don't mind, I prefer not to hear it!'

She moved around the table, and stood beside him, looking up into his face.

'When I warned that you would be jealous of my past, I was right. When I told you that I, being a woman, and therefore wise, would never be jealous, I was a great fool. I said you could not forget—as though it were something to be proud of, not to remember. I can't forget, either, and I don't wish to! I told you Bentoff had utterly left my life, with those two other men who are dead. They never will leave me, and I say they ought not to, no more than Ruth will disappear from the sum of all that has gone to make up you!

'We shall not forget, we shall always remember, and because of some memories, we shall always be hurt, both of us!'

Her fingers played with the button on his coat.

'But also, my dear, my dear, I think we shall love—always!'

## X

I suppose she looked up, with shining eyes, to see if he agreed. I hope he took her arms and drew her towards him, or whatever it is the reconciled husband should do. But, having bared everything else in their lives, they were of course reticent about these merely technical details.

When I saw them last he seemed happy and at peace, which I take to be not altogether a good sign. She seemed deeply in love with him, resolutely so, as though in our mortal warfare against time and change, she had retreated upward to the heights, and defended the last citadel.

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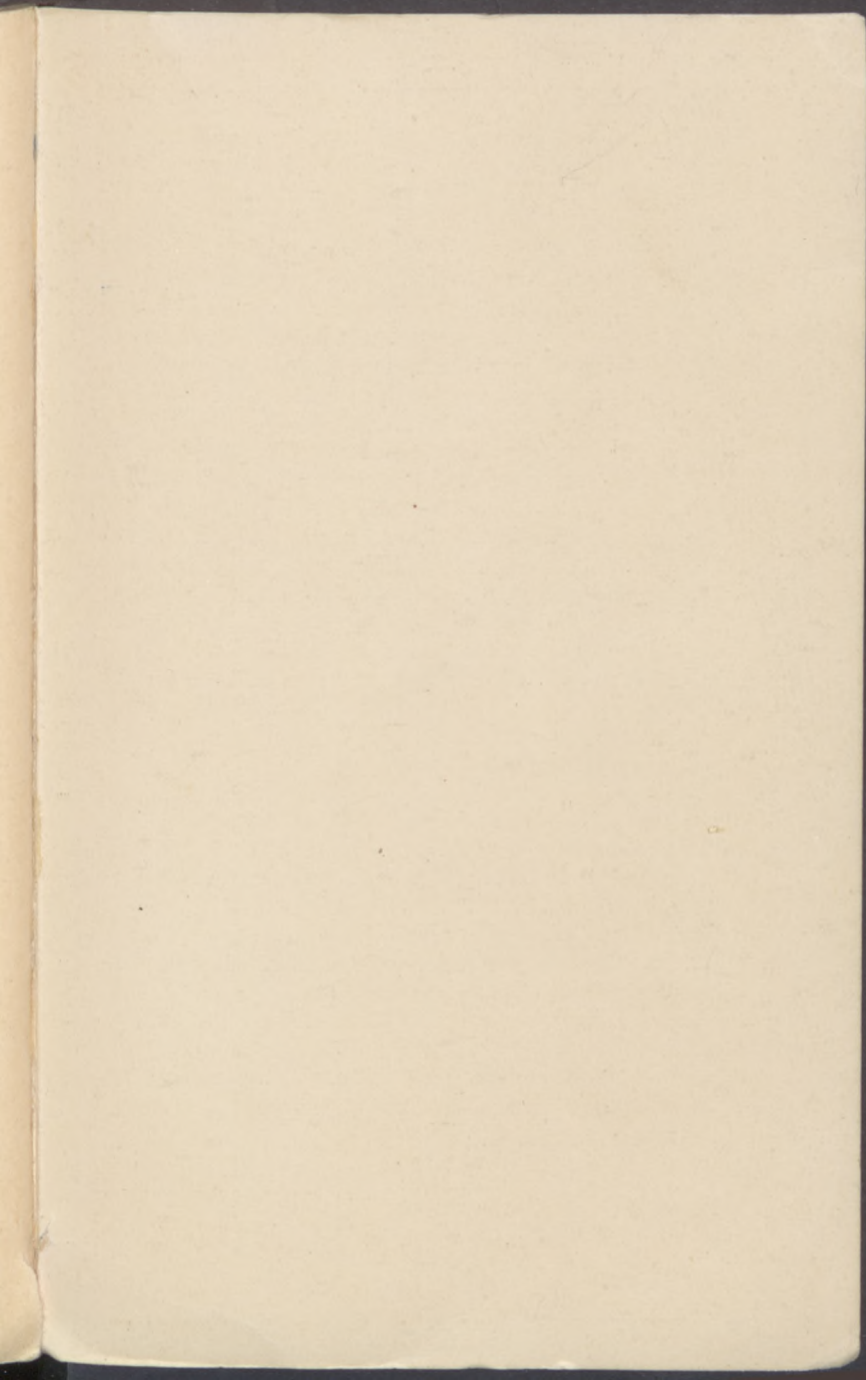
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