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FLAMINGO

By the Same Author

JANE—OUR STRANGER
THE ROMANTIC WOMAN
THREE PILGRIMS AND A TINKER
JERICHO SANDS
FOUR O'CLOCK

FLAMINGO

OR

THE AMERICAN TOWER

A NOVEL BY

MARY BORDEN



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FLAMINGO

PART I

CHAPTER I

SOMETIMES when I think of Peter Campbell standing at his high window in that breathless American tower and looking out at the panorama of New York City, a figure, so minute in the great flat façade of the building as to appear an indistinguishable speck across the precipitous cañon of the street, I remember that space is black, and I think of the eternal night of space with little lighted worlds spinning in it, a thousand million or so, tracing across the void a faint luminous trail that is no bigger in the immensity than the whisk of the tail of a firefly. The darkness seems to be undisturbed by their passing. The whirling suns cause no ripple on its surface, for it has no surface, we are told, no beginning, no end, no edge, yet the stars travel on in it tirelessly, like a swarm of luminous bees, flying towards no destination.

We are told too that they have always been travelling in this way, that there was no time before they began their journey, so that it is difficult to see just where Peter Campbell belongs in the great scheme of things. He did not know, but he wanted to know. It was one of the questions that he kept asking himself in an insistent,

violent, youthful way, sometimes convulsed with merriment over the monstrous joke, sometimes almost sobbing with exasperation, and he would often try to imagine in his presumptuous ardour what the universe would look like to an omniscient being.

It was no doubt very pretty to look at, if there was an eye to see, a Great Eye, watching. If there was an eye it could have picked out a small planet turning round and round its sun, obediently, and on this docile spinning speck, something crawling, in a confused sort of way: life, it was called. It had given itself a name. It was an obstreperous and cheeky thing, very puzzling and peculiar. It struggled and wriggled, trying to be something, to do something, and it was doing something, under the great watching eye. By means of its incessant clumsy struggling wriggles, slipping and slithering, bumping against obstacles, making innumerable mistakes, it had got itself eyes too, somehow, and had created out of itself a minute being that it called man, a tiny creature that lifted itself up on two legs, looked out into the great dark, saw the obedient stars travelling interminably through space, and asked a question.

It seemed to be true, to our little American, that this sort of thing had happened before on other planets; but perhaps not. No one knew, save the Eye maybe, if it had always been watching, if it saw the beginning of that flight of the star-swarm, through the night. In that case it might remember, as if it were yesterday, other specks of suns spinning in other swarms, and other tiny planets, now gone to fine dust and absorbed into the blackness, oozing with life once upon a time: on the other hand it may have been surprised by the minute apparition of a defiant man on the earth. It may have blinked, and it may have been during that instant when its eyelid was

lowered that cities sprang up on the earth: Thebes, Babylon, then, New York. When the eyelid lifted there they were, and in a second some were already dead and buried in sand, while others were scattered over the round earth, on seaboards, at the mouths of rivers, in the centres of wide plains, twinkling across at each other through the dark. The amazing thing was that men had built them. Undaunted by the knowledge that the earth under their feet was crumbling and cracking and that continents were slipping under the sea, these little people who had only each one an instant to live, were busy tearing stones out of the mountains with their tiny fingers and piling them into shelters for their protection. The truth was that the microscopic creatures, aware of the darkness surrounding their planet, were determined to conquer it.

The history of the human race was in Peter Campbell's view the inspiring record of a long rebellion that had begun with the obstinate pushing amoeba. As protoplasm, as tadpole, as worm, man had always refused to accept his fate. Something in him reached out beyond itself, greedy and inquisitive and defiant. This was admirable. Counting the stars on his fingers and toes, measuring his length like a caterpillar through space, minute man flung his soft tiny body out into the unknown.

"Who am I?" he whispered into the soundless abyss, and as he travelled on, throwing his tiny length out, pulling his tail up after him again and again through the unfathomable void, he repeated his question again and again, "Who am I? Who am I?"

If a Great Spirit were there listening it might have heard that whisper travelling the infinite, but if it did, it gave no answer. Man was awed by that silence. He felt lonely in the immense soundless heavens. He was afraid but obstinate, and he said to himself, "This universe

is very mysterious. I must find out what it means, and why I am here. There must be something, somewhere out there behind it all. Are you there?" he called faintly. "Are you there?" and he thought he heard someone like himself answering, but perhaps it was merely the whisper of his own voice echoing back to him from the stars. He was not sure, and he wanted to be sure. He became in this way a trembling impudent explorer of the Universe, and a minute element of disorder in its vast monotony.

The difficulty was that no man lived long enough to accomplish much. His body gave out, his mind went drowsy, and puff, he was gone, leaving a dead carcass behind him. This was exasperating. Observing that he had only a minute to live, he thought: "My children's children will finish what I have only been able to begin," and so for the benefit of those who were coming, men all over the earth carefully noted the results of their labours, keeping minute records of their investigations into the unknown. It was shrinking. Slowly and persistently, the swarm had been nibbling away at the fabric of the mysterious curtain that was suspended behind the stars, hiding something, until at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century after the birth of Jesus Christ, when Peter Campbell is discovered by our spyglass standing at the ninth window counting from the left along the façade of that New York skyscraper on the thirty-third row of windows counting up from the bottom, it seemed as if truly sensational developments were about to take place in this drama of man's struggle to dominate nature. At any rate, it seemed so to him, and he would often feel, as he stood looking out across the corrugated lid of the city that was boiling with life down there underneath like a steaming, sizzling cauldron, that he stood poised

on the breathless verge of an age of incalculable revelation.

He was an architect by profession. He often thought in pictures, and it almost seemed to him at times as if the sky, pierced by those sharp towers of steel, must split open one day before him and unroll like a scroll, or that the gigantic magnetic power of the city's energy must drag down the curtain of the sky on top of it; that some day or some night the canopy of heaven, that was straining and shivering with the electricity concentrated and generated in the city's bowels and the row set up in the ether by the thousands of magnetic air-waves set spinning by radio, must give way with a frightful sound of tearing and fall thunderously on the earth. Standing motionless at his dizzy height, he would be filled with exultancy and sometimes terror, and sometimes would hold his breath with a feeling of acute suspense. He believed fervently in his age and in the future of the human race. He took it that the aim of human progress was omniscience, and that man must surely arrive some day at that goal; and he believed that his age had made a great leap forward into the darkness, and was scattering and driving it back. The conquest of the ether was to him a proof of the power of rebellion; at each new discovery in physics or mechanics or engineering he had a sense of triumph. But he had as well a sense of destiny and of personal loneliness.

The city clanged and roared round him. It was a portrait in stone and steel and reinforced concrete of his young raw people and his boisterous, bumptious, incredibly aspiring, tumultuous age; but more than a portrait, it was a living thing to him. He saw it and felt it as a monster, alive with an energy only different from his own in that it was a million times greater. The force of electricity beat in its steel veins and animated its stone

sinews. Well, wasn't it the same force in the last analysis that kept his puny body going?

He was fond of finding resemblances between men and machines. He would vow that there was no essential difference between their physical organisms, only a difference in degree; and that in almost every physical point the machines had the advantage. They did almost everything that men could do much better than men, and many things that men couldn't do at all, like seeing through stone walls. Their senses in fact were much more acute. A quite ordinary radio apparatus could hear faint sounds three thousand miles away, and whisper "Hello" round the earth so quickly that it whipped back into its own tail. All this was a wonderful help to man in his battle with time, space, wind, cold, death, disease and so on. Steel arms, legs, wings, and glass eyes were wonderfully useful to man, but he would have to look out. The machines were getting dangerous. They already cluttered up whole tracts of the earth. In hot countries black races of human beings were still incubating, but in the moderate zones the life energy of the earth was already passing from flesh-and-blood beings into iron and steel ones. All wild beasts were gone from Great Britain for instance, and the buffalo and the bison from North America. Only a few grisly bears skulked in the mountains, and now such friendly animals as the horse were disappearing too. Hordes of spidery things on wheels called motor-cars, more prolific than rabbits, had driven the horse off the face of the prairies and the deserts.

It struck him as interesting that American citizens were already crossing the Atlantic in the early twentieth century to look at the quaint spectacle of a horse drawing a plough. An engraving of a man with a scythe had become an historical document. Machines sowed the

seed and reaped the grain from the immense wheatfields of the West, threshed it and ground it and made it into bread. Only one man's hand touched it, the hand that conveyed it to a mouth. The time might come when even forks and knives would lift themselves from tablecloths automatically, and babies would no longer be obliged to suck. All this was amusing, but disquieting too, when one was tired. Since the machines were destroying one biological organism after another, the question presented itself—whose turn next? Wasn't it just possible that men might disappear one day, as their friends the horses and dogs had done? Horses were become luxuries, the pets of millionaires. Only certain kinds of cows were allowed to breed under certain conditions. Men, he reflected, might be destined to a like fate if they weren't careful. They would be bred merely for the bit of grey matter in their skulls. Their legs and arms would atrophy in the process and drop off them as their hair was already doing. The machines if they had their way would probably keep a few men to serve them because of their brain-matter, but not more than were absolutely necessary.

It was in this way that Peter Campbell used to talk over there in New York at the time when our story begins. There had been a war in the Western Hemisphere. Half-a-dozen nations had for some indefinable reason been filled with hatred of each other. And as if anxious to help the machines in the business of exterminating the human race, they had fought until they were tired of killing each other, until there were not many young healthy men left among them. It was really the machines that were at the bottom of it all. Thousands of guns and innumerable engines of destruction had been waiting, champing at the bit, bursting to do something, and had at last broken out of their factories and forges. They had

had a good time of it; they had had their money's worth; they had had everything their own way during the war. They had blown ten million men to smithereens and made such a noise as even they themselves had scarcely believed possible. And they had come out of it exultant, above themselves. They hadn't known until the war how powerful they were. Now they knew. You could imagine them laughing among themselves, all those guns of different calibres, all those iron elephants called tanks, and those deadly armoured whales called battleships and the poisonous aeroplane wasps, chuckling and rumbling with laughter and whispering to each other through their delicate wireless voice-machines, over the joke of having turned men into their slaves, and devoured ten millions of them. "Cannon-fodder", the men themselves used the phrase. They were aware of what was happening, some of them, in a confused sort of way, but they seemed unable to do anything to save themselves. Mechanising the army, they called it in London. Men had come to depend upon the machines for so many things that they were already helpless without them. Their flesh-and-blood bodies were no longer much good to them in the life struggle of the twentieth century, not in America anyhow, and certainly not in New York.

No man could attempt to live in New York City without the help of machines. He couldn't provide a home for his children, or transact any business, or obtain any food without them. All you had to do to see that this was true was to look at the place. When a man lives five hundred feet up in the air and has to arrange for his infants to get fresh air in wire caged window-boxes suspended over an abyss, how is he to get milk and butter and eggs up, or to get up there himself without a machine to lift him off the ground? Stairs are no good to him.

His legs and his heart-pump couldn't stand forty flights of stairs.

This city is obviously not designed as a habitation for men or animals. Its conception has nothing whatever to do with the physical needs of Nature's creatures. It is perpendicular, and entirely made of minerals, stone, steel, iron, copper, and various composites of stone. It has a curious, terrible beauty. Its sharp towers shoot up out of the rock like scissors cutting the sky into ribbons. There is scarcely a tree to be seen in the immense stone jungle. There are only a few patches of grass. In one called Central Park there is a collection of live animals, tigers, lions, leopards and so on, in cages, kept as curiosities just as there are carcasses of extinct animals in its museums, but these beautiful beings are no less incongruous among the skyscrapers than the Ichthyosaurus of the Mesozoic Age. The beings who are at home in that city are made of metal and animated by the force of electricity. They are of every size and type. The process of mechanical invention has produced as many types in a hundred years as the process of evolution managed to produce in a hundred thousand. Some day a modern Darwin will tell how the turbine, the dynamo, the telephone, the microscope and the wireless came into being. In the meantime these machines already have their newspapers and their modes. You can read how autumn brings new styles in radio, and find a survey of aerial fashions in a journal called the "Scientific American."

Life for a mere man in such a city is a precarious business. He is about as safe and comfortable there as a tightrope-walker balanced above a roaring iron river. In London, keeping alive isn't quite such a dizzy business. The difficulties are of another kind. London sprawls on a muddy bottom. It is heavy and lazy and comfortable.

There is no chance for skyscrapers. Not only the mud underneath but the damp air on top is against them. There is no force at work there like that of an artesian well, to send fountains of cement shooting skyward. London remains human. It gathers its children lazily into its great grimy bosom and lets them roll about and grumble to their heart's content. Its inhabitants would be horrified at the suggestion that like New Yorkers they should choose to live suspended in the air and dispense with the use of their legs.

Our story has to do with a group of English people who are on their reluctant way to America, and with a group of Americans. This dozen or so of men and women are gravitating together as the result of some cause that is obscure, some complicated delicate interplay of forces behind the stars maybe, some pattern of small accident, minute chance and so on, some obligation from the past laid upon the men of to-day. New York is the magnet.

Now New York holds packed away in a building called the Federal Reserve Bank the largest collection of bars of solid gold in the world. They are packed snugly on shelves like loaves in a baker's shop, in small rooms like safes. The Federal Reserve Building isn't very high but it goes down some twenty-two floors underground, and although it is in a very crowded part of the city it is surrounded by water. A casing of water contained between double walls encloses it, so that it can't be blown up. There are guns mounted on the roof that can be swung out and trained north, south, east and west on the surrounding intersecting streets, and when a consignment of bullion arrives in the city it is escorted to the building by a detachment of the American Army. Such precautions for the secure keeping of this yellow metal

suggest that it is of the greatest possible value, so that perhaps those golden loaves that must weigh a good many hundred tons bulked together may be the magnet that draws so many thousands of men across mountains and prairies and the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans to New York ; but it is really very odd that this should be so, for the lumps of gold are dead lumps. They don't do anything, and once they are safely tucked into their cubby-holes no one does anything with them. Indeed no one is allowed to touch them, and only very important people, after going through a great deal of fuss, are allowed so much as to peep at them. It is all very mysterious. It is almost as if these bars of gold were a race of mummified gods under a spell, captured by America in their sleep and kept prisoner in the Federal Reserve Building. A great many of them were brought there during and after the war. The war is responsible for a lot of odd things, but for nothing odder than this. And there is a connection between those dead lumps of yellow metal and Victor Joyce's trip to America, though he would loathe to admit it.

Victor Joyce is a member of the British Government going to America to talk to the President about certain important questions between the two countries. He has with him his wife and her friend Bridget Prime, and his private secretary, Mr. Robert Parkinson, known among his friends in London as Perky. It seems as if the great powerful nations who threw themselves most wholeheartedly into the war are no longer going to be as great and powerful as they once were. They look apprehensively across the Atlantic to that newer, untired country. France, Germany and England are a little anxious, and Victor Joyce is anxious. He is worried about England, but not as worried as he might be did he have a little of

the kind of imagination which causes a man to get out of his own skin into someone else's and doubt himself. He has almost none. This peculiarity saves him a great deal of trouble, and makes him useful to his country. He is impressive. It is not only that he is taller and more massive than most men; or that he is handsome, with a red face that looks as if it had been cut out of wood, and surprising round china-blue eyes, slightly protuberant like a doll's. The effect he makes in a crowd is due to a quality of great concentration and finish. He is a big man, but he is complete and compact. He is like a large solid, a block of something of a close consistency like cement. You imagine that if you hacked away at his surface you could go on hacking until you had chipped him to a heap of slivers, but that you would find the centre as solid as the outside; and the expression of his face so seldom changes that his eyes seem to be set in his handsome face for no purpose but ornament. It is as if he had two glass eyes. This makes him a somewhat baffling person to deal with, for his eyes never betray his thoughts, and seem indeed to belie his having any. The result is comic or exasperating according to the temper of those who look at him closely. There is something funny about that mild glassy stare to those who know him best and are fond of him, to his wife for instance or his private secretary, but to his enemies it is extremely annoying. His private secretary often chuckles over him in a pleased, affectionate, almost doting way, and Frederika Joyce, when most puzzled and exasperated by her husband, bursts out laughing with the words—"Victor darling!"

Victor is one of those men who believe or pretend to believe that the earth is becoming a more disagreeable place to live in every day. He is convinced or professes

to be convinced that each time the earth revolves on its axis, it is slightly changed for the worse, and he seems to consider it his duty to stop this. One sees him grabbing hold of the belt of the equator, digging his toes into the ground of the past, and opposing his weight to that centrifugal force which keeps the earth spinning on its axis. He hates change. He knows of course that the English are the greatest race on earth, and although he grumbles as much as most of his friends about England going to the dogs, he does not really believe that it will. He thinks that England, his England, will endure for ever. He cannot conceive of the deep green fields, the snug villages, the great patrician houses, the old furniture and old customs and habits that he likes, and the old ideas that he is used to, passing away. He believes that the war was waged on behalf of these things, and that the war was won.

Frederika his wife is not very like him. She was born in Cornwall. An exotic garden tumbled down the cliffs there into the sea. The air was soft even in winter. She comes of a sea-going family. The house she lived in as a child was a dilapidated castellated place, rather ghostly. Storms swept the coast. She would stand with her small white boyish face pressed against the window in the tower looking out at the black scudding clouds, and the angry surging waves, wishing that she might set sail for the New Hebrides or some such place. Life has disciplined her and stiffened her. There is almost no trace in her face or her manner of the romantic adventurous hoyden she once was. She is a rather silent woman. Although she does not share her husband's convictions, she has learned to keep her opinions to herself; and although she is very unlike him, still in a crowd of Americans or French people they are undeniably alike.

There is something strong and steady about them both. They move with the case of well-bred, well-trained animals who cannot make a false movement. It would be quite impossible for them to lose control of themselves and shout or gesticulate. The same can be said for Bridget Prime, who has thrown overboard many of the conventions of her world. This is rather rash of her, for she is so beautiful that almost every man who sees her falls in love with her instantly. But one feels that though she might be very wild at times, she would probably be safe even among hooligans because of her instinctive habit of domination. Victor could not fall in love with her, he can look at her with nothing more than a vague irritation. To him she is only a wild girl called Biddy, the daughter of an old waster whom he has known all his life, and whom he considers a disgrace to his class. Mr. Joyce has a deep class-feeling, the sort of feeling that makes him hold himself responsible for the fate of England.

Frederika Joyce is enigmatic. She lay like a cocoon on the deck of the *Aquitania*, only the tip of her arrogant nose showing between her fur collar and the brim of her hat. You couldn't tell what she was thinking, lying there almost as if she were dead between Bridget Prime and her husband. It may be that she was wondering what she was on earth for. Victor was certainly not wondering about that. He knew. He was on earth to behave like a gentleman and do his duty by helping to govern England. He never questioned his destiny and was now merely loathing the trip, worrying about his coming talk with President Coolidge, and wishing in a dull dreary sort of way that the ship were heading in the opposite direction. As for Bridget Prime, she had gone to sleep with her mouth open. There she was, all her

long line of proud ancestors stretching behind her, exposed to the inquisitive stares of an endless procession of New York Jews, Ikey Daw, the international financier, amongst them, and with her relaxed little pink mouth gaping, she was so miraculously beautiful that every one of them wanted to leap on her and grab her. Her face would have done admirably as an advertisement for a new skin-food, tooth-powder, hair-tonic or disinfectant. It would have sold any commodity in enormous quantities. There were millions to be made out of it, and she knew it. She was on her way to America to make money out of having herself photographed, and was feeling quite savage about it. The fact that her face was already a public monument, as well known as the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty, filled her with contempt for it, and so her beauty lay there, flung down carelessly, with the ridiculous idiocy of sleep blurred over it, as if it were of no account, and in her sleep while Ikey Daw passed and repassed, she was murmuring in a queer confused sort of way, as if some miserable memory possessed her.

It is difficult to keep one's sense of proportion in regard to these people. They are indistinguishable specks on the deck of a ship that is a dot in the middle of the Atlantic, but they trick one into feeling that they are more significant than their size would seem to warrant. The two Englishwomen, Frederika and Bridget, seemed somehow to stand for a whole procession of women, to represent something strong, enduring and obstinate. There is something grim about both of them, a look of race, though Bridget's is smudged for the moment, and a distinction that has nothing to do with their clothes, which consist of squash hats and tweeds. The smart, high-heeled American women with their pretty ankles

and tilted profiles look cheap beside them. Not one of them would dare to speak to Frederika. If they did, she might be rude. It is obvious that for years she has refused to be disturbed.

These two women care for each other more than they care for any man. They are bound together by a curious feeling about men, a sort of muffled contempt, a mixture of mild antagonism and irritated sympathy, and they have an obscure stifled feeling of impatience with an instinct in themselves which draws them to men. They would each behave quite differently in any given set of circumstances, but each understand and envies that quality in the other which makes the contrast between them. Everything happens and always will happen to the reckless one, Biddy, and nothing ever happens or is likely to happen to Frederika, because she chooses that it shall be so. At any rate nothing has happened so far, and one can't tell whether she is bored or perfectly content with this state of things. She gives the impression of letting life slip past her from sheer indifference, and yet she has a curious magnetism. People who don't know her circle round her, keeping their distance, even those whom she has snubbed, but she doesn't notice them. She notices no one whom she hasn't seen many times before.

New York lay ahead of these people, lay in wait for them, a strange feverish city, a sort of long-necked restless monster, a man-eating dragon, its belly crammed with black men and yellow men and coffee-coloured men, with Africans and Chinamen and Slavs and Swedes and Armenians and Germans and Jews and with a sprinkling of Anglo-Saxons, thrown in like a pinch of salt into a pudding, all mixed together and shouting and kicking inside it. This city is one of the characters of our story, perhaps the principal character. It is difficult to tell who

plays the lead in the drama. One might argue about it and say for instance that Ikey Daw, the New York Jew who lends money to this and that Government, helping them to fight each other, and who hates all men, coldly and secretly, individually and in their swarming masses, is the Mephistopheles of the piece, and represents the greatest power left on earth, international finance. One might say that without him and such men as Mr. J. J. Jamieson, the Steel King, New York would never have existed, but that I for one cannot believe. The vast deposits of iron ore were there, stretching for miles along the north shore of Lake Superior. Fifty per cent of pure iron, they averaged. If Mr. Jamieson and his associates hadn't exploited them, built docks, blast-furnaces, fleets of carrying ships and cities of foundries, other men would have done it. John Jamieson merely happened along. He is a great man in America and one of New York's most respected citizens, which Ikey Daw is not, but still he doesn't count much, and he is already too tired to care very much for his millions. He is a gentle wistful dried-up dyspeptic with a tired grey moustache and the mildest eyes in the world. Peter Campbell is married to his daughter. This is a pity. A young New York architect is only laying up trouble for himself when he marries the daughter of a multi-millionaire. Peter is one of the most gifted architects in America, some people say, a sort of prodigy, a magician, and a lovable little man, but with monstrous notions in his head. His skyscraper, the Radio Building, proves him to be a great architect, but he is certainly not a great man. He is small and weak. There is a softness about him that makes one wonder how he has been able to last out even as long as this in New York, and how on earth he has already become successful in his profession. His charm is boyish. An

unquenchable enthusiasm bubbles up in him, and he looks much younger than he really is. His face is self-contradictory. It often wears a shrewd comical good-humoured grin, but it is marked by suffering. His eyes are surmounted by a high boldly-modelled forehead on which his very fair hair is receding. They are at the same time intelligent and incredibly naïve. They are intensely blue, and go almost black when he is excited. He is often excited. At moments they have a look of intense pain in them. A small boyish tow-headed man going bald, with laughter and enthusiasm bubbling up in him, and puzzled lonely eyes: such is our little American architect to look at. The trouble with him is that he could have been almost any kind of man: a monk, a poet, a civil engineer, a player of the eukelele or the saxophone, or a drunken waster. It is merely by chance that he is an architect, merely because he happened to be born in 1886 and happened to catch a glimpse of the New York City of the future when he left Harvard. He was going down the Hudson river on a steamer with some college friends of his, and suddenly saw the town as if for the first time. "Holy smokel!" he shouted. "What a mess! This place needs a gardener," and off he rushed to the Beaux Arts in Paris, and now the City has got him. It obsesses him. He is in love with it and he fears it. He sweats and labours for it. He wants to grapple with it. There is something odd about such a small man building such monstrous towers. Sometimes it strikes even him as funny. He has vast schemes in his head, and to realise them he needs Ikey Daw and a whole gang of millionaires. Mr. Daw is the most active of the Directors of the Manhattan Development Company, a Company formed to plan and control the building that is going on in the city. Peter has ideas about this. He has designed great slabs

of the city, and in particular a block-skyscraper that will cover an area a quarter of a mile square. He hopes to persuade the Manhattan Development Company to put this up. If he can touch the great Jew's imagination, his plans may come to something. Unfortunately a great many things interest him outside his profession. Almost everything that is going on interests him. He is for ever talking and talking with his friends who are doctors, biologists, psychologists, inventors and scientists about Physics, Metaphysics, the subconscious mind and mechanical inventions. He believes that the physical and the metaphysical are two aspects of the same thing, that mind and matter are both just a series of causes, and that the subconscious mind of man is somehow quite definitely able to tap the universal source of all knowledge. Such questions delight him and tickle his fancy, as music tickles his nerves and beauty of any sort or description delights his eye, a woman's face or a group of factory chimneys or the smooth whirring movements of a dynamo. He is really half drunk with the elixir of life, most of the time, but of course he doesn't know very much about anything but architecture. What he understands best is the balancing of large masses, the beauty of vertical planes rising up, shooting down, and the fashioning of fragile towers. He was one of the first to see that horizontal lines must be obliterated from the façades of skyscrapers if these great buildings were to come into their own as a logical and convincing architectural form of the highest order. He knows a good deal about stone and terra-cotta and reinforced concrete and the elasticity of steel under stress, and flood lighting. He is mad about light, and is for ever talking about it and writing about it in architectural journals. His enemies say that he talks too much, and that an architect should build buildings, not write

poetic drivel about them. He isn't so strong on the practical side of his profession as on the imaginative. His partners and his assistants have to test his drawings and overhaul them pretty carefully before they go out of the office. And he sometimes goes perfectly frantic with the contractors and plumbers, engineers and electricians and specification specialists and all the dozen other specialists who are concerned in this business of building and tear his drawings out of his hands before they are half finished and maul them about and change them and start to work on them long before he's ready, but he goes frantic in a good-humoured way.

Incidentally he is very attractive to women and very sensitive to their charm, and he is specially drawn to the strong brutal animal ones, for he is neither strong nor brutal himself. His passions are complicated by his nerves. His imagination and his nerves are always playing tricks on him. What is ugly and outrageous and dangerous seems to exercise on him a strong fascination.

He sees New York as a city of three layers. His working life is lived in the air, on the top layer; his married life goes on down on the ground or near it, in the smart world where his wife's set skim about in ballrooms or up and down smooth roads to Long Island. Below this there is another world, subterranean, the world of blazing night cellars, where the negroes gather, and this world too draws him irresistibly down into it. He is at home at the top and at the bottom, in the air or underground, but not on the level that is called Society. This he detests. He rushes off from his wife's dinner parties as often as he can and joins his negro friends in Harlem. There is a big black man who plays the piano in a negro night club called the Crib, Joseph Jefferson is his name, and a negro girl called Carolina Sal who sings there. These two are

special friends of his. Sometimes, and were this known in New York Society it would land him in serious trouble, he goes with the negro, Joe, to a baseball game. Sometimes he takes Carolina Sal to Coney Island, but mostly he sees them at night. The large, coarse, black girl draws him to her, and her race draws him. All those black men stimulate his creative power. Their great black masks and huge limbs fill him with a strange elation. He exults in Sal. She is like hashish to him. He goes back and back to that black continent, that subterranean Africa blazing under the city's pavement. All sorts of architectural concepts sprout up in his mind in that Jazz jungle. His fancy becomes there as luxuriant as a tropical forest. It may be bad for him. It may be that in Joe's dance-cellar Peter the artist flourishes while Peter the man dwindles and goes sick, but he would never for a minute admit this. He would shout with laughter at the idea, and rush over and sit with the band and begin playing on a swanee whistle or saxophone with his head against the drum. He was happy with those coloured people. He loved them. Certainly it wasn't the negroes pouring in a dark flood through the lighted caverns under the city's foundations that he was afraid of. If he was afraid of anything, it was of the straining, stretching, clanging super-structure, rising up above ground into the air; the spidery steel monster that had got him in its grip, that had got so many white men in its claws. It wasn't the darkies who were dangerous to his race, this he felt very strongly. He would maintain on the contrary if you asked him that they were probably the one power in America strong enough to save the human race from being enslaved by the machinery of industrial development. They paid no attention to those straining skyscrapers on top of them. They went on breeding and singing and

laughing and yelling and dancing and being lazy and getting religion just as if they were in Africa with no clothes on.

In any case there is Peter hoisted up to his office in the air every morning and shot down into the bowels of the earth at night, a speck of a man with monstrous notions in his head and his nerves jiggling with excitement.

We shall have to do with him and with his mother Amanda Campbell, who lives with her other son Christopher in a small leafy place on the shore of a lake, fifty miles from Albany in New York State. The village she lives in is named Campbelltown after the family that was made famous by Zeb Campbell, the American writer who lived in the early nineteenth century and wrote tales of Red Indians. The wooded hills round Campbelltown were full of Indians in the days when George II. gave a grant to the first pioneer Campbell. Eight generations of Campbells have lived in the white house that stands at the end of the village street, something of a record in America, but it is empty now. Amanda lives in a small narrow dark brick house shaded by giant elms, farther down the street towards the shops, one of a block that might have been transported from a Bloomsbury square in London. She is poor, and her son Christopher is not like other people. He is almost completely lacking in what is called common sense, and has never learned to read or write. Some people say that he is an idiot, but not in Amanda's presence. Amanda is a fierce little fighting-cock of a woman. She would fly out at anyone who showed signs of thinking Chris different from other men. And Peter, who has an odd way of looking at things, has a queer belief about his brother, a peculiar conviction that he understands not less but more than most people of the world that lies beyond the appearance of things.

Amanda Campbell is important in this story, although she doesn't do anything very much. How can she? She is nothing but a little old woman of sixty, tired but defiant, with flashing blue eyes and sandy wisps of hair blowing into them, living in seclusion in a small country town. She almost never goes to New York to see Peter. Peter's smart wife Adelaide is embarrassed when Amanda in her old-fashioned black hat and jacket comes to lunch with her in her sunny apartment in Park Avenue, and Adelaide, who is the daughter of the great J. J. JAMIESON, hates Campbelltown and won't live in the beautiful long white Georgian house with the green shutters and the four lovely columns before the front door which now belongs to Peter. Adelaide can't bear the sight of Christopher, her idiot brother-in-law, who bites his nails and makes faces at her, so that Peter seldom gets down to Campbelltown and Amanda is most of the time alone with Christopher. She has had four sons, but two are dead, so is her husband. Peter and Chris are left to her. She can look after Christopher. He follows her about like a dog and is almost never out of her sight, but Peter has escaped her. He has been whirled away from her on the great grinding roaring torrent of American life. There he is, off there, a minute speck against the sky, balanced on that tight-rope between two towers.

His father died in delirium tremens nearly thirty years ago seeing lions round his bed, and Peter drinks too, sometimes. I would rather he did anything but that. I feel something of the sickening fear that Amanda Campbell feels when I hear of his drinking, for I love Amanda Campbell and I follow her up the village street to the Campbell house and watch her with her duster as she goes grimly through the shuttered rooms, remembering that day thirty years ago, when she locked her four little boys

into the barn and went back to wrestle with her husband's hideous death. I can see her now, tightening her skinny arms round Zeb Campbell's sweating terrified body, and hear her saying obstinately over and over again—"There's no such thing, Zeb, no, there's nothing, there aren't any lions coming in at the door; the door's locked. There's nothing. I tell you there's nothing there."

She is fond of Campbelltown, she has lived there for thirty-five years, first in the big house, then in the dark little one, and knows every one, but she is very isolated for all that, partly because of Chris being so odd, and partly because she does not go to church. This is a thorn in the side of the town. The people respect her, some of them are fond of her, but they consider her a cranky old woman, and her questioning of the accepted doctrines of the Church shocks them. She has come in for a certain amount of interference and mild persecution. She has been, off and on, the subject of prayer meetings. Local parsons have been known to argue and reason with her and even to pray for her at evening Bible classes, but she is impatient of interference, and has shown each minister of the Gospel a scanty courtesy when he came bothering her. "I guess I've got to be honest," is her usual rejoinder to pleadings that have to do with the salvation of her immortal soul. But it would be a mistake to consider her a free thinker in anything that has to do with conduct. Her moral sense is old-fashioned in the extreme. It has come straight down to her from her puritan forbears. She doubts the existence of God, but is not in the least vague about right and wrong. Lying, deceit and adultery are abominable to her. Her father was a professor of mathematics at Harvard University and taught her to reason, and although she has had little time to study mathematics during the forty odd

years that have passed since she married Zeb Campbell, she still cherishes a secret passion for that exact science. When life goes hard with her she gets out her old school books and as she would put it—"does sums."

It hasn't been easy for her to keep up her courage and to withstand the influence of all that deep militant religious feeling surging round her through her country. It affects her and it affects Peter. Two hundred American newspapers recently took a national religious census and compared their results with those of a similar inquiry in England, and proclaimed that America was undoubtedly the more devout. Eighty per cent of those who responded to the clarion question proclaimed that they believed in God, and the same percentage had faith in immortality. Seventy-seven per cent believed that Christ was divine, eighty per cent that the Bible was inspired as no other literature could be said to be inspired, and while only seventy per cent attended church, ninety per cent believed that religion was a necessary element of life; so that really Amanda Campbell, who held that the doctrines of heaven and hell and a jealous god were highly unreasonable, and that the first chapter of the Book of Genesis was an allegorical poem whose author was an ancient Hebrew of vigorous imagination, found herself in a small minority in Campbelltown and Jordan Valley. And though she might sniff at the new religions springing into being all over the place, the thousands of believing Christians scattered through the country who had a sure hope of eternal happiness and a loving Heavenly Father who was to them a source of strength in time of trouble, had a great advantage over an isolated tired little old woman like Amanda whose only hope was that she might hold her head up and look life straight in the face till she dropped for ever asleep. The trouble is that she has loved her

husband and her sons quite terribly, with a restrained concentrated passion of tenderness, and although she has never admitted it to anyone, when she stood by the grave first of one and then of another of her men, she was terribly tempted to go back on what she knows to be true, and to find comfort in the belief which she knows to be a lie that she will somehow, somewhere, sometime, find them and be with them again. And often as she sits in the evening in her shabby room with Chris babbling to himself in the corner, she thinks of Peter and feels a panicky longing to implore God's help on his behalf. But she merely sits there very still, thinking and thinking, with an aching straining sensation in her side, and after half an hour or so she will give her head a little jerk and say to herself in her terse defiant way, "I'd hate to blame God for what happens to folks."

As for Peter, his mind in spite of him was affected by the simple and formidable beliefs of the American churchgoers. He simply could not sin against these with an easy conscience. When he did, he felt guilty.

There are then some little people on a ship in mid-Atlantic, and other minute people in New York, and a speck of an old woman in a small country town by a lake. The map is wide, the people are tiny, the distances between them are vast. And most of them are as yet unaware of each other or of the fact that they are being drawn together. Peter's wife, for instance, in her luxurious shiny apartment, has never really been aware of anyone in the world but herself. She is looking into a mirror and trying on hats. Her room is littered with band-boxes. She is surrounded by billows of tissue paper just as the ss. *Aquitania* is surrounded by the waves of the Atlantic. She knows that the Victor Joyces are on their way to America. Her mother is giving a

dinner for them the night after their arrival, and she has been in a temper because Peter has refused to put off his trip to Chicago in order to be at the dinner. She suspects that he has arranged the trip in order not to be there, and she has made a scene about it, threatening for the tenth time to divorce him, for dinner-parties are very important things in Adelaide's world. But she isn't thinking of that now. She isn't thinking at all. She is merely twisting her head and pulling down the corners of her mouth, solemnly, under one hat after another. She hasn't an idea that Peter has ever seen Frederika Joyce, nor has he. That is the strange thing. Peter Campbell and Frederika Joyce knew each other in Cornwall thirty-four years ago, and he has since seen her three times. He could tell you exactly when and where, though it is five years ago now since the last time. He could draw you the shape of her head, and a likeness of her triangular face, very broad at the top with high cheekbones, and going to a point, her cheeks slightly hollowed in. He remembers precisely the peculiar dry pallor of her skin, the sweep of eyebrows above her black eyes that are rather small and sunken, and indeed he sometimes, absent-mindedly, when he is thinking out some problem, traces with a pencil the curve of her firm lips on a piece of paper, but he doesn't know her name. He has no suspicion of her identity. He doesn't know that she is the little girl he played with on that Cornish beach. Although he was so startled by her face when he saw her fifteen years ago, he didn't, that first time in Paris in 1912, try to find out who she was. She was getting into a car outside the Ritz ; he was passing, he might have asked a dozen people, the concierge would have told him, but he flung off, after hovering miserably for a minute before the high revolving doors. The chattering mob

of asses inside scared him away, and the second time in Vienna, a year later, though he did ask several people who she was, no one seemed to recognise his description of her; perhaps because she didn't come in contact with the sort of people he knew in those days, artists and students, and so on.

On the last occasion, in London, he had had no time to find out about her. Adelaide had taken him to a party in a big house somewhere in Mayfair. They had met Frederika coming out as they went in. She had brushed past him in the canvas tunnel before the great lighted door, diamonds in her dark hair, draperies with a shimmer to them gathered round her. He had sailed the next morning. So now, though he remembered her very definitely, he did not know who she was, or that she was at last coming to America, or that she was dining with his mother-in-law next week, or that he was going to miss meeting her there because he had to go to Chicago for his firm, and because, too, he hated his mother-in-law's dinner-parties. He will often miss things by a hair's breadth. He is for ever rushing off in the wrong direction. He ought to stay in New York and meet Frederika the night she arrives. He ought to be on the dock waiting for her; for he has been thinking of this woman whose name he doesn't know, and to whom he has never spoken, for fifteen years, and her image has become involved in some way that he cannot explain with his sense of destiny and solitude.

CHAPTER II

LONDON and New York had been talking all that summer. They had been trying to understand each other, but with very moderate success. They saw things differently, or perhaps New York didn't try very hard to understand that old woman across the Atlantic, that old fogey. The young are inclined to be harsh in their judgements. They are sometimes impatient. That was why the Right Honourable Victor Joyce, Member of His Majesty's Government, was going to America to talk to the President, because America didn't understand England, because New York thought of London as a lazy rheumatic old Mother Hubbard who, though her cupboard was bare, had a lot of ne'er-do-weels, a lot of loafers, hanging to her skirts. Paris, Vienna, Rome, Warsaw, Budapest, they all owed her money. Well, why didn't she turn them out, make them go to work? Work, that was it. "You don't know what work is over there," said New York. It was all nonsense, this talk about not being able to pay. All they had to do was to clear up the rubbish in their backyards, where the war had been going on, and get to work. The war had been over now for eight years, hadn't it? Well, and they had none of them yet cleared up the mess. What was wanted was a new broom. "A new broom sweeps clean," New York had announced in the tone of an inspired orator, with histrionic emphasis, as if suddenly a great philosophic truth had been revealed to the world. "A new broom sweeps clean. You think that over. There's a wonderful meaning in that thought, for every one of you—a lesson." But London from under her cap of fog had merely blinked, had seemed not at all

surprised, had only huddled herself closer in her dingy wraps of mist and smoke, drawing them round her haughtily, in the grand manner, as a great old dowager might do. That grand manner exasperated New York. That aloofness, that coldness, that air of self-assurance in a lazy old woman, drove New York crazy. Wasn't she impoverished and sick, after all, then? Wasn't she preparing to lie down in her cold bed and give in to the slow creeping paralysis of old age? Wasn't she after all going to hand over the keys of that mysterious cupboard, and let someone younger and stronger and more energetic run her house for her, run the world?

"Now see here," yelled New York, for the old soul must be deaf, "you come down off your perch. I want to talk to you, and when I talk, I lay my cards on the table." But again London had merely blinked and had, absent-mindedly as it were, handed New York a purse. It turned out to be crammed with gold and bank-notes. That had been rather impressive, and the poor old thing had paid more than one had expected. One had thought she would haggle over terms, whereas she had simply paid what she was asked to pay, the poor old innocent. But was it innocence? Wasn't it just that damned cursed pride of hers? There had been something patronising about the way it was done. New York smarted. It couldn't be true then, that she had had difficulty in finding the money, had mortgaged her little patch of land, and had cut down her rations? What of all those hard-luck stories about trade depression, taxation and the unemployed problem? She must have been bluffing.

Respectable old women shouldn't bluff. It wasn't decent for them to play poker. Poker was an American game. "I've got four aces. Now what has she got?"

wondered New York; but London seemed to have gone to sleep over the game.

She trusted too much to her reputation, that was it. She banked on her prestige. Because she had held the purse strings of Europe for so long, she thought that she could still go on doing so. Nations had trusted her with their savings for centuries, had lent to her occasionally, knowing that they would be paid, had borrowed from her largely, because—well, because it had become almost an asset to owe her money, because it was almost better, and certainly easier, to pay one's bills with her notes than with one's own; and she had grown enormously heavy, slow, beefy, corpulent, on the business, and her credit remained unimpaired. Crippled as she was, she still handled, behind her dingy counter, a great deal of the wealth of the world.

Well, all that would be changed now. New York brandished in its fist 'he fat gold bag.

"Look at this, look at this!" But London, opening one eye sleepily, mumbled something. What was it she had said? "Money, what's money?" Could it have been that? And if it was, what did she mean? Perhaps she was making a joke, one of those English jokes. For money, New York knew, was power, and the stuff in those cellars, filled from the coffers of England and France and Belgium and Germany, was—well, it was gold, the final, the basic, the one absolute, eternal, unchangeable, indestructible element of worth, the last distilled exquisite essence of money. Whenever the franc or the mark, the lei or the iira, jiggged up or down in a death dance, when Germany was all strewn over with whirling shrivelled-up paper marks as with a storm of dead leaves, and German grocers wrapped up their cakes of soap in notes of a million marks or so, then New York thought of those

bars of gold in the cellar of the Federal Reserve Bank and was reassured.

Still, the queer thing was that London seemed to get on quite well without much of the magic symbolic yellow stuff. The Bank of England's signature on a piece of paper remained good. It passed, almost, for gold. It was very strange. It must have something to do with that amazing thing, her prestige. That was extraordinary. It was baffling. Didn't being up-to-date mean anything? Didn't looks mean anything? Was that slow shabby old frump in a moth-eaten wig going to carry on for ever, calmly and stolidly, her antiquated methods?

"Look at me," said New York preening herself. "Look at my skyscrapers, my Greek temples that are banks, my railway stations that are as beautiful as cathedrals, my palatial hospitals. Look at my lovely clean chimneys that give out no smoke: See how clean my face is, see how I sparkle and shine, and just see how I hustle. Could anyone resist me? Won't they all come flocking? Am I not beautiful and young and alluring? And am I not the greatest heiress on earth?"

Poor old London! She knew it was true. She looked with a veiled gleam of envy across the Atlantic. She felt a pang of jealousy, perhaps a pang of dread. There was after all a menace in the silly chatter of the bumptious young creature over there. For all her boasting and bragging, for all her ignorance, she did have that most precious of all possessions, that most potent of all powerful charms, not the gold, but the youth of the world.

Still, London wanted to be friends. She was more tolerant and kindly since the war. She had to be. Even though every word and gesture of the young, raw American beauty made her wince, she must be friendly. She couldn't afford to quarrel with the youngster. Though

she had paid and was going to go on paying off her debts to the heiress for the next hundred years or so, there was still plenty to quarrel about, there were still various little matters of dispute between them, such as the freedom of the seas, for instance. America cared a great deal about the freedom of the seas, New York said, doing all the talking instead of Washington, most improperly, one thought. The freedom of the seas? London smiled and changed the subject, casually, in the grand manner afore-mentioned, that was so exasperating; but New York went on and on about it, until at last London murmured the name of Japan. That was a red herring, that worked, that distracted the youngster's attention. America would be quite pleased if Great Britain would build a naval base at Singapore. Yes, sure, sea police were a good thing. One must keep order. America believed in policemen, though not in soldiers. New York had a number of policemen who regulated her traffic. That was the idea, agreed London. England and America had best regulate the traffic of the seas together. You take the West side and I'll take the East.

But the Merchant Marine,—shipping? All that was very complicated. Too many ships flying the British flag sailed into New York Harbour. New York didn't like it. She tossed her head. Why should the riches of her country be carried in British ships? She would build ships of her own, and man them with her own men; but London, clucking like a hen to her chicks, Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow and Portsmouth, gathered them together and said, "Tut, let her talk. This England of ours is a sea-going nation. Let the Yankee farmers have a try," and presently that subject too was dropped, at any rate for the time being. What America cared most about, it appeared, was Peace and Disarmament. The President

and the Cabinet and the Senate and Congress couldn't understand, explained New York, volubly annotating and embellishing the President's few carefully chosen words, how it was that countries who were bankrupt should keep up vast standing armies and lend money to other smaller bankrupts in order that they should do likewise.

London nodded sagely. London agreed that it was most unreasonable. Disarm? By all means. Would England's statesmen accept America's invitation to a further conference on disarmament? Certainly, with the best will in the world. "For", remarked London, "England too wants peace. You see, she too, like France and Italy and Belgium, fought beside the gallant American Army on the Western Front, that is she held on with her Allies, as best she could, until General Pershing and his men could come and win the war."

But the American sense of humour is American, and New York did not notice that someone had been guilty of joking on such a serious matter as the peace of the world.

"Peace by disarmament. The President invites you to come and lay down your arms at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. We've no use for your League of Nations. We don't believe in it, and we're not going to be involved in your affairs. You can pay what you owe us, but otherwise count us out. We've our own concerns, and we want to look after them without being called upon to interfere in your squabbles; but because we know what is good for you, because we have ideals, and because Peace is one of them, because peace on earth and goodwill towards men is a verse out of the Bible, and we know the Bible is a grand book and is the written word of God, and we are its interpreters to the heathen—because of

this faith of ours, and these high ideals of ours, we invite you to disarm, and, you see, once you have disarmed you won't fight any more, because you'll find that you can't."

"Peace," chanted New York, "peace and order! We are makers of peace. We believe in peace on earth and goodwill to all men." All the newspapers shouted it, and there on the other side of the page, you would read how the gunmen of Chicago had cleared the streets of that city, and how it was dangerous to stay at the Liberty Hotel on Fifth Avenue because one was likely to be stabbed in the back on the way to the bathroom, and how there had been a panic in the Wheat Pit because some man had cornered all but a few bushels of grain growing in North and South America, and some other man at the head of a gang had vowed to do him in and had done him in. Still, America was, it seemed, a peaceful and a peace-loving nation.

So they went on talking, across the Atlantic, New York standing straight and slim on her western starboard, London sprawling at the mouth of the Thames, and all the sea between them was dotted with ships coming and going from one to the other, and the sandy bottom of it was laced with cables binding the two together, and the scudding clouds were charged, were electric, with countless hurrying messages. They had suddenly moved close to each other. That was the difficulty. The Atlantic that once had separated them was shrunk to a pond, and the storms and the darkness that once had hidden them from each other were powerless now. Whizz! the radio messages passed through the blizzard, tiny whispers travelling precisely with perfect composure through the roaring obstreperous tempest, the north-easter. And what could the elements do, pour down sheets of water,

obliterating the earth, the sky, churn up the frothing seas, fill the wind with blinding snow-drifts? Pooh! the poor things! The *Aquitania* nosed her way through the gale as smoothly as if she were a tame duck swimming across the millpond into the farmyard.

And the people on board her were warm and snug, in their pretty brass beds with the little shaded lamps lighted beside them, and the eighteenth-century ladies in frilled caps and kerchiefs smiling insipidly from the damask panelled walls. Only a queer creaking noise in the corridors, and a sinking feeling now and then as the floor withdrew, and the swaying of limp empty clothes hanging from pegs, to suggest that one wasn't at home in the Ritz, in Paris or London or New York, at whichever Ritz of all the Ritzes in the world you preferred to call "home". A cocktail put you right, or if not one, then two, followed by a bottle of champagne, and the band was playing, the fiddles were scraping away in the warm little restaurant behind the discreet baskets of blooming rosy-cheeked peaches from California and the fat pots of caviar from Russia and the sturdy stalks of asparagus grown out of season under glass in France and brought here to tempt you, to make you feel at home. You could have for dinner that excellent dish, pressed duck, as they did it at the Tour d'Argent, and closing your eyes over the succulent bloody morsel could imagine yourself surrounded by the gay jingling streets of Paris, by the lighted boulevards, the theatres, could watch lovely women stepping out of their limousines. You didn't hear the wind rushing past in the dark, moaning and snarling and leaping over the waves like an animal. You didn't notice it. It wasn't there. After dinner you would play a rubber of bridge, or dance, and drink cointreau, or mint, or brandy, and if you reeled a little

going to bed, well one did sometimes in Paris or New York or London, and your maid or your valet or the kind steward had laid out your things for the night, just as usual, and your hot-water bottle was in your bed.

Although Mr. Joyce's visit to the United States was understood to be entirely unofficial, a number of people had gone to Waterloo Station to see the Joyces off when they left. The American Ambassador at the Court of St. James's had been at the station and someone from Buckingham Palace with good-bye messages from the King and Queen, and several people from Government Offices in Whitehall. Even the Prime Minister had come to say a last word to his colleague, which he did quietly in the middle of the crowded platform, murmuring little things about China, the Hague, the Japs, and there had been a number of smart women calling "Good-bye Freddie!" "Good-bye, Biddy darling!" and a number of young men, three of whom had gone as far as Southampton to have a couple of hours more of Biddy's society. The suite of cabins reserved for the Cabinet Minister and his party had been filled with flowers and parcels of books, sweets, baskets of fruit and so on, and a lot of agitated but respectful newspaper reporters had run up and down the gangway with cameras on tripods, taking last snapshots of the English statesman and his wife and beautiful Bridget Prime. And Victor Joyce had put up with it all, patiently, stolidly, betraying no sign of the dull sinking feeling in his stomach caused by the thought of leaving England for that awful country on the other side of the Atlantic. He hated going. He hated it more than any other member of the Government would have hated it. It almost seemed as if the Cabinet had chosen him to go for this very reason, just because he loathed America and Americans, just because it knew instinctively

that he, being like that, dull and obstinate and quite lacking in the sort of imagination that would make anything in America interesting to him, would be exactly the right person to defend Great Britain's interests with the American Government.

Many of the passengers on the ship had been aware of the arrival on board of the distinguished English party. They had crowded round the gangway and stared, more or less openly. All the men and most of the women would have stared at Bridget anyhow. Men and women all over the world stared at Bridget Prime. They couldn't help it. Her fair radiance was one of nature's best efforts, a sort of miracle like a beautiful sunset or a moonlight night, but it had an even more moving effect on men's hearts, filling them with a wistful hunger. Few people noticed Frederika Joyce or anyone else when Bridget was about.

But the English party kept to themselves, at any rate for the first three days, and did not mix with the other passengers. They had their meals in their suite on B deck, and only came out to lie in their deck-chairs behind the unscalable barrier of their reserve. The promenaders, slanting past against the wind, observed that Mr. Joyce was a bad sailor, that he kept his eyes closed and his chin in his collar, that Mrs. Joyce had her haughty nose in a book a good deal of the time, and that Mrs. Prime did crossword puzzles with the private secretary. The four would spend the afternoon that way and then disappear, and a maid or a valet would come and gather up their things. Mr. Daw, the swarthy handsome Jew, observed all this in a series of oblique glances. Sometimes they acknowledged his presence as he passed, with slight perfunctory nods, sometimes they did not. Mrs. Joyce usually closed her eyes, and Bridget lay curled up side-

ways in her chair facing the young man in spectacles over the crossword puzzle book. Mr. Daw, growing more and more sore and impatient, told his friend Miss Augusta Green, the famous Broadway star, that he wished she'd stop playing skittles on the boat-deck and do something about Bridget Prime, whom she had met in Paris at Fisher's, the Grand Duke, and other places. Miss Augusta Green had laughed good-humouredly in his dark face. "All right, Ike," she said, "anything to please you—but she doesn't want me or anyone butting in on her." "I don't care what she wants," he remarked. "You butt in anyway, Gussy—she'll take it from you." And she did. After three days of crossword puzzles with Perky, Bridget was ready for a little diversion. She took Perky with her to the smoking-room to have a cocktail with the amusing American actress. After that Mr. and Mrs. Joyce remained alone, much of the time, stretched side by side in their chairs. It was observed that they said little to each other. As the wind freshened, Mr. Joyce sank lower and lower into his collar and his handsome red face became rather green. Mrs. Joyce continued to read, or lay silent, her eyes half-closed, watching the rise and fall of the rail and the heaving waters of the Atlantic, her hat pulled down over her nose, her long legs wrapped in a fur rug. She was distant, inaccessible. She spoke to no one on deck save the steward and the Captain, who stopped beside her chair every afternoon for a few minutes. For long hours she appeared to be unaware of her husband's existence and he of hers. A casual observer might have supposed them to be very bored indeed with each other, but this would not have been any more true than most rough approximations which, missing the point of such relationships, are no better than entirely wrong. The

fact is that they were too discordant by nature to be really bored with each other, and pretended to be more bored than they were, in order to make things smooth. A common united life had been for them too difficult an achievement to allow them to sink into comfortable dullness. Their instinct had indicated to them that an assumption of mutual indifference would be most conducive to ease.

Frederika Joyce was a rather masculine woman—not that she looked like a man. Her small close-cropped head was boyish, but not manly. Her thin hard face had a wasted, worn appearance in certain lights, but its peculiarity lay in the contrast between the direct level brilliance of her small black eyes and the mocking lines of her mouth that expressed a subtle bitterness. Her shoulders were broad, her chest was deep, her hands and feet were long and narrow. Although she was excessively thin, with no flesh on her bones, you felt from the way she moved that she was strong, that her languor came from weariness of mind, not of body. Her manner was still somewhat abrupt, but she had grown gentler and at the same time more scornful as she grew older; her gentleness was a result of self-discipline. Her hands were noticeable. Emaciated and nervous, they were expressive of some quality in herself to which she refused expression. They were feminine and exotic.

There were in her mentality and her general make-up more masculine elements than feminine. Nature it seemed had started out intending her to be a man, but something had happened to her before she was a complete infant and she had been born a girl. This was unfortunate. She had a natural taste for mechanics, and she might have made a good mechanical engineer or something of that sort had she been trained to it, but she had been brought

up as the daughters of badly-off English gentlefolk are brought up in the country and had had no education. Failing an active career in some profession of applied science, she would have been satisfied as the mother of half-a-dozen sons; but she had had no children. Failing these, she would have found an outlet for her strong vitality in the dependence upon her of a weak man; but her husband was not weak, he was as strong as she was, stronger in some ways, and slower. A great deal of her energy had been spent in forcing herself to keep step with him. What was left over would have carried her into a variety of amorous adventures, had it not been that she was a woman of very exacting taste. In a community of wide privilege and good-humoured tolerance, where people felt sufficiently sure of themselves to ignore the common code of morality, she had had no lovers because of this scornful quality of mind. Her scorn, however, was all for herself. She had grown slowly to dislike herself. This made her shy, and although her husband's position necessitated her going about almost constantly in crowds of people, and although she played her public part with ease and dignity, she remained aloof and had not many friends.

It is probable that she understood her husband as well as any well-bred woman can understand any man, and that is not saying very much. Her masculine turn of mind did not help her here, it hindered, for she did not know how to coax or wheedle, and lacked what is called the feminine instinct in dealing with men. It had come to her knowledge about two years after her marriage that he had had, up to and at the time of marrying her, a very intimate friendship indeed with a very clever woman, a brilliant political hostess in London, who had professed, when Frederika became Victor's young, ignorant wife, a great

affection for herself. It had dawned upon Frederika gradually that this lady was known to have had a great influence on Victor, and to have done a great deal for him over a period of ten years—indeed was said by some to have made him, and even his marriage, choosing Frederika herself as his wife. These unsought revelations had been like a series of soft soundless shocks to Frederika, destroying her confidence in herself; but she had never let him know that she knew these things, and had never made him a scene. They had been married now for twenty years, and moved together quietly without any fuss through the great complex world of international affairs, affairs of state, party politics and social obligations. She had reasoned it out, and judged that Victor, though he had remained friends with the lady, had brought his liaison to an end when he married; and of course after twenty years of marriage she had forgotten the humiliation of her early discovery. It remained to her now merely as a doubt of her own worth, a source of inner weakness that had produced round itself, like a protective skin, an outward hardness. She wondered sometimes whether he had ever really cared for her at all. She would have liked to know. It occurred to her occasionally as rather odd that she should never have experienced passion. She told herself that she was essentially cold.

Victor Joyce had been one of those chosen to represent Great Britain at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1918. His wife had gone with him to Paris—she almost always accompanied him on his public missions; and she had watched the business of peace-making with a very great interest. They had taken a comfortably furnished apartment in the Champs Elysées, and had entertained a good deal, giving luncheon and dinner to a great many people, including the delegates of the numerous countries who

had a share in making the treaty and a claim to the spoils of war. Listening and watching, noting the casual words let drop at her luncheon or dinner table, the anecdotes, t' e jokes, noting the faces, the lifted eyebrows, the smiles, Mrs. Joyce had gathered the impression that this business of arranging the affairs of Europe was quite beyond the power of the men who were supposed to do it, and that they knew it was. She observed that the task was immense and infinitely complicated, and that the necessary adjustments between races and bits of the map required an extreme delicacy of handling together with a very profound understanding of problems that had their roots in the dark, deep pockets of the histories of many separate nations; and she observed that there was no one at the Conference who was fit for the job. What was needed was a group of very great men; and there were, she had decided, no great men in the world, anyhow in the world of politics. The strange, almost pathetic thing was that those who were supposed to be great were perfectly aware of their own futility. They knew the thing was beyond them; they didn't even hope to cope with it satisfactorily, they were perfectly conscious that they were making a hotchpotch of the whole business; and from this consciousness they had taken refuge in frivolity, in a kind of flippancy, in making little jokes at their own expense. They had worked off their embarrassment that way, and had hidden from each other and themselves their mortification by exaggerating it, by pretending that they were greater fools than they were, so that they might secretly hope to be taken for less incompetent than they seemed.

Victor had not pretended. Not for one moment had he believed that he could arrange the affairs of Europe. He had accepted with great reluctance the task

imposed on him, and had whittled it down to its bare core. He wasn't, as he understood it, in Paris to solve impossible ethnological problems; he was there to represent perfectly definite British interests, to protect the British taxpayer and the British Colonies and the British fleet. He knew that he was a dull man. He had always known it. He entrenched himself in his dullness, and his stupidity became a solid English rock in the whirlpool of disordered European interests. He did not argue, he did not talk, he sat tight. He refused to give way. He refused to understand arguments that were levelled against the power and claims of England. He really did not understand them. It was impossible for him to grasp the point of any discussion that diminished England's importance. Where the Prime Minister in sudden flashes of genius saw the other fellow's point of view and launched himself into daring propositions of give and take, Victor saw nothing but the small British Isles surrounded by sea, and remained obstinate. The Frenchmen and Italians and Roumanians didn't understand him. Even his own colleagues became exasperated with him. In moments of tension they said he would wreck the whole show. He remained obdurate, he remained obtuse. He didn't seem to know what they were driving at when they abused him for defending England. He simply stared, stuck his chin into his collar, and lost his appetite.

Frederika took in all this. She knew how dull he was better than anyone. Dull? He was heroically dull. His obtuseness had more than once saved the Conservative Party from going to pieces. She smiled, but not mockingly, watching him at work in Paris. She smiled at the joke of Victor baffling all those foreigners. All the world knew Victor was dull, obtuse, blind; but when a bit of the world came up against that obtuseness it couldn't

believe its eyes, suspected some deep intelligence, and growing nervous gave itself away.

She and Perky had watched him during those days with a kin' of awe.

She observed that he did not, like many of his colleagues, become frivolous under the crushing, the monstrous, the impossible responsibilities of making peace. Indeed the frivolity shocked him. That one could joke over the fate of a nation, even a small nation, seemed to him incredible. When the others gave it up as a hopeless muddle and comforted themselves with dinner-parties and the society of pretty women, Victor became more and more gloomy and more and more unpopular, until really nobody at the end of it all had had a good word to say for him. It had been touch and go whether he would or would not resign. There had been a last scene, rather funny in a way. It had had something to do with coal. Frederika remembered the evening quite well. Coal had been on the Conference table all day, and Victor had been mulish. He had refused to take into consideration anything at all but the price at which British coal could be produced at a profit from British mines. He had sat like an image staring in front of him. Frederika knew exactly how he had sat there. It was as if he were staring straight down the shaft of a Lancashire colliery, or had gone down into it out of sight and hearing. They could do nothing with him. The Prime Minister, anxious to come to an understanding with the French, had grown desperate, and at last the Conference had broken up exasperated. It had split on Victor's pig-headedness.

A group of his own irate colleagues had called on her that evening. In their desperation they had come to her hoping that she would get round him, but Victor had marched back to the flat in the Champs Elysées dogged

and miserable, and had told her drearily in a few muttered words that he would have to go home and resign from the Government. He had then wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and sunk into silence. Perky had explained the point to her. So when the delegation appeared she had simply told them, rather curtly, that it was no good and that Victor would throw up his job before he would give way. He meant it, and they knew he meant it. There was never any bluff about Victor. He had resigned from Governments before for the same sort of reason, and so in the end they had been obliged to give in.

She had said to herself then that if any man of the lot was great it was Victor, who was so dull that he exasperated her at times to tears, so slow that there were moments when she wanted to stick pins into him, and so obstinate that she had never been able to divert him a hair's breadth from his purpose.

It was this man who had been chosen against his will to go to America to talk to the President and the Secretary of State and a number of other people. He had protested and grumbled, and when he had been forced to give in he had done so with a very bad grace. His last words to his chief in the middle of the platform at Waterloo Station had been: "Well, you know what I think. In my opinion it's a mistake. Why should we cotton up to these chaps?" His mission was humiliating to him. He thought it very weak on the part of Great Britain to send him or anyone across the Atlantic. It was a tribute to the power of America which he acquiesced in with the greatest reluctance. He didn't see the point of it. He would carry out his instructions conscientiously of course, but secretly he was ashamed of the part he was playing.

CHAPTER III

No one in his immediate circle in London had ever thought of calling Victor Joyce either intelligent or agreeable, but England doted on him. She preferred him to any of her public men. Perhaps those qualities of his which made him appear at close quarters a pompous bore showed to better advantage against the turbulent background of politics. It was as if he loomed large, solid, immaculate and imperturbable through the grimy mist of depression that lay heavy upon the nation, and as if the nation peering up from its sodden farms, its black coalpits, its windy dockyards, were reassured at the sight of him. Even those who disagreed with him trusted him. It seemed that somehow the secret of his mulish devotion to them had leaked out and had been handed on from cottage to cottage, from pub to pub, over the length and breadth of the land, until, mysteriously, the public knew him better than his friends did, or his colleagues.

"Here is an honest man," said England. "Let him administer the Navy or the Army or the Colonies, whichever he chooses. Let him deal with our finances and prescribe for the Empire, or if he has a fancy for conducting the ship of state through the shoals and reefs of foreign affairs, let him do it. He is an honest man, and therefore fit to govern the country. Tut! he needn't know anything about navigation, much better that he shouldn't. We don't trust brains. What we want is an honest man at the helm."

He had, of course, other qualities beside an uncompromising rectitude that fitted him for public life. These

he had inherited. One might almost say that everything about him was inherited, that his aptitude for politics, his instinct for administration, and even his personal habits, were as much his father and his grandfather as himself. He was not merely a man, he was a family tradition, and a symbol. His father and his grandfather had been Ministers of the Crown. They too had been hard-working, cautious, conscientious men, trusted by England, accustomed to sitting on the box of the lumbering coach of state, careful, trustworthy coachmen, so that even Victor's woodenness had the gloss of antiquity.

England has a long memory. It remembered his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather, who though his surprising affair with the beautiful Lady Dobson had been the sensation of a decade was nevertheless impeccable in affairs of state; and so it had taken Victor Joyce for granted. It had recognised him at once as a familiar figure, and it liked him because it knew that he would never do anything surprising. Victor had had little to do with his career. He had remained passive in the hands of England. A sort of automaton, he walked through the intricate corridors of political life like a man in his sleep who knew the way so well that he couldn't bump into anything and wake up. This was baffling to his opponents. When they attacked him, called him a die-hard, a relic, an obstacle to progress, he blinked, looked puzzled, and went doggedly on lumbering his way through the maze of public affairs, contemptuous of what his enemies thought or said of him, and he had got there. Steadily he had mounted from strength to strength, carrying the respect of England with him, or rather borne aloft on it; for when he was, politically speaking, down, when the current of public opinion was against him and he came in for abuse, he simply waited, stolid,

and confident. Certainly he was impressive. Did he smart, did he wince? He showed no sign. One couldn't tell. There was something sublime in his confidence, for what was he confident in, people asked? Not in his brains, of course. He knew that he was a dull man. What it came down to was that he knew England, and was certain that England would behave as he expected her to and of course he was right. England had behaved as he expected, and had always ended by coming back to him and asking him to take care of her.

Certainly Victor understood the temper of England, but did the poor darling understand anything else, Bridget Prime sometimes wondered when she lunched in Bruton Street, watching him drive vaguely away in his wooden dream to the Admiralty or the Colonial Office to decide questions of the very highest importance. He could make a sensible speech in the House, of course, but Perky wrote those, and Perky had all the answers to those tiresome upstarts who bobbed up at question time neatly written out for him beforehand on slips of paper. One isn't taken unawares in the British House of Commons. There are such things as rules of the House to shelter and protect Cabinet Ministers, and if, as occasionally happened, one were caught out, exposed for a moment in one's horrid ignorance, one had always the grand manner to fall back on, the blank bland stare, or the classic polished phrase that meant nothing, but passed softly like a sponge over the board, effacing the mistake.

Bridget Prime, who sometimes attended the debates in the House of Commons and often stayed with the Joyces in the country, thought Victor absurd. He made her laugh. He also made her angry. What she resented about him was his being Frederika's husband. If he hadn't been she would merely have avoided him, as she

did every one else who bored her. As it was, she considered him a selfish brute, but kept her irritation to herself. She knew that it would be fatal to show Frederika what she felt. Close as their intimacy was, it wasn't close enough for that. Frederika would allow that kind of liberty, Bridget knew, to no one. Her marriage was the one subject Frederika never mentioned. Once long ago Bridget had burst out, "My God, Frederika, why do you do it?" And Frederika had turned on her a mild, blank, uncomprehending stare—"Do what, Biddy?"

"Everything, my dear, that he wants and nothing that you do." And Frederika had simply continued to stare for a full minute, and then had smiled in the scornful maddening way she had with tiresome strangers, and said, "Don't be silly, Biddy dear." And that was that.

Bridget after this held her tongue, and set herself to getting on with Victor. They were apparently very good friends. The muffled antagonism between them did not show; but Bridget knew that Victor had a very poor opinion of her. She said once to Perky; "You know, Perky, if it were possible for Victor to think of a constant inmate of his own house as a low woman, he would think me one. It's only my being so much about the place that keeps him from condemning me as a bad lot. As it is he's afraid of me—afraid you know that I'll do something dreadful and disgrace him. Sometimes I think I'd like to——" But Perky had only grinned and blinked in a pained way that made her feel sorry.

Bridget, for all her loveliness, was no fool. She had lived, fortunately for herself, in a community where more is expected of a woman than mere beauty, however superlative. Her friends liked to look at her, but they liked even better to talk to her. It was for them, she sometimes said to herself, for their sakes, because they were so kind

and human and forgave her so much, that she kept straight. For really, there was no other reason that she could think of why she should. She had been brought up to be bad. It had been her family's peculiar distinction to lend to every kind of wickedness a grace and a charm that gave their immoralities the appearance of having a much rarer value than decency. And she loved her family, beautiful, lackadaisical, vicious ne'er-do-weels and spendthrifts all of them; so where and how was she to get for herself any moral sense? She hadn't an idea. It had been bad enough before she married Humphrey Prime—and got that awful knock.

She had fallen in love with Humphrey Prime out of sheer cussedness. He had been just a stupid horsey young man in the Nnth. No one had understood why she had chosen him except perhaps Frederika, but anyone could see that she had been ridiculously happy during those two years. She had disappeared from her night clubs. They had hunted in Leicestershire, gone to East Africa after big game; and then the war had broken out, and when he came home, he couldn't bear the sight of her. No one had known at first what was the matter. Bridget had said nothing, and had stuck to him as much as he would let her. They were to be seen together again at the Embassy Club sometimes, or at Lambs, drinking with the jockeys and horse-dealers whose society he frequented for choice, and Bridget had told her friends that she liked jockeys. It was impossible to tell whether or not she was lying, but she began that winter to drink noticeably more than was good for her. When the divorce came on Humphrey had disappeared. He was living in Capri on what Bridget could scrape together to send him.

Once Bidy had talked about Humphrey to Frederika just before she gave in about the divorce. "It's so

uncanny. It's like living in the house with a man who has been turned into a horse or a dog, if you can imagine a horse sitting at the breakfast table. You can't get at him, you can't appeal to him in any known way. He doesn't see you as a woman at all. He doesn't take the least interest. He wants to be away, in the fields, galloping. He's sniffing the air, another air, he's pricking his ears at sounds you can't hear. He stamps with his eyes on the door, his ears twitching, if you cry or blow your nose. You feel it's somehow positively dangerous to cry, that he might stamp on you, if you exasperated him too much. It's so odd, Freddie, and yet it's only that he is a man who has forgotten women, who's under a spell, and is quite divided from anyone now but men."

She had wiped her damp hair from her forehead and flung back her head: "The worst of it is that I still care. He looks just the same to me, I love him, and am so ashamed of loving him. It seems foul somehow, poisonous. It's got to end. It can't go on like that."

And it had ended. Humphrey had gone off at last for good. She had let him go. Now what would she do? Fall to one of the many normal men who wanted her, or go to the dogs, gaily—she could do that perfectly, it was indicated—or work for her living like any ordinary woman who had no one to look after her?

That, she had decided, would be the most interesting, because it was the most difficult. She rather wanted to prove to herself that she was something more than a beautiful animal. Her face at times sickened her, especially since Humphrey had shown so plainly that he couldn't bear the sight of it.

Victor of course didn't understand any of this. He couldn't. He wasn't interested in human beings. He wasn't even interested in Frederika.

How curious the world was since the war. So many men with worn-out nerves, suffering in odd ways from some kind of shell shock or exhausted by the long ghastly strain; coming back quite different, having got used to living without women, or like Victor simply carrying on and going stiff and rigid and blind. Why couldn't Victor see what he was doing to Frederika?

Bridget thought she knew what Frederika was driving at, but she wasn't certain. She couldn't make out whether or not Frederika was doing what she wanted to do. What she did know was that she herself in Frederika's place would have done something drastic long ago. Was Frederika in love with Victor? Bridget couldn't tell. How on earth could she be? But then did one ever understand why any of one's friends loved the men they did love? She herself had loved a sick brute. But Victor? No, it was impossible.

Sometimes she stayed at Wellowburn with no one but Victor and Frederika and Perky in the house. She and Frederika would play Chinese Bezique in the evening while Victor went stolidly through his papers, and then Perky would come in, his hair rather ruffled, with a pile of letters for Victor to sign, and Victor would get up and stand like a beautifully carved monument to himself and England in front of the fire and say, screwing in his eyeglass, "Now what am I to say to those fellas? It's the publicans, isn't it, something about the beer tax?" And Perky would answer, in his delicate, clear, dry little voice, that no, it was the delegation from the Anglican Conference, the extreme High Church wing, who were coming to see him about the revision of the prayer-book. The Licensed Victuallers didn't happen till Wednesday, there was the S.P.C.A. in between; he had the notes of all three ready, and had put a red A for Anglicans in

the corner so that Victor wouldn't mix them up; and he thought that Victor could quite honestly and safely say that he had no very strong feeling about the revision of the prayer-book, but that his personal inclination, always conservative in these matters, led him to dislike somewhat such an innovation in the time-honoured script; and therefore Perky had prepared a few remarks on those lines, with some references to the Early Fathers thrown in just to put them off, you know, and make them go away happy. When Perky said all this, hesitating a little because he was shy and in awe of Victor, not because he didn't have the whole matter as smooth as milk on his tongue, Bridget would wonder how on earth he kept it up, for he never showed any slightest shade of anything but the most complete deference to Victor. He had an almost mystic reverence for Victor. Was it just the respect of the poor little scribe, the cloistered monk, for the great public benefactor? No, for Perky wasn't a cloistered monk. He had no end of fun in town. He and Bridget had heaps of friends in common, rather ribald friends.

Perky was, of course, a delightful creature, almost uncannily wise. He knew and read simply everything, and yet he adored Victor. He too, like Frederika, had given up his life to Victor. He had simply handed it to him like a package, had as it were slipped it into his pocket when Victor wasn't looking, and Victor hadn't seemed even to notice it. He had taken Perky for granted, just as he took Frederika. It was very irritating to Bridget. Why should Victor have everything his own way always, and a Perky to pull the strings of the thing Victor had in place of a mind? Was she unjust? God help her, it wasn't, whatever else it was, Victor's mind that was adorable, all made up of dry sticks and cold ashes of prejudice and political passions that once long ago had

flared high. She felt that Frederika must know this. It was impossible she shouldn't realise that Perky was Victor's brain, and that without him he wouldn't have an idea in his head. And it wasn't as if Victor made up for his dullness by adoring her and looking after her. Bridget didn't sentimentalise. She didn't blame Victor for being dull, but she did blame him for turning Frederika into a hack for the Conservative Party and not noticing when she was dead beat. It was a woman's job to help when her husband was in politics. Every one did, and every one was political in England. Committees and constituents and speech-making were all very well. No woman grumbled about that. All the same Victor might have allowed Frederika a life of her own. He was like a steam-roller. Men were brutes. It was maddening. And why did Frederika allow it, since she must certainly have seen through Victor long ago? Was it all make-believe on her part, an elaborate artifice? There were days when Bridget longed to see it go to smash. If only Frederika would fall in love, badly, and wake up before it was too late! But she put men off. She snubbed even the nicest men, and she seemed to sneer at herself whenever a man was attracted to her. There was something blighting and icy about her that chilled them. Really it was a shame, and yet striking too, in a way, and Bridget admired her for it. Frederika was the only woman she knew with a chaste mind.

In any case she knew what Frederika expected of her, and since it was a question of loyalty, Bidley never made fun of Victor, and never let on to anyone that Frederika's life was anything but complete.

And of course, she did feel sorry for him sometimes, though he was absurd.

Poor old Victor, he had been terribly worried since the

war. There were the unemployed marching through the dark, wet winter streets, there were the Indians and the Egyptians wanting to govern themselves, there was Australia demanding preferential tariffs and Canada complaining that it hadn't enough capital to develop its resources, and Italy refusing to pay its debts, and France going bankrupt, and British industry being crippled by taxation. He really had no fun out of life. Even at home in the country, he didn't enjoy himself, never hunted or fished any more, or played with the dogs or anything, but mooned in the garden with his pipe, staring at the trees and worrying about England, or sat in his study interviewing constituents. The curious thing was that he slept well, always looked fresh in the morning, and was cleaner and neater than any man on earth. It was as if he had some special magic soap and such a valet as men sometimes dream of, but he hadn't. His soap was quite ordinary, Frederika ordered it for him from Harrodt's, and his man, Shaw, was merely a quiet competent servant. It was Victor himself who never rumbled his clothes and shaved too beautifully twice a day, even when the country was on the brink of war, even if the Government was about to be turned out of office, even in the middle of an election.

Well—there was Victor Joyce, taking himself very seriously as the prominent public man, and inside this man another hiding; but it is very difficult to get at that other Victor. He is so shy, and has so much of the time that absurd solemn manner; and when he is not pompous, he says so little. When he talks to Frederika it is only about humdrum questions, something to do with the constituency, or about ordering a new suit of clothes or having his hair cut. It is many years since he really talked to her and would feel very awkward were he expected to do so now. He is much more intimate with his private

secretary than with his wife; he would much rather be with him than with her, and he always is with him. Perky is always there. He and Victor are so much one that when the two of them are with Frederika this doesn't at all seem to Victor to make a triangle.

As for women and that sort of thing, they matter very little to him. Except for his one great friend and Frederika, no woman has played any part in his life. That affair was his one romance. All the ardour of his youth went into it; but he has no sense of having done his wife any injury. On the contrary he would be greatly shocked did she ever accuse him of anything of the kind. He would be shocked, that is to say, by her stooping to do so. It would seem to him vulgar. He rightly considers her incapable of such a lapse from good taste. Her dignity is important, since his own is bound up with it, and he takes for granted that she is satisfied.

It has always been his habit to take for granted almost everything that has to do with himself personally, and in this way he has been free to worry about England with a complete concentration, and to devote himself exclusively to serving England, and to the interests of his political party. He identifies the two. He believes that the Conservative Party is the organisation which alone can and will save England from disaster. His attitude towards it is like the attitude of many devout Catholics towards the Church of Rome. Although he knows it is not the holy sanctified thing that it ought to be, still he behaves as if it were.

Had his personal life or his marriage seemed to him complicated, he would have been distracted. It is vital to his existence that they should not be. He has always taken for granted that Frederika was contented with her rôle of political consort, because he simply could not

tolerate the thought of the nuisance it would be if she were not.

But Victor was a bad sailor, and now on this immense ship that swayed like a hammock, his ideas, as a rule so comfortably fixed, became curiously upset and muddled. Into his swimming head darted for the first time the suspicion that he was wrong about Frederika, that he had somehow, at some time, made a mistake in regard to her. Her steady sea legs put him at a great disadvantage. He watched her with helpless amazement as she balanced calmly in front of the slanting mirror of her ghastly lurching cabin, or came with proud unconcern down the heaving deck, sniffing the air as if she liked it, a faint look of scornful pleasure on her face.

Getting up in the morning was a humiliating ordeal. He and Frederika had adjoining cabins. He would hear her splashing vigorously in her bath, talking cheerfully to Biddy or her maid or the stewardess, and would wait wretchedly for her knock on his door and the sound of her voice saying—"Are you all right, Victor?" And he would say yes, he'd be up presently, while he thought resentfully, "She mustn't see me like this. I must get up. I must shave." And he did get up and he did shave. It took him an hour or more. He had to lie down several times during the process, and do most of it with his eyes shut—watching things swaying was fatal—but still he managed the business, and painfully, laboriously, gritting his teeth, he would get his clothes on and at last emerge immaculate as always, and walk solemnly with a wooden countenance and rigid jaws to the lift.

No one watching him would have guessed that he had for the first time in his life known what it was to doubt himself, or that he had just been asking himself, as he leaned against the creaking wall of his cabin, his eyes

closed and his necktie dangling in his hand, what he really amounted to, separated from his home and adrift like a bobbing cork on the bosom of the Atlantic?

His life had been set in its mould when he married. It was at the suggestion of the woman now dead that he had done so. There had never been any question of his marrying her. She had had an immense position in England, and been enmeshed in a complicated web of responsibilities. Also she was a very decided determined person, and had never had any wish to marry him. So that when their affair had run its course and had settled into friendship, and he had come into his place in Dorsetshire, he had, at her suggestion, looked about for a wife. He had chosen one to fit the place that was ready for her, and a very dignified place it was. He had a good many thousands of pounds a year, a good many thousand acres of farmland, and besides beautiful Wellowburn a nice house in Mayfair. He was thirty-five, and already Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office. His existence was complete except for a wife. The tall dark girl of the St. Edmunds would do very well, he thought. She pleased him. She was young and strong. She was dignified, and ignorant of the world. He had liked the way she carried herself. He was not aware that his great friend had chosen her for him. He thought that he had selected her for himself. Presently he had told himself that he was in love, and told her so, and he had taken her without a dowry. The St. Edmunds couldn't give her anything. He was rather pleased at this than otherwise. He liked her complete dependence upon him, even for pocket-money.

The instinct of possession was very strong in him, also the force of habit. He never changed his habits. He did not change them after marriage, but began to

educate his wife into sharing them with him. She was to sit at the head of the table, be the ornament of his house, a hostess to his guests, and his most faithful political supporter.

He had been surprised to find that she had an overabundance of energy and a quick, inquiring mind. There had been other little things about her that surprised him. But she was, he had observed to himself, very young. She had continued to please him. His instinct in choosing her had been correct. He had known that she would always please him. It wasn't a question of being disappointed or bored with her, it was simply a question of moulding her to a greater perfection. He had made her a very generous allowance, and had paid her bills without comment. They were not, he noticed, excessive. It was not in matters of personal adornment that her extravagance lay, yet the epithet did apply. It was her energy that was extravagant. She hadn't, she had declared after a year or two, enough to do, and did he mind if she went to the Polytechnic? He had inquired what the Polytechnic was, and had been greatly disconcerted when she told him that it was a School of Science. It had never occurred to him that she had any gifts other than those social ones which had recommended her to him during her first season in London. It seemed to him quite unsuitable and rather silly that his wife should be a student of mechanical science. He pointed this out to her. He did not mean to be overbearing. In order to console her for the sacrifice of her hobby, he had handed the running of his constituency over to her. He was changing agents. It had all fitted in very well. She had accepted the task.

Gradually he had given her more and more to do, in order to keep her quiet. He didn't put it that way. He

was scarcely aware of the process of shifting responsibilities on to her shoulders. He did not really know why he had objected to so many of her wishes. When she asked, for instance, whether she might have a small open car that she could drive herself, he gave her a big closed one, much more expensive than the one she wanted, because he didn't like the idea of her driving a car. He did not know that she particularly liked fussing over a motor and had passionately wanted to drive herself to and from town, and would always have travelled by aeroplane when they went abroad if she had had her way. She didn't. He went on his own expecting her to follow, and as she did follow all was well. It was in this way that he had ended by leaving the management of his constituency entirely in her hands, together with the management of his estate and the running of his houses in the country and in town. Her ability was unquestionable, and it never occurred to him to question her willingness. Indeed in regard to his house he expected perfection and, getting it, he had not noticed very much. One does not notice things that run like clockwork. The calm clear rooms at Wellowburn filled on Friday and emptied on Monday without any fuss. Large week-end parties were a tradition at Wellowburn, and he kept up the tradition, though he did not really enjoy them, being too busy and too preoccupied to have time to talk to his guests. Not that he was obliged to bother. He would motor down with Perký on Friday to find a group of people on the lawn, and motor up on Monday morning leaving them at breakfast, with Frederika at the head of the table quietly drinking her coffee, while the competent servants carried down armloads of bags to the group of waiting cars. All that was expected of him during the week-end was to appear at meals and be civil to the two

ladies who sat on his right and left. He was free the rest of the time to work all day in his study with Perky, or to shut himself up for long important discussions with one or another of his colleagues. There were always two or three of them in the house, so that the women didn't bother him, or the young respectful M.P.'s who hung on his lips in the smoking-room, and he really did like looking down the long dinner-table with the massive family silver reflected in the polished mahogany. It pleased him to see a group of well-groomed men and women being agreeable to each other over his excellent food, and he liked to see Frederika's dark head beyond the lighted candles. It all gave him a sense of security. The world outside was undoubtedly becoming a most unpleasant place to live in, but his little world remained what it had always been. His great-grandmother's famous pearls hung on Frederika's neck, and Simpson, who had been with him for twenty years, was pouring his grandfather's wine into his glass. He would go up to town on Monday morning feeling reassured. Frederika stayed behind for her Board of Guardians and her Girl Guides, but she got up in time for dinner, and if they were dining out he found a reminder of the fact on his dressing-table in Bruton Street. He didn't have to remember. She and Perky remembered for him. In all social matters he did what she told him, knowing that she would never make dinner engagements for him unless there was some reason for it. She knew that he did not like dining out, and that meeting new people didn't amuse him. Frederika went out a good deal without him. He approved of this. He liked to think of her whirling through the lighted streets of London while he sprawled in his seat in the stuffy House of Commons and pretended to go to sleep in the grimy brawling face

of the Opposition. He was proud of her. There had been something exotic and languid about her of late that worried him a little; but he didn't tell her so. Sometimes, coming on her unexpectedly, he was arrested by her pallor, and he would wonder for a moment whether she were perhaps not very fit, but if he asked her she always answered in her short vigorous way that she was perfectly well, and he believed her. It didn't occur to him that she might be unhappy. How could it? Her life was brilliant. She went everywhere with him, to Paris, to Rome, to Geneva. What more could a woman want? She had hosts of friends, and had, thank God, dropped those of whom he didn't approve, those painter chaps and scientists and socialists, getting tired of them, as he knew she would. Indeed she had turned out just as he had hoped and grown into the kind of woman he wanted her to be, so gradually that he scarcely noticed. It seemed to him fitting that the partner of his political career should be not only one of the best dressed women in England, but should sit on innumerable committees, preside at public meetings in the Queen's Hall, and be one of the Vice-Presidents of the Women's National Conservative Association. It never entered his head that this sort of thing was uncongenial to her, and when she made one of her admirable witty biting political speeches he never dreamed that she was choking over the platitudes that dropped from her lips. Had he known he would have been profoundly disturbed, but there was nothing about her now to disturb him, there had been nothing for years. She was calm, she was efficient, she was silent. His colleagues had the very highest opinion of her, and his constituents, especially the working people, the farm labourers, the dockers and the factory hands, were doggedly attached to her.

Long ago, she had been restless, had asked questions, had said startling things. Once she had said abruptly, "I wish we were poor." On another occasion, standing in the drawing-room at Wellowburn one night when their guests had gone to bed, she had said, "Couldn't we go away, Victor, for a bit, I mean really away, away from everything, to China, or the New Hebrides, or somewhere, anywhere?"

He had looked at her amazed. Her eyes had been fiery and sombre. He had been embarrassed by their gaze. He had said uncomfortably, "My dear, it's impossible. China? The New Hebrides? What a notion!"

"Is it?" she had asked, still staring at him in that queer way, commanding his reluctant attention.

"But you know it is, I'm not a free agent." He had squirmed uneasily.

"That's just it, Victor."

"Just what, Frederika?"

"We're in a rut here."

"In a rut?" He had simply not dared understand her. "My dear girl, you're talking nonsense. Do you call it being in a rut to hold the position I hold?"

She had withdrawn her gaze then, stood a moment looking down, had seemed to droop an instant, as if tired.

"I thought we might get away," she had murmured, "but it's no matter."

She had got over all that nonsense, nor did she disturb him any more by coming in from some play or concert or lecture, her dark eyes blazing and her hair looking blown back, untidy, as if she had been running. She never now had the wild gipsy look that he dreaded, but was decorative in a formal way that suited his house. Her head to be sure was cropped, but he didn't mind that. Her face was a mask. He liked it to be so. He was as

satisfied with it as if he had made it himself. He liked the scornful curve of her witty mouth, the slight sneer of her nostrils, the arrogant indifferent droop of her eyelids when she was bored. He liked to see her look bored. It was to him a proof of her superiority over other women. He felt that well-bred people should be bored, that they should be beyond the appeal or the need of the silly amusements offered by the world that was so gaily and vulgarly degenerating.

He did not wonder what she was thinking when they were alone at Wellowburn as they were sometimes, and the look in her eyes when she lay back in her chair by the fire in the evening escaped him. She would look at him for long moments with a smouldering rebellious wonder and compassion, puzzled and searching. A strange expression to have found on a face usually so cold and mocking, but he did not see it. It was only there when he wasn't looking, when he was absorbed as he usually was in important affairs of state, in some blue paper or white paper, or some departmental report about Australian raisons or raw silk or dried fruit.

In any case he was fifty-six years old and she was forty. They had both, he felt, settled down very comfortably. And, as a diversion from his duties, he had little hobbies. He collected, for instance, china dogs. He had a cabinet full of them in the corner of his bedroom which Frederika seldom entered. It was a cold, neat room with the window always wide open even on raw winter days. The fog drifting in soaked into the large sponge, the toothbrushes, hairbrushes, shaving-brushes, the towels, the blankets. There was a smell of soap pervading it, and of tobacco and hair-wash. The room was just as he liked it, and every now and then he shyly added a new china dog to the collection in the cabinet.

Frederika had her hobbies too. She took in a paper called the "Engineer," and another called the "Scientific American," but she kept these in her bedroom and said nothing about them to Victor because he was once quite awfully upset to hear her suddenly burst out laughing by the library lamp and say, "Victor, listen! Unbreakable four jaw independent chuck. Isn't it a delicious name?" He had been quite horrified. When he discovered that for an hour she had been absorbed in an engineer's catalogue, he had taken the paper from her and read aloud, "waugh-hammer, drifters, drills, clinching lathe, Duty sloper, slotter." While he read, she had screamed with laughter. "Steam-driven hydro-extractor, centrifugal pumps, vertical steam-driven double-ram pumps." "Oh Victor darling!" "Gyrating stone crushers—good God! Caterpillar tractors, heavy guillotine shearing-machine, large inductive motors, mechanically robust, electrically perfect, washers made of cold rolled steel bright all over, turned and chamfered edges—of all the—my dear girl—you—you——"

"But it's thrilling, Victor. It's poetry. Can't you hear it? Cold rolled steel bright all over, turned and chamfered edges. And listen to this. Sunderland gear planer, 69 teeth five inch face 3 D.F. cutting time per tooth 30 secs. Isn't it mysterious? Doesn't it convey something extraordinary? It's the new machine world, the way they talk, there, out there." She had waved a hand.

Had Perky not been there to tell him that it was all a joke he would have taken her to a doctor the next day. He remembered these things now, in the middle of the Atlantic.

And so though this little party of four was a solid clump rooted in common ground, and a prickly nettle to the rest of that polyglot shipload of people, until Bidy

took up with Augusta Green and dragged Perky off to drink cocktails, still the clump fell apart automatically somehow into two halves, with Victor and Perky in one half, and the two women in the other; but they were perhaps not themselves aware of this. It would probably only reveal itself to them in a crisis if anything happened in the nature of a serious misunderstanding, for instance, between Frederika and Victor. Then Biddy would range herself at once on Frederika's side, and Perky, who had the most charming manner in the world with Frederika, would come out strong for Victor. In the meantime they all took each other for granted, and when Victor had had a pill and could sit down to lunch in the cabin they would talk quietly in short clipped phrases about this and that person whom they all knew in London, and Perky would make little jokes, chuckling and beaming at the two women as if he had the fondest feeling for them both, which he had, and admired them in the nicest and most fitting way, which he did.

But when Biddy said, on the fourth day out, that Mr. Ikey Daw had invited them all to dine with him, Victor suddenly snorted, "What damned impertinence!" And Frederika asked, "Why should he?" very much surprised. Biddy, flushing a little, said, "Why not, darling? He's not at all bad, and that actress woman is most amusing," and there had been an unpleasant five minutes at the small luncheon-table. Biddy had been obstinate. Victor had said, Of course she could do as she liked, but he hoped Frederika—— Frederika had said that she didn't in the least wish to dine with Mr. Daw, and Biddy had said, "Very well, then Perky must come. I won't go alone," and Victor had said he was sure the fella was a low scheming brute, he had seen him in Paris during the Conference, he had had his nose in things that didn't concern him,

and these International Jews were no end of a nuisance, and Perky had said very mildly that as the man was a big bug in finance and had a pull in Washington perhaps it would be just as well to be careful, and then when Victor had gone on grumbling, Bidy had got up and said, "Darling Victor, don't be absurd," and had vanished.

Victor had looked mildly surprised and rather worried as the door closed behind her.

"I wish you would have a talk with her, Frederika."

"Why, Victor?"

"She'll be an infernal nuisance in New York."

"I don't think so. We're not likely to see much of her once we land."

"Won't she be staying with us then?" he asked more cheerfully.

"No, she's going to Martha Heddings."

"Martha Heddings? Never heard of her. Who is she? I hope she's respectable."

"Oh, most respectable," piped Perky. "She's one of those handsome young spinster women who have replaced the man about town."

"Humph!" Victor closed his eyes and leaned back on the couch under the window. "Well—you go and look after her, Perky. I suppose you can put up with that Jew chap for an evening, but once we get to New York, I wash my hands of her. I won't be responsible. If she gets into a mess, you understand, Frederika, it's her own look-out."

Frederika, her long legs in their knitted stockings crossed comfortably, was smoking a cigarette, and said nothing.

He gave her a rapid oblique glance from the couch, then closed his eyes quickly. The ship was pitching infernally. How could she sit there like that, smoking?

It was most inconsiderate of her, and she looked somehow so odd in that sweater and short rough skirt. Was it because he was seasick, or because of the red silk handkerchief she had knotted round her throat? She reminded him of a cowboy. There was something picturesque about her that disconcerted him. Her hair curled extravagantly in the damp air. There were little matted curls all over her head.

"Must you smoke, my dear?" His tone was petulant.

"I'm so sorry, Victor." Hers was gentle, abrupt and husky.

"The ship's pitching badly."

"The captain says we're in for a gale."

He groaned.

"Poor dear! Is there anything I can do for you?"

She had put out her cigarette. She got up, reached for her hat. "Won't you come out on deck, Victor? The fresh air——"

"No—no, thank you."

She stood looking down at him. He felt her standing there, strong, upright, slender and manly. With his eyes closed, he saw her delicate nostrils dilate slightly, sniffing up the salt air as if she loved it; saw her sombre eyes, her sallow, slightly hollow cheeks, and observed for the first time the bitter curve of her lips. Why bitter? And why should he notice that now with his eyes closed and the ship going down, down, shuddering into the trough of the sea?

Was there really something wrong with her, then? He almost asked her. The words formed behind his lips. "Are you disappointed in me, Frederika?" But he didn't say them. He was too dumb, too stiff, too old and too seasick. He was afraid to say them.

All he said was, "Leave me, my dear, leave me."

Perky, scribbling in a notebook, seemed not to notice them. He was writing a nonsensical lyric which he would send to "Punch."

CHAPTER IV

THAT little spinning thing, that gyroscope was guiding this Ritz Hotel on a keel, with all its armchairs and palms in pots and brass beds and so on, across the Atlantic, and in the teeth of a gale too. It was quite absurd, Frederika thought.

There was a boom of guns as the water smashed against the iron flanks. The ship shuddered, quivered, plunged down, reared up and rode buoyant above the elastic waves.

"All the same it's like a racehorse," she thought, standing on the captain's bridge, watching the rise and fall of the bow, and the spray flung high into the air, "Like a galloping racehorse. But it's ridiculous to think in such images," she said to herself, "as if the man on the bridge were a kind of jockey, giving the ship her head, as if a man's puny hand on a wooden wheel could control the elements, the waters of the Atlantic, the wind rushing down from the North Pole across icebergs. How many tons did that wave weigh I wonder? And how many thousand horsepower goes to these engines? Shall I ask the captain? No, it doesn't matter. In any case, all the forces of nature meet here, where I am, poised on the top of this rolling mountain of water. It's sliding under me. But there's a state of suspense here, a perfect balance of wind, tide, steam, and the little gyroscope holds them in its magic circle and the ship is moving on in a straight line, obedient to its will. "It's an idea,"

said Frederika, "that does it. It has all been worked out in somebody's brain, and this ridiculous exquisite toy, that would fit quite nicely into my jewel box, is really just a very precise idea; the result of a careful minutely formulated bit of abstract logic, and it works, it casts its spell on the sea, on the sixty thousand ton hull of the ship, on the wind and the tide and the driving force of the engines, and well, we're keeping our course to a hair, east-south-east, and the storm can't stop us. We'll get there. We'll be in New York the day after to-morrow."

There was a faint gleam in her eyes, otherwise she betrayed no excitement. She scarcely seemed interested, was barely civil, the captain thought. A very cold woman, with her thin face, and that startling vermilion paint on her pointed lips. Not at all his type, he said to himself. Mrs. Prime—that was a different story. Now there was a beautiful woman, and so delicate, as delicate as glass. Having her on the ship was a responsibility. The idea of taking care of her was pleasant. It made you feel old-fashioned, made you square your shoulders and swell out your biceps under your sleeve. Whereas with a woman like Mrs. Joyce you felt small. There was a kind of contempt in her gloomy eyes, as if the blood in her veins gave her some superiority over you, as if Rear-Admiral St. Edmunds of the Grand Fleet, her uncle—or was he her father—and all the other admirals further back, gave her a right to despise the Merchant Service, and really during the war, what with submarines and mines and one thing and another, one felt that one had done one's bit with the rest. Not that she was rude. No, he couldn't honestly say that, but when she said "Well, thank you, Captain" abruptly, as if there was no more to be said about it, as if she were suddenly bored, one couldn't do anything but bow, and feel somehow an

ass. Uncomfortable, that was it; she made a man uncomfortable, though she did have that air about her of belonging to a ship. There was something in the way she stood against the wind and looked out, something strong and steady, though she was much too thin for his taste. He supposed she did a good bit of cruising with the Admiral. Probably she'd seen the review from the Flag Ship. He wished he had asked her, but she discouraged conversation. "Well, thank you, Captain," she said curtly, dismissing him, a kind of gloom falling on her, a coldness, like night coming over the sea. Something masculine about her, he thought. Yes, that was it. She wasn't feminine enough. He preferred Mrs. Prime or young Mrs. Peter Campbell, who crossed with him sometimes. There was another pretty woman, and so easy to get on with, as pleased as a child, though she was the daughter of one of the richest men in the world, at being shown over the ship, taken down to the engine-room, and asked him all sorts of questions, and poked her little nose into everything, and her father, the great millionaire, J. J. Jamieson, had thanked him for looking after her on her last voyage. He had had a note, thanking him, sent down to the dock by special messenger.

"But there really is something about these men," Frederika thought, settling down again into her steamer chair, "that inspires confidence," and she was about to say so to her husband, who had opened an eye and had started to unroll himself from his rugs to roll her up in hers, but she knew what he would answer. He would say something about Great Britain having the finest merchant service in the world, which was so perfectly true and with which she so entirely agreed that there was really no point in mentioning it, so she said merely, "Thank you,

Victor, don't bother," in much the same tone that she had used to the Captain, but she did not mean to be curt; she was naturally abrupt. And there was the steward, much better at rolling one up than Victor, who lay back again, poor darling, still greenish in spite of those Heaven-sent pills. The steward treated them both as if they were precious to him, a couple of helpless babies, confided solemnly to his care by the British Government, whom it was his exalted duty to look after.

"Thank you, steward," she said, but this time not quite in the same manner, more gently, a note of humour, of warmth in her voice, for he was awfully nice and probably had real babies of his own somewhere, in Southampton or Portsmouth or London may be, and this business of being a public personage was all nonsense and very wearisome.

One lived in a crowd under a great lighted chandelier. The light poured down on one's stiff disciplined face. One smiled, one talked, and then one saw suddenly a world stretching out beyond the hot crowded room, an unattainable world, beautiful as a moonlit beach with slow silver waves rolling, curling, whispering along the sand, quicksands waiting to suck one down if one ventured out, and one wanted terribly to go, to run out, to drown if need be; but the vision passed swiftly, silently, as one caught one's breath in the middle of a sentence, something that one didn't in the least mean, about the Bolshevist menace, or the Labour Government's shocking proposal to purchase mining royalties. One took up the thread of conversation. The voices that had sounded so far away for a moment rattled against one's ears. The circle of one's life closed round one again.

She dragged her life after her, even, along the deck of the ship. It was like a heavy cloak, fastened firmly by a

strong clasp round her neck. There were yards of it. It was a public robe richly embroidered, very grand no doubt to look at, but stuffy to wear, stifling at times. There had been moments when she had felt that she must tear the thing off, but she hadn't, she had merely given an impatient jerk of her shoulders, and settled the cloak round them once more. One carried it as well as one could, held one's head up. One had been taught to do that. But what else did they teach girls in England except how to behave? Less than nothing. Girls were bred with an eye to temper and manners, like horses. Their brains weren't worth bothering about. If they had any, so much the better or worse for them; they must do what they could with them in their raw untutored state. She and her sisters had had no education. They had been turned out to grass at home in Cornwall and been allowed to run wild with a quite ridiculously futile governess trailing after them, until at seventeen each one in turn had been called in, rubbed down and groomed and generally whipped into shape, and had then, one after the other, been taken up to town for a season and married off quickly. Her sisters had taken it all as a matter of course, and had settled down comfortably in their scattered counties, where hunting and farming and babies filled their days, but she had been cursed with an adventurous spirit, a passionate curiosity about life, and above all things, a taste for mechanics. That had been most unfortunate.

Had she had a gift for painting or something of that sort, Victor and his world would have tolerated it. Had she been absorbed in gardening or the breeding of pigs he would have sympathised, but a taste for tinkering with machinery, and an interest in atoms or the theory of radio-activity was almost a deformity in a woman. Science

was not the fashion in Victor's England. It smacked of the city, the metropolis, the urban professional world that had no love for the land. It was middle-class. No one in Victor's set had the least feeling for the romance of machine-power, or was aware of the aerial drama playing itself out in the universe, where space and time were surrendering their secrets to the power of thought. Victor and his kind could stand silent and absorbed for hours looking at a tree, or watching fish jump in a pool, but the origin and the ultimate end of the things which made up the nature they loved didn't interest them. They shied off abstract questions. Even her women friends were out of patience with her desire to know how things worked. They lived straight ahead, instinctively and apparently with no need for reflection. The quality of mind in them which she admired was that of the navigator who treats the stars as so many lamps lighted along a street. In dirty weather they took in canvas and kept straight on, surveying the horizon with a steady look of challenge. There was no wobbling about them, no doubt, and little curiosity about distant things.

It was certainly very odd that she should have been born with a feeling for mechanics. Her mother had been interested in ghosts and folk-lore; her father had sailed the High seas. Had it not been for her brother, who was of an inventive turn, she would not, she supposed, have ever discovered the charm of electric batteries or gasoline engines. But she had been his assistant and companion during his holidays, and he had passed on to her some of his school books. It was no doubt her admiration for him that had quickened and kept alive her interest, even after his career as a sailor had absorbed him and taken him out of her life. He had gone down in the Battle of Jutland.

Victor was of course, in his shy way, very romantic about the Navy. He was now opposing with all his might the development of aircraft at the expense of battleships, just as with an even more passionate sense of impending bereavement he fought for the cavalry against the mechanising of the Army. Poor Victor! He simply couldn't bear to see tanks and tractors driving his beautiful horses from the field of military manoeuvres. The Horse Guards in Whitehall were as beautiful to him still as to any small schoolboy. She rather loved this quality in Victor. It was profound and natural, a sort of secret childish poetry hidden deep within him. He had really a school-boy's sense of his country's glorious past.

Well, she too was stirred by the spectacle of England's history and the panoply that was its symbol, polished cuirasses and floating plumes coming down the Mall on a white frosty morning; the opening of Parliament with Black Stick and Silver Stick and beefeaters and all such absurdities. Certainly one wouldn't want to get rid of them. And the Regimental flags, worn, stained and eloquent, furled in the Palace of Whitehall, mutely testifying that men were brave; these were moving. How many men had leapt to death for England in the fields of Flanders and Champagne! This she worshipped, this quick readiness to give one's life, throw it from one, take the last leap into darkness, at a bugle-call, and it was this, really, that Victor championed, obstinately, wrong-headedly, she often thought, but with a grim devotion; this spirit of England's past that was weighty with the legacy of many sacrifices.

It was her sense of this that had kept her in bondage for twenty years to a view of life and a political creed that irritated and bored her. It seemed a pity that one's feeling for past things should not include a belief in the

future; still she could not but admire Victor, the administrator, the incorruptible romantic idealist of reaction. Even though she disagreed with him, fundamentally, feeling instinctively that there was death and decay in the perpetuating of old things. Quite lately she had discovered that what made her welcome every advance in science and every revolutionary impulse in man was simply a fear of the ending of the world. Change was a sign of everlasting growth, of eternal life. It was a guarantee against the fear that life on the earth would one day be exhausted and come to an end, and all the past then become nothing.

But she couldn't explain this to Victor. So she had spent her energies on the Conservative Party. Victor's career was a double-barrelled affair, and the part of it in which she was useful was political. It appeared that in order that His Majesty's Government should be carried on, the masses had to be kept quiet, and this was where she came in. She wasn't of course included in the laying down of cruisers, the adventure of growing cotton in the Sudan, or the electrifying of railways. Her part of the business was to strengthen the Women's National Conservative Association, keep Victor's constituency in order, and fight the forces of Socialism, and gradually she had become involved in all this up to the neck, to the exclusion of almost everything else. She could scarcely recall now the zest with which she had thrown herself into her new crowded London life, the lectures at the Royal Society that had so stimulated her curiosity, and her first difficult fascinating contacts with scholarly men. She had at first paid little attention to the attitude towards her peculiar tastes of Victor's set; a set which occasionally welcomed writers and painters into its stronghold, but men of science never. The species was wild, it appeared,

and cranky, musty and frousty. It was a sect as cut-off as a monastic order. One simply never saw one anywhere. She had had to hunt them out of their lairs, and she had set about it happily, being young then and fearless, and believing that what she admired above all things—the exploring spirit in man, the daring impulse that sent some to the North Pole, and others into chemical laboratories—would appeal to Victor too. It didn't of course. She had succeeded in getting to know several, among others a dreamy little dried-up Professor of Physics, who told her that physics and metaphysics were the same thing and that the physical universe was no more physical really than music or a line of poetry, which was the sort of assurance she wanted; but she had found it difficult to explain to her friends what she got out of such people, and they had not after all fitted into Wellowburn and her brilliant life with Victor. They didn't show up well in the pale blue drawing-room. They weren't up in the gossip of her set. Victor looked down his nose at them, and the others ragged her about her collection of cranks. "What odd hobbies you have my dear," the women said to her, "and who in the world is that dreadful old man?" They could make nothing of her enthusiasm, and since, when she talked unguardedly, she found that she made Victor uncomfortable and bored his friends, she had taken at first to concealing her interests and then to stifling them, and so, gradually, her 'cranks' had dropped out of her life. She had let them go, from cowardice, laziness, even snobbishness perhaps. Had she become a snob then? How simply sickening!

It had all been for some reason too difficult. It had been like walking up stream against a strong current.

She remembered once upon a time, in the days when she had still hoped to bring Victor round, trying to explain

to him why machines fascinated her. It had to do, she said, with man's revolt against the powers of Nature. The great adventure of the era was man's conquest of space, his effort to gain control of the energy of the universe. Machines were his tools, and were much more reliable than people. They did their jobs perfectly, and never got tired. The blur and fog and falsity of men's minds made her uncomfortable. What she liked was certainty, exactness, perfect efficiency. Turbines, dynamos and hydraulic tractors were soothing. It was their immense power and delicate precision that thrilled her. Besides, she had ended lamely, they were beautiful. Victor's face had been a study.

The current of his life and his world flowed in one direction, hers in another. She had felt the force of his like a physical pressure, slowly but insistently wearing down her resistance, until at last she was too tired to struggle any more. Then a small incident had occurred, one of those minute accidents that cause no ripple on the surface of life but sink slowly into its deep under-current and lie there like stones, disturbing the flow of one's mind, and remaining buried obstacles to happiness. It had happened nearly ten years ago, soon after a general election during which she had toured the country with Victor, making innumerable speeches. Victor had left an unfinished letter on his table. He had asked her to fetch some notes from his desk, so that she had come on the sheet and read it quite innocently, without taking in for a moment the significance of the words. It was a letter to his great friend, the woman who had died a couple of years later, and the words she had read were: "Frederika has been tiresome." That was all. She had glanced quickly away from the sheet of paper, and had stood for a minute quite still wondering why her

hands were trembling. She remembered feeling very cold. Afterwards she had gone back to him with the papers he wanted. She had done nothing and said nothing about the occurrence. Her sense of failure had simply dropped down into her mind like a stone. It was there now. She had always nowadays a sense of failure and a feeling of self-contempt.

The curious thing was, she reflected, that she belonged to an adventurous family, and had become the most passive, the most insular, the most conventional creature on earth. The men of her family, and she had always felt she was like them, had for generations gone down to the sea in ships. One, the first of note, had been a buccaneer, a sort of pirate enjoying his Sovereign's indulgence because he had added lustre to the Crown by his thieving wickedness. He had sailed to the Americas, rounded Cape Horn and nosed up the coast of California, looking, with the Spaniards, for the Golden Gate. Well, there was nothing after all in blood, all that was nonsense. When Victor had asked her to go with him to New York she had immediately said, although always she had had a longing to go there, that she couldn't possibly leave home, feeling suddenly a curious languor, a nervous dread, an intense desire to be left where she was, alone at Wellowburn in her husband's beautiful formal house, the gates of the park shutting her in, with the old trees, the browsing sheep and the silent flowing river. And she had ended by packing up with a quite uncanny sense of foreboding. Why? The truth was, and she was obliged to face it—for there was something in the great slow rise and fall of the ship and the sound of the rushing wind that stirred up her mind, bringing old buried thoughts to the surface—that although she was tired to death of her crowded life, she was no good now for anything else, and wanted only

one thing, to be quiet and to be alone. When she was alone in the country, she was like a drugged woman, and that was what she wanted now, to be drugged by her deep English countryside with its monotonous soothing days that followed each other softly, lazily, to the sound of gentle sighing winds and pattering rain.

She had trained herself too well, she reflected grimly, watching the heaving sea with a slight scornful curve of her lips. The passivity which she had cultivated as her one safety, hers and Victor's, had now sunk into her bones and become a deep-ingrained instinctive thing. Where in the old days, her young days, her heart had leapt, she now automatically turned away her eyes, indifferent, sceptical, bored.

At fifteen she had been twice the person she was now. At fifteen she had had real friends, among the sailors and fishermen: the man on her father's estate who ran the electric light had been one, and the plumber from the village with his bag of tools. He had let her saw pipes and tinker with the bathroom taps. She had known in those days quite a lot about electricity, she could mend the bells that didn't work, and had rigged up an arrangement of pulleys in her room by which she could open the window from her bed. Then there had been the call of the sea. That was different, that was a primitive thing, appealing through her blood. She had longed to be a boy and sail round the world before the mast. Indeed her enthusiasms had been many and confusing. Her family of course had snubbed her. She had no doubt been an odious child. She remembered herself as rather solitary, without playmates, since her sisters wouldn't mess about with tools, and her brother was always away; but she had had one friend for a whole year, she must have been about seven then, a funny little American boy.

She couldn't remember his name—it was more than thirty years ago—or where he came from, or very much about him, but she could remember him very well. He had had a shock of straw-coloured hair and very blue eyes and a wide comical grin. She could see his ugly face all spattered with freckles quite distinctly, and hear his funny nasal American drawl. They had built together great towers and castles of stones cemented with sand. They had stolen a pick-axe and shovel from the tool-shed, and left them on the beach to be washed away by the tide. They had got into trouble for that. They had often got into trouble. Once they had been cut off by the tide and stranded on a rock with the water coming up and up. He was younger than she by a year or so. He had clung to her, and she had held him tight till the rescue-party came in a boat and took them off. How beautiful the cliffs were—and the leaping rocks, bounding out into the sea, and how wonderful that sense of danger! She could recall the emotion even now, and the look of the stealthy water creeping up.

The tides and the storms had always destroyed their sand castles, and this made them so furious that they had given up building and tried to make a steam-engine out of an old boiler and a wooden box and some wheels they found. It wouldn't go, of course. She remembered that they had been secretly very disappointed, but had pretended that they hadn't ever meant it to go. When they had asked their friends the village mechanic and the blacksmith to help them, they had only got laughed at, and had gone away mortified and crestfallen, to sit on the rocks and chew seaweed.

They had agreed that it was no good, they didn't know enough, they were only children. "But some day," he said, "we'll be grown up and then—you just

wait. I'm going to be a builder, what are you going to be?" Curious how vivid that was. She could see the two of them sitting on the rocks in the sun and wind, staring out to sea, with solemn faces. She wished she could remember his name. She wondered what had become of him.

Well—she was a middle-aged woman now, and what had actually become of her she couldn't quite make out. Nothing very much in any case. So little that was natural, that at times she even doubted her own identity. It seemed, looking back, like a dream, as if she had been struggling in her sleep to accomplish some vague and ill-defined task which she did not understand.

Perhaps if Victor had cared for her a little more—but it was absurd to blame Victor for being more absorbed in England than in his wife. It was that concentration of his that she admired, and who was she, to rival the British Empire in a man's mind? Truly she must have a high opinion of herself.

How strange it was lying stretched out beside Victor, so close to him, their steamer chairs touching, and thinking these thoughts without his knowing in the least what was going on in her mind, as if they were miles apart! "But that is what our life is now," she thought. "I wonder if he realises, I wonder what he is thinking."

But she did not turn her head to look at him, for she had nothing to say to him. It was no good saying "Victor, please forget about England and pay attention to me before it's too late." He wouldn't understand. Besides, he was seasick. She didn't want to look at him exposed against the empty waste of the Atlantic. It made her wince to see him like that, in the bare stark gloom of the funnel-like deck with the green reflected

light of the swirling water playing on him. The sight of him recalled to her, for some reason, her first youthful romantic view of him when his good looks had dazzled her, when she had fallen in love with his long legs, his high nose, his noble forehead, lean cheeks and obstinate chin. She had been eighteen when she married, and wildly in love.

Well, her warm joyous passion had faded, that was natural, but the curious thing was that Victor hadn't seemed to notice. His love-making had from the beginning been perfunctory, not precisely clumsy, but slightly awkward, as if he were absent-minded, and at the same time rather ill at ease. It was as if he took his career to bed with him as a chaperon who embarrassed him.

She hadn't been, she supposed, the kind of woman to move him. He would have been happier really with a very different sort of wife, a kittenish fluffy creature, who would amuse him and distract his poor mind from solemn things with her silly tricks. She wasn't that kind. She had merely tried to be his companion and failed. Well, one got one's deserts in this world, and if what one got was not what one's soul craved, the least one could do was to go without the poor substitutes that offered. To accept in the place of passion which she had never known the unsavoury pleasures of surreptitious relationships with this man or that, was an idea that had never appealed to her. She wasn't after all, she told herself, an animal who had to satisfy certain cravings or go sick. It wasn't their love affairs that she envied other women, but a certain daring, a certain way of being free and of being themselves. There was Bidy for instance. Bidy was terrible, defiant, fated, but she envied Bidy. It was better after all to have been adored and then hated, than to have been noticed only when one was a nuisance.

Her women friends thought her very cold. Well, perhaps she was, cold as death, she felt sometimes, and yet with a sense of life suspended, of something pending, something awaiting her, somewhere. She often had a curious feeling that she would wake some morning and find everything quite changed. But all that was nonsense. She had decided long ago that nothing should ever happen to her that would upset the decent even tenour of her life with Victor, and nothing ever had happened, and now she knew that nothing ever would happen, nothing wonderful, vivifying or strange, because if it did, she would not be ready for it, she would instinctively avoid it, she might not even recognise it.

One couldn't live with a man like Victor and not be flattened out, that was all. If you got in his way you were rolled out flat and there was an end of it. She had tried, so she knew.

The difficulty had been that what was honest and natural for Victor had been unnatural and dishonest for her. She had told herself scornfully in the early days of her apprenticeship to the Conservative Party that it didn't in the least matter, that it was only politics, that one could do one's public job and live one's own life privately; but the point was that one couldn't, one didn't have any private life left. One hadn't time even to read, and was too fagged to think. One became a kind of talking machine that went on and on reeling out the same rigmarole in little schoolhouses and town-halls and on big public platforms in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow and Leeds, promising the fat middle-class that they should remain comfortable, telling the patient pallid workers that they must go on being patient. Well, she had done it for Victor, and tried to make up to them for what she felt was, from her, an insult, by being kind to

her villagers and dock-labourers when they were ill or in trouble.

But Victor did not understand. On the other hand, and there was somehow a decent consolation in the fact, she did understand him, and he was wonderful; she knew it, even when he exasperated her most—because he was rooted deep in the soil of England, because he was provincial, rural, almost like a peasant, and what he stood for was the parish pump, the village common, the farm. He was like an oak-tree, stolidly protecting these homely things, but he didn't know this. He thought that he was a member of a privileged class by divine right, the upholder of a great political faith, and the champion of a social system that was planned by God and must last for ever. Poor Victor! Did she misread him?

Perhaps after all he too knew all the time that the system he stood for could not exist much longer, that the world was going to rise like a flood and submerge it. Perhaps he knew, down deep inside him, that his kind were one day going to be swept off the face of the earth. She wondered. If he did, if he felt that he was just an old dry stick, an oak-tree, about to be uprooted and sent adrift on the great tide of life that was for ever renewing itself and casting off the old, then he was truly admirable. Anyhow she caught a look in his eyes sometimes that suggested a man with his back to the wall, fighting a losing fight, and counting on her to stand by him. Well, he could. She wasn't going to let Victor down. She stiffened in her chair. Her lips tightened. Her eyes narrowed to slits.

All the same her mind had gone stale. But again the difficulty was that he had always been sure of what he had to do, and that she never had been sure of anything. She had never been sure enough of anything to convince

or convert him, or to make the least impression on him. She had, she reflected, no convictions. She could only question; she could only doubt, feeling obscurely the misery of the human drama and the urge, the tug, like an undertow at sea of great slow revolutionary forces.

Sometimes in the black country of the North of England, motoring at night to a political meeting, it would all come over her in a dark miserable flood. She had had once or twice a quite hysterical impulse to jump out of her motor and rush off down the black streets with their flaring lights, and never come back. "To be a working woman would be better than this," she had said to herself. "To scrub floors, do one's own washing and cooking, that is respectable—but to go on with this business of keeping them quiet, so that we can be comfortable—no, it's impossible!" But then immediately afterwards she would doubt again, would find herself using the old argument. "It would be worse for them, if we disappeared. Victor is probably right. Socialism would only enslave them further. The Government as employer, a lot of bureaucrats, what good would that do? Look at Russia." Oh God! how tired she got of Russia, and of all the talk about industrial power. Wily employers who grew fat under the protecting shadow of the British Constitution. Truly one could hear too much of the British Constitution. If she were a miner, keeping a family on thirty shillings a week, what would she care for the grandeur of the British Constitution? or the lovely Horse Guards in Whitehall?

"But this is ridiculous," she told herself. "You are in the middle of the Atlantic on the way to America. Why not forget all that and enjoy yourself?"

"There comes that awful Mr. Daw, Ikey Daw they call him. It's dangerous for Bidy to let him make up

to her. There's something sinister about that man." She closed her eyes as the great Jewish financier passed, his proud semitic profile cutting a bit out of the tilted horizon.

Those people in New York and Washington would get the best of Victor if he wasn't careful. She and Perky would have to keep their wits about them. Victor was so innocent and gullible sometimes, and he was hating it all so anyway. That might turn out to be his safeguard. He would dislike them all so intensely that he would dig his toes in and be obstinate, and the British taxpayer would be saved. She understood how Victor felt. It was extremely annoying having these Americans lay down the law. That one-eyed journalist from Chicago who had barged in on them had been apparently very impressed by the sight of tea-trays carried upstairs at four o'clock in the City. Why not? Why shouldn't the poor things have their tea brought to them up their dismal gritty stairs? In America they didn't have time for lunch, much less for tea. A chocolate milk-shake at a drug store, he had said, that was all he ever had for lunch. What was a chocolate milk-shake, she had asked, but he had stared out of his one eye—the other had gone in a fight in the streets of Chicago—and had said at last, "You get it at a Soda Fountain." Well, if they invited Victor to drink chocolate milk-shakes with them at Soda Fountains in drug stores, God Himself couldn't help them, the British taxpayer would come out on top.

Only the fun, if there were any, would be all for her and for Perky. There would be none at all for Victor. Victor would suffer in silent agony.

She would like to see the skyscrapers and the famous skyline of New York, but it was probably not very extra-

ordinary. Nothing came up to what one expected. Though it might be. Something new, a new country, what did that mean? The only countries she knew were old, polished and worldly wise, and she had seen them officially with Victor from the high formal porticoes of British Embassies.

If she could be new too over there! If she could shake off the cloak and plunge into the fountain's basin under the icy refreshing downpour! It would be nice to come up young.

But one couldn't. One's decisions, one's denials, one's refusals of experience were so many stitches in the heavy folds of the cloak. One couldn't, even if one wanted to, rip them out. One simply had to go on carrying the thing as gracefully as one could, and what would she feel like, trailing her pompous official position round skyscrapers and across deserts? She would like to go to the desert of Arizona. That writer man had talked of it with a sort of glare in his eyes, a positive glare of blinding sunlight shining out of them in Effie's dark London dining-room. But she wouldn't go to the desert. This impulse too would be stifled. It was impossible to get loose from Victor and the President in his White House and all the awful public dinners, and go to California, where her buccaneer ancestor had been two hundred years ago.

Suppose she said, "Victor, I am going to have a holiday. I am going to disappear for a month into the desert," what would he say?

One was supine, one drifted. One's life was a strong current carrying one along swiftly past beautiful distant banks, just out of reach. She had gone with the current for twenty years. It was no good being angry about it now. One went on and on, doing what one was expected

to do, scarcely noticing, and then at five o'clock, in the country, as one drank tea in front of the lovely Adam chimney in the blue boudoir, or came into the clear fragile formal drawing-room from a Mothers' Meeting or Committee or something, the low afternoon sun would stream in and light up some picture in a curious eerie way, or shimmer over the surface of her beautiful flamingo screen, and a little crack would open suddenly under one's feet, an almost invisible crack, right across the polished floor, and one looked down, down, and wondered whether the whole thing, the famous house and the great top-heavy elaborate edifice of one's life that rose up out of it, were going to collapse—but it didn't.

The house was important. It was serenely sophisticated, elegant and worldly. Adam had built it for Victor's naughty great-grandmother in the days when English ladies of high breeding were all frivolity and white satin. Her portrait by Reynolds, done when she was seventeen, and already famous for her affair with the great Lord X, hung in the drawing-room, an exquisite baby with a tousled curly head, a great lady, absurdly infantile, and dashing, who stepped lightly through life, creating havoc, and laughing. The polished floors, the clear windows, the fine gilded traceries on the pale walls, the painted ceilings, the Wedgwood in spindly cabinets, and the marble busts in their shallow niches, were her frame, a monument of exquisite artificiality, the protest of a high sophisticated intolerant taste against the romantic gloom of the English sea that lay just beyond the park. To be dainty, fastidious, gaily passionate, and withal a trifle exotic, in the midst of sodden fields and with the mists rolling up from the Channel, was an achievement that Frederika liked to contemplate. She liked to look at Victor's sparkling great-grandmother, who had handed

down to him no glimmer of her vivacity. She understood life, as it was beautifully and cynically portrayed in that house. She could have entered into the great business of governing England on those terms and in those days, but this solemn tramping up and down among farmers and factory hands and tradesmen, persuading them to like and to trust one, was different, and somehow sickening.

Perky helped. She was grateful to him. He lived like a bird in the house, so lightly, sitting day after day on his nest of documents, on Victor's eggs, hatching them out for him. Sometimes he reminded her of a brown sparrow in spectacles with a pen in his claw, perched over their heads on a branch, a bird scribe, twittering and chuckling contentedly to himself. At others he seemed to her like a little shabby priest scattering blessings on them from gentle inky finger-tips and smiling with heavenly good-humour.

She would sit sometimes dreaming in the evening by the fire opposite the flamingo screen that she loved so much—it was a lacquer screen with a design on it of flamingos standing in shallow ripples—and think, while Victor went through some white or blue paper, that she was dead, that she was really not alive any more, and then Perky would come shyly in, his hair rather ruffled, with a pile of letters for Victor to sign, and smile at her, and she would feel better.

She had not been really very well lately. Nerves probably. She had quite absurd fits of depression, difficult to deal with and very tiring, and odd disconcerting impulses. She had taken to wandering round unknown parts of London by herself, and lunching in A.B.C. shops. And actually, a little more than a year ago, she had been very near leaving Victor, very near indeed. Why? For what purpose? How strange and unreal it seemed now!

Or had it been more real, more true, than anything else? She wasn't certain. She had got as far as packing her bag, one small one, and counting the money in her purse, twenty-three pounds and seven shillings. It had been a very curious and rather dreadful experience. Now, as she thought of it, there was a slight sneer on her lips and a look of pain in her eyes.

It had been a lovely July morning. She had awakened suddenly in Bruton Street very early, with a start, a sort of leap, as if a far off distant trumpet or drum had sounded in her sleep, to see the sunlight filtering through her curtains and to hear herself saying very insistently and softly—"Yes, I must, I am forty. I cannot put it off any longer. There is no time to wait to put off things." And jumping out of bed she had found her nightdress was dripping with perspiration, and stood for a minute, trembling, listening, in the middle of the carpet, as if for the echo of a call, a summons that had died away. The house was quiet. The servants were still asleep. She had acted quickly. And as she took her cold plunge, dressed, packed, she had said to herself—"I will take the hundred pounds of housekeeping money that is in my cash-box and leave a note for Victor. That will keep me until I can get a job. I can get to New York for twenty or thirty second class. Once I've landed in America, it will be quite easy." She had put her hat on. It was seven o'clock when she clicked the clasp of her bag. Then she had sat down at her writing-table. Her hand had trembled so that the pen slithered on the paper. "Dear Victor," she had had to write that three times. "Dear Victor." He would think of course that she had gone off with some man. He would never believe. "Dear Victor, I have taken the hundred pounds——" She had sat there ten minutes, twenty minutes, half an

hour. She heard the housemaids moving about, carts in the street, men's voices. Suddenly she heard the silvery notes of her little clock on the chimneypiece strike eight, and she had dropped her head on her arms and wept.

How silly! How utterly contemptible! Well, no one had known. No one had even suspected. She had had time to unpack her bag before her maid came, then she had gone for a walk in the Park. She had walked to the round pond and sat on a penny chair.

She stirred now in her deck-chair, uncrossing her long legs under the rug, crossing them again, and with her hands slipped up into the loose sleeves of her fur coat, she gripped her arms tightly, hurting herself. Except for that very slight movement of her long limbs, and a slight dilating of her nostrils, she gave no sign of the curious muffled animal pain that gripped her for a moment.

Could it have been a message? something psychic? But who was there? She could think of no one. "Nonsense. Don't be an idiot!" she snarled, silently.

All that was over and done with. She would not, she must not, think of it any more. It was no good wondering, since she had done what was quite clearly the sane thing and the right thing, why she should have so little sense of comfort and of rightness. But what on earth did you expect, she asked herself harshly. And what if you do feel peculiarly alone, what difference does it make anyway?

It was getting dark. The wind was freshening. They were in for a rough night. Had she had tea? She must have. She had been lying there thinking, had not noticed. Perhaps she had been asleep. Victor was gone. His chair was empty. She would ask the steward.

"Have I had tea, steward? I can't remember."

"No Madam, you seemed to be asleep, but I can get you a cup now, Madam, it's only just five."

"And Mr. Joyce?"

"He went below, Madam, he wasn't feeling quite himself."

How dark the sky was! Night was rolling up over the sea, a single wave of darkness, welling up out of the abyss of space, over the round edge of the horizon. A flood of darkness was spreading stealthily over the water, pouring over the face of the Atlantic as if the cup of the universe were overflowing, were tilted up. The sea was still visible. It had gone a queer ghastly colour, a lurid yellowish-green. She had seen the same glistening hue, during the war, on the faces of men who were dying. The sea seemed to be sweating. It tossed and moaned. Soon it would be obliterated.

Soon everything would be obliterated. How soon? In a hundred thousand years? But what did that mean to God, if there were a God? The wink of an eye. Even she knew that much. Only a minute ago she had been a little girl chasing her pony in a paddock. She had thought then, when she was a little girl looking forward—"I shall do everything, see everything, how wonderful! Life, my life, is long. It stretches ahead." That was just a minute ago. She had turned round where she stood at the paddock gate, it had taken a second, and now she was looking back.

Life! She had somehow missed it. She had not had enough of it. She was forty. She wanted more of it. Not more of a particular thing, but merely more of anything, more mornings, more nights, more sopping rainy days, more fogs, more muddy roads, more soggy fields, with horses galloping across them, their hoofs cutting the green tender turf, more storms at sea, more lighthouses

winking, more drunken laughter beneath her London windows, more lamplight shining on the pages of open books, more green leaves dancing in the sunny park, more whirring motors, more disappointments, more disgust, more hunger, more curiosity, more of this very same glorious gusto of longing for more, that now swept over her strangely, because she was at sea in the middle of the Atlantic.

And then strangely, she heard two voices in her mind talking in a sort of double trembling inaudible whisper. "There must be something else, something better—some exact fitness, some point, some meaning. There is, I am sure there is, a great propriety, a great beauty, behind all this, if only you could find it. You have built up an artificial thing round you, because you couldn't bear to admit that you were duped, but you know that Victor bores you and that he has never cared for you. Why not accept that? Why pretend any longer? Why bother? It doesn't matter. It is simply a fact like any other. Accept it and think no more about it. Be alone, since you are alone. But I have lived Victor's life, and if he doesn't care I must have something else, some assurance, some certitude then, of some kind; something beyond myself to live for—God, perhaps; after all——"

She gave herself a sudden shake, collected her scattered wits. God was inconceivable. Anyhow Christianity wasn't English and the English weren't Christians. Look at the crowd at Epsom on Derby Day; there you had England, and what had God or Jesus Christ to do with it?

But it needn't be a personal God. Any kind of a God would do. She wasn't particular. Some pervading spirit of companionship and understanding was all that she wanted. But how could there be? It was so very unreasonable to suppose that there was anything to come

after, any new sort of being on the under side of a mouldy little tombstone. One dissolved into darkness, that was all. It was quite simple. But the boundless Infinite, void of life, inanimate, was fearful to contemplate. If only one could conjure up faith; become a child. But she could not; she did not know how; she only had it in her to conceive of dead space. But if space were Godless, if God were dead, then the earth too, spinning in dead space, must surely die, must freeze to death. That was most terrible of all; for however remote the dying of the earth might be from her, it was all the same, compared to the timeless void beyond the end, immediately imminent like saying To-morrow, or at six o'clock. Already now it was drawing near some other woman who was coming, who would be born in a few hundred thousand years, and then, when that death came, the two of them, like all the others who had gone before and in between, would be as if they had never been. They would be all alike, and nothing would be left, and since there would be nothing, no trace of life, no memory, not even a trembling wisp of thought left behind, then when that time came, they really would never have been, would never have existed at all. It would be simply true that no race of human beings had ever lived, been born, and died.

It would all have been for nothing. . . .

But there was the nice kind steward bringing her a cup of tea. Suppose she said to him—"God help me, steward, I do not want to die," what would he think? And yet that was what she had to say to him, and who knows, he might be able to tell her that she was having a bad dream, that it was all a mistake. "There," he might say, tucking her rug under her feet, "you've been dreaming all that. Don't you see, it's morning, and you and me is in Heaven and there's no more night." But it was

better not to risk it. He wouldn't understand, probably, how savagely and hungrily, like a desperate insatiable lover, she had once adored life. He treated her like baby, for all her long legs. So all she said was,
"Oh, thank you, steward, that's very nice."

CHAPTER V

To Ikey Daw, who was equally at home in all the numerous Ritz Hotels of the earth, crossing the Atlantic was so much a matter of habit that he scarcely noticed whether he was stepping on or off a ship. His activities were much the same wherever he was. When the telephone was switched off the wireless got busy and the many threads that he spun from his fingers, held taut, spreading out from him in a beautiful elastic web that covered the earth. He didn't appear to be aware of the sea sliding and heaving beyond the rail of the *Aquitania*. It didn't affect his appetite and he didn't look at it. Natural phenomena like storms, heat and cold, a lot of water or dry land, and the things described in the geography books, never attracted his attention. Nor did the antics and idiosyncrasies of human beings, except in so far as they came into his scheme, and for the most part they didn't. He could afford to despise them, and so wherever he was he was always in the same place, and although he travelled pretty constantly, he never seemed to himself to be moving and yet never had the feeling of "being put". If he had any feeling of being anywhere, it was of being suspended in the air, like a spider at the centre of his web, and the web, since he had spun it out of himself, revolved round him, contracting, twisting and adjusting itself to

cover the globe with himself continually at the middle of it. He had, and he was glad of it, no roots anywhere, no fixed dwelling-place, and almost no possessions that could be handled or looked at. His apartment at the Ritz Carlton in New York held some of his clothes and a few things he had picked up, some bits of jade, a picture or two, but these could scarcely be called possessions, and he cared nothing about them. He did not care about owning things. When he bought it was always to sell again as quickly as possible. He got no pleasure out of the sense of ownership, and had no feeling for property, whether it were in the form of buildings, land, copper-mines or women. It was a rare thing for him to cast any but the briefest glance at a woman. He could, he felt wearily, size up a woman in a second, and almost all of them left him cold. He had had enough of them. He had had enough of everything. There was really nothing in the so-called feast of life that he hadn't long ago stuffed himself with, till he was sick. The only thing that he could get any kick out of now was the game of finance. He was, he told himself, primarily a man of imagination who dealt in abstractions. High Finance, like Higher Mathematics, was a science removed above the drama of life, and he was in his way as unworldly as any monk or professor, since money and the things money could buy had no power over him any more. That he thought in terms which might be mistaken by the vulgar for terms of money made no difference. They were symbols. In any case the world was to him as monotonously fascinating as a baccarat-table and he sometimes thought of it in that way, all littered with oil shares and rubber shares and municipal bonds and foreign loans done up in neat packets with elastic bands. He liked to see those modest bundles that represented so much mysterious power

change hands quickly—liked to scoop them up, stake them again; those diamond-mines, copper-mines, coal-mines, those crops of cotton and harvests of grain and heads of cattle and jungles of rubber-trees, all reduced to little bits of paper that he could crumple in his fingers, tear up if he liked. It was this that fascinated him: the idea of toying with the wealth of the world, treating it like cigarette paper. Sometimes he caught himself thinking "I'd like to pile up all that stuff and make a bonfire of it", as if really setting a match to a few million dollars worth of stocks and bonds would destroy the diamond-mines, coal-mines and cities represented. His imagination played him tricks at times, but he would bring himself up short and tell himself not to go balmy, and remind himself that he wasn't in the least interested in anything but a cold clear process of reasoning; that he wasn't sufficiently interested in anything on earth even to want to destroy it; and he would remind himself as a proof of this of the fact that wherever he was on the earth, he was equally bored. And truly this was, in its way, a triumph for a man who had been born over a pawnshop on Tenth Avenue in New York City. He reminded himself of it again as he dressed carefully for dinner in his lurching cabin.

He travelled light. His luggage was modest. His needs were extremely simple. All the same, he occupied on the ship a row of cabins opposite and corresponding to the suite that had been placed at the disposal of the British Cabinet Minister. He had with him four secretaries, a valet, a private cinema-operator, and joined to the party, but not obviously, there was Miss Gussy Green and her maid. He seldom travelled with Gussy because she seldom would travel with him, preferring to run about Europe alone with a toothbrush in her pocket,

but he never went anywhere without the others. The secretaries looked after his correspondence; the valet looked after his clothes; and the cinema-operator always went with him because he liked to look at moving pictures in the middle of the night when he could not sleep. He more often than not could not sleep, and moving pictures were a habit with him. They were almost a vice. Though he was a famous figure in Europe, and recognised as one of the greatest of living financiers, he was really a movie-fan, and he had a movie mind; for however bored he might be with the world of fools, of real men and women, he nevertheless responded to the appeal of the beautiful voluptuous passionate heroines and dark villains who flickered and jerked before him on the screen. Some of his favourite films had been made for South America. They would not have passed the censor in New York, London or Paris. These he enjoyed, for the most part alone, but occasionally he invited a few kindred spirits to watch them with him behind the closed doors of his hotel drawing-rooms.

It may seem odd that a very great financial genius like Ikey Daw should have this particular weakness and prefer the screen world to the world of nature, but after all, it was very natural. He was a child of New York City, and city life in America had been for some time imitating quite successfully the peculiar dramatic romantic life portrayed on the screen. The cinematograph had been busy for some years, transforming the so-called real life that roared and rocked and yelled with laughter before its curtain into its own image, and transmuting the stuff of life into its own stuff. Men no longer made love or did business or murdered each other or walked across the street as they had done before the camera was invented. The reckless way they threw themselves on and off street

cars, the breathless way they dodged in and out of buildings, and skipped into elevators, the ease with which they pulled revolvers from their hip-pockets, the lightning speed of their motors, the kind of dreams they dreamed about women and the type of women they liked, all told of an apprenticeship for the adventure of life spent in the Movie Theatre. Indeed the urban population of North America was so saturated with the violence and romance of the films, and so used to a diet of mixed pain, horror, sentiment, sensuality and convulsive side-splitting horse-play, that it absolutely demanded the same sort of thing of its newspapers, churches, stockbrokers, and even of the merchants of such commodities as soap and tooth-paste. Life in other words was doing its best to express the camera art of its period. This being so, it would have been very extraordinary had Ikey Daw not understood Movie land better than a New England village or Cheyne Walk in London. Born in the vertical hive of a tenement, the gritty torrent of America's prosperous polyglot anarchy had swept him up town and had shot him out of Columbia University into Wall Street. He knew his town, and his world. He had drunk oil and gasoline in place of mother's milk. An elevated railway thundering past the window had rocked his cradle. He had gambled in gutters before he could read. He had never done an honest day's work, or known an honest man, till he was too old to believe in the worth of either. He had never seen a flesh-and-blood cow or pig till he took the train for Chicago at the age of twenty-five, but he had seen them on the screen. All he knew about geography, history, natural science and love he had learned from the movies. He was a very remarkable product of the twentieth century, and he represented a power that appeared to be even greater than the power

behind such a man as Victor Joyce, who merely represented the British Government. Ikey Daw despised Governments. He represented and had behind him the greed of men. He called it "Big Business". He was always being called in by sick Governments to advise and prescribe for them. They sent for him as you'd send for the doctor. Governments were very rich patients. As his practice among them grew, and it had grown enormously since 1914, his fees grew in proportion. Sometimes it was not to his interest that the patient should recover, and then, well, as a rule, the Government collapsed. There would be a revolution perhaps, or something of that sort. On the other hand it wouldn't be good for his practice if they all went sick at the same time. A general condition of intermittent fever throughout Europe was the most paying to him; then the physician's services were pretty constantly required. And of course it was only right and natural that the Government of his own country should be both prosperous and altruistic. Ikey Daw had secretly despised Woodrow Wilson, but it suited him perfectly that the President of the United States should be an Apostle of Peace. He had approved of Mr. Hoover's feeding the starving population of Eastern Europe after the war. It was good publicity. He had pulled off a number of deals in his time under the cloak of American charity. In the same way, he believed in Foreign Missions. Evangelists took with them to China and India and Africa not only Bibles but sewing-machines. The spread of a Christian civilisation opened up heathen countries in a very useful way, and sometimes one could profit even by a massacre of missionaries. The Boxer trouble had done a lot for business in China.

Now, it looked as if there were going to be trouble in China again. Well, he could know how to profit by it,

and he would of course give the President the benefit of his advice. He had been learning a good deal about China lately. He was all set to begin spinning out the threads of a new web. It was worth while being useful to the State Department. He would take them into his confidence, just enough. All they had to do was to sit tight and let the British get into a mess, then they would come along and put things right and walk off with the swag, and the Britishers could be counted on to behave like fools.

The English never had had and never would have any business sense. They had no imagination. They didn't understand the first thing about finance. Why, just the other day the British Government had asked the President to interfere with Ikey's pet plan of a loan to Moscow. They had put forward moral and sentimental objections. Ikey Daw had smiled. He had told those people in the city of London that his associates would most undoubtedly regard the matter as a business proposition pure and simple. Victor Joyce probably meant to say something about this to the President. Well, Victor Joyce too was a fool, and a pompous fool. Ikey Daw smiled pleasantly into the mirror as he had seen those gigantic hero-villains smile on the screen. Unconsciously he imitated the mammoth wreathing grin of a close-up. He was, he noted with satisfaction, a very handsome man, and although his father Isaac Ikenstein had come from Germany and his mother from the Caucasus, no one would take him for a Jew. No one could possibly take him for anything but a man of the world—and a great man.

No one would have thought of questioning this, least of all the harassed wireless operator of the s.s. *Aquitania* sitting up in his box on the boat-deck with a steel thing

round his head. To him it seemed as if all the cities of the world were clamouring for Mr. Daw's attention and advice. The air of heaven quivered with his name. The little hurrying air-waves could babble of and to no one else. He was monopolising the ether. From the moment the ship left Southampton, it had been besieged by scurrying messages, hurrying after him from the receding shores of England and Europe, hurrying out to meet him from New York. Neatly typed out now on radio forms, they littered the room next to the one in which he was dressing for dinner. A cabin boy had been kept running up and down all day with them. Most were in cipher, and two of the secretaries had been kept at it all day deciphering them, until, because of the tables bounding up under their chins and then dropping suddenly down, while the floor gave way under them, they had gone suddenly green, one after the other, and bolted. Ikey Daw had sat calmly in the lurching-room, buying cotton off a million little bushes in Louisiana, buying grain from the fields of Canada, selling cattle that were grazing in Australia, until he couldn't buy or sell anything more because one after another the stomachs of his secretaries had revolted. His stomach paid no attention to the crazy dipping floor, the doors swinging spasmodically open and banging, banging, the sofa that slid suddenly across the room. His stomach seemed to be attached to some centre of gravity that ignored the sea, the storm, the tossing ship, and now, bracing himself before his mirror, he scrutinised himself, critically, coldly, but with satisfaction, carefully brushing his beautifully cut grey hair and wondering whether the diamond stud in his white gleaming shirt were perhaps a shade too large to suit Mrs. Prime's taste. 'One couldn't be too careful. It was easy to make mistakes. He had discovered lately, it was his great discovery since the war,

that one could be too well dressed, even by the best London tailor. Victor Joyce now, though he was a fool, was exactly right. It was almost a drawback sometimes, being so handsome. It made one conspicuous. He no longer wanted to be conspicuous. He bared his teeth, pulling back his long leathery lips. His teeth were strong but rather yellow when he looked at them close with his great black mouth open, showing his tongue black like a Pom's from tobacco; but framed by the swarthy mask of his face they looked white enough. Still there was something glossy about him that he did not like; something shiny. He looked too rich, that was it. He had a horror of looking rich. He still had a secret horror of looking like one of those rich New York Jews. He had got his looks from his mother; she had been a strong giant of a woman, he could remember her dimly: a Slav, intolerant, oriental, superstitious. She had talked to him in Russian and German; she had never learned English; she had hated America. He had felt her hatred pouring into him out of her great lazy passionate body. She had hated everything and every one but himself, and had died of it, suffocated by her hatred of the noise, the glare, the crowded tenement, the rushing elevated railway pounding by above the door of the shop. Now, as he waited for Gussy in this slanting, heaving, lamplit drawing-room, he thought of his savage mother, reminding himself with gratification that he hated the world even more than she did, since his hatred had been fined down by success into boredom.

His self-satisfaction however was marred suddenly by the curious feeling that he had not after all got away from the pawnshop. His father had dealt with the rabble of slums, with small bankrupts and thieves and nervous unlucky gamblers he dealt with Governments.

It was, he reflected wearily, much the same thing. They too had things to pawn, mines, oil-wells, fields of grain, the labour and sweat of their people, and the future, not only the patrimony but the lives of those who were not yet born, but who would be. They could count on those who were coming. That crop wouldn't fail. It was a valuable asset. What would he give for it, they asked him. It was the best security they had to offer, for don't you see, as those who were coming didn't know that they were being put up for sale, since they were still in the womb of the great prolific mother, they couldn't upset things or interfere with the deal, as populations did sometimes, bursting out into sudden rages when one least expected it, and upsetting the wise Governments who were selling the sweat that was dripping from their patient hides. Certainly it was much the same sort of business. As a small boy he had perched on a stool in a dark corner of the little crowded shop, and watched. He remembered the look of bravado, the feeble attempt at bargaining, the bad conscience peeping out, the confession, in spite of the attempt at bluffing, that they were selling something that didn't rightfully belong to them. The professional thieves who didn't pretend to be anything else were the best of the lot. They were easy to deal with. The valuables changed hands quickly, without any fuss or waste of time. The price was regulated beforehand, the risk discounted. His father had had a number of such satisfactory regular customers, pleasant fellows who liked the danger and enjoyed the joke. The joke was on the world, on the plodding law-fearing careful workers, who saved. The amusement was to take away from them what they'd earned, when they weren't looking, when they were asleep maybe, and snoring. He too had a few such satisfactory acquaintances, yes, quite a

number. They were scattered about, in Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw and Moscow, and sometimes they were in positions of authority and sometimes they were not. They kept him posted. When they were out of office they lay doggo, waiting to get in again. They almost always did get in again. The political wheel went round and round, and if they hung on to it they came round to the top, once in so often. It didn't of course matter what they did, or how shady their transactions were. The masses who formed the stream that turned the wheel didn't seem to notice, or to care. So long as they had enough to eat and drink and were not taxed too much, they would believe any lies they were told. Ikey Daw would smile when some nervous customer, some fussy Finance Minister, mentioned public opinion. There was no such thing as public opinion. There were only newspapers. He controlled a number of newspapers himself, and got a certain amount of amusement out of a little game of his called "educating the public". It took about a week to put an idea across in the United States. If he decided with a group of gentlemen who managed that sort of thing for him, on a Monday that it would be good for America to feel the very strongest sentimental interest in Guatemala or Chile or Greenland, well, by the following Thursday the good folk of New England and Idaho and Texas were scratching their heads and looking the place up on the map, and by Monday every mother's son of them was taking a passionate interest in the fate of that country. All those, that is, who read newspapers. The rest didn't count. They were too slow. By the time they heard of a thing it was finished. They didn't count, unless they were driven too far. Then they got angry, and moved, but blindly, like a herd of wild elephants. Things crashed then.

There was a lot of noise, of smashing timber, forests uprooted, houses flattened out, and a great stamping and thudding, but you could guide them, round them up when you got tired, and drive them back where they came from, or in some other direction if that were more interesting. He had sent a number of elephant drivers to Russia in 1918, out of second-hand clothes-stores on Lower Broadway and such places, men of his own race, who were animated by the kind of hatred that suited the occasion. He had done this, not so much for the pickings that revolutions invariably offered, as from an obscure impulse that was, he thought, the only source of weakness in him, the only dangerous bond binding him to humanity. It was like a weight resting heavily somewhere within him, pressing down on some hidden nerve-centre, and affecting very slightly the smooth working of his brain. He could not dislodge it.

He might have called it a name, if it had not been so subtle, so deeply muffled and covered over, and wrapped round in layers of cynicism. He might, if he poked down through all that to the soft sinister pulsing heart of it, have recognised it as a passion for revenge; but he didn't. How could he? He claimed no kindred with the Hebrew race that had been insulted over the face of the earth for nineteen hundred years. He was a man of the world. Homeless? No, he was at home equally in London, New York, or Paris. Wherever he chose to give a dinner, Prime Ministers and Duchesses, and that elusive creature, the most admired woman of the moment, accepted his invitations. Almost no one refused to dine with him, and seldom did any one fail to return his hospitality. The doors of the proudest and gloomiest houses even in England had opened to him, and he had been as proudly bored in them all, and that, he reminded himself again,

was in its way a triumph for the son of Ikey Ikenstein, the obscure pawnbroker of Tenth Avenue.

There had been, however, one or two people who had refused to dine with him. And on reflection he was grateful to them. They relieved the vague oppressive feeling of being dead which haunted him sometimes, and which had drifted him towards Gussy Green, who was so very much alive. Victor Joyce was one of the few who had not accepted his hospitality, and Mrs. Joyce had snubbed him. He remembered perfectly how she had looked at him when he had at last succeeded in getting himself presented. Her glance had swept up and down him once, like a sombre feather, she had murmured something inaudible and had turned her back. He had been left staring at it. He had stared calmly, his heavy-lidded eyes had betrayed no sign of annoyance.

Now here she was on the ship, lying motionless in her deck-chair, pretending to be asleep when he passed, and again refusing to join his little dinner-party. Well, they would meet in New York. He was to meet her at the Jamieson's the day after to-morrow. She didn't know that. She had no conception of how small New York was, with its one street, just a town with a main street, its one or two restaurants, a few theatres, an Opera, and a bear-garden called the Stock Exchange. Victor Joyce, who was going to talk to the President and muddle up things a little—they would have to be disentangled again when he left—would rest quietly in the palm of his hand in New York. He would stand there stiff and solemn, with the British flag flying from the top of his head, and not know that it was Ikey Daw's brown scented palm that was holding him up to view in America.

But there was something about these English people. He did not, he told himself, admire Mrs. Joyce, yet she

attracted your attention and held it. As for the other, Bridget Prime, Biddy, he had heard them call her, "She," he said aloud to himself, "is the real thing"; but the words were no attempt to express the convulsive spasm of pain that the mere thought of her gave him. That he could not express. Unless the slightly drawn look coming over his face as if its leathery skin had been suddenly stretched, by some invisible process were an expression of it, and the quivering of his heavy eyelids over eyes that suddenly looked yellow and sick.

He had had enough of women, so he had thought, enough to last him his lifetime. Women were too dirt-cheap, and they were all alike when you got close. But Bridget Prime, God help him, was different, and he saw the difference. It was as if the sight of her had suddenly turned him into a sick man, all eyes. He let his breath whistle through his teeth in a sort of miserable sigh, grinding them gently together as he dabbed his ears with scent. Her face had an incredible perfection, an uncanny delicacy. He saw this. It made him, Ikey Daw, wince. There was something miraculous and desperate about her beauty, he saw that too. It was as if she were the last triumphant bloom of an exhausted plant, a doomed flower that it had taken a hundred years to fashion. And this too, all this he felt obscurely. It filled him with rage, with a longing that was like a desire to do murder. He wanted to kill her. He wanted to hurt all these English people. They gave him an insufferable feeling of inferiority. Tucking his scented handkerchief into his pocket, he rose and went across the lurching floor into the adjoining room.

Victor Joyce wouldn't talk to him. He pretended to be seasick, and put his secretary on to him. They had had to talk in the smoking-room. They had talked of the

Peace Conference in Paris, then had got on to the League of Nations. Mr. Joyce had recently been to Geneva. His secretary had mumbled something about it being a pity America wouldn't join the League.

"Well, why should we?" Mr. Daw had asked. "What do we stand to get out of it?" The Englishman hadn't answered. He had merely slid down in his seat, sunk lower into his collar, and stared. There had been something funny about that stare, something very mild but galling, a sort of surprise, a sort of idiotic wonder that had made Ikey Daw want to explain, and he had explained. He had told Mr. Parkinson confidentially, wanting in spite of himself to be pleasant, though he felt an extraordinary animosity to the man—still, he had wanted to explain to him how Big Business in America wouldn't stand for International Labour Bureaux and that sort of bunk; and Mr. Parkinson had slid lower and lower and further and further across the floor until he was sitting on the back of his neck and had seemed more and more surprised. Then suddenly when Ikey had got on to the question of war debts, and had been in the middle of explaining very tactfully why the people of America wanted to be paid what was owed them, he had asked how many religions there were in the States and who were the Holy Jumpers? Good God! How did he know? The man must be crazy. Here he had a chance to learn something about American finance, and he didn't even listen, wasn't even interested, and had scarcely said another word, except when he got up to go, muttering something in a small, soft, timid sort of voice, as if he were half asleep, about the picturesque quality of the American language.

In most countries a man had to have a modicum of brains to become a Cabinet Minister, or even a Cabinet Minister's Secretary. Well, Victor Joyce and Mr.

Parkinson must have some other qualities that made them useful to the British Nation, but what else was there? He didn't know. He gave it up. In any case it was of no consequence. Mr. Joyce and the President would have their little talk and then Mr. Joyce would go home to England where he belonged, but not before he had been made to smart for his indifference, and Mrs. Joyce had smiled at Ikey Daw with those cold sneering lips of hers that she painted vermilion and that made a streak of flame in her ashy face. That woman wanted a lesson. She needed taking down a peg. He would enjoy humiliating her, but how could he? His eyes narrowed. He stared intently at the little shaded lamp on the writing table. He sat very still, very handsome, and oh so perfectly groomed from the top of his silvery head to the tip of his patent-leather pumps, and imagined ways of humiliating Frederika Joyce. Everything about her annoyed him. He lifted a long brown hand and curved his long brown fingers with their polished nails as if he were squeezing something. Her head was too small and her neck was too long, her face fell away to nothing, to a point. She had a dry face, with blemishes on it, like freckles, and she was so thin that she looked as if she might fall to pieces, and he hated her hoarse abrupt voice.

"Good-morning," she said sometimes when they bumped into each other on the stairs, not a word more, sometimes not even that, sometimes she would merely nod. Well, there were a number of ways to humiliate a woman, but perhaps the best way with Mrs. Joyce was through her solemn stick of a husband, or perhaps even a better way was through her friend Bridget Prime. He could kill two birds with one stone that way. Mrs. Joyce left a bitter taste in one's mouth, like quinine, but Bridget Prime made one thirsty, hungry, made one feel starved,

lonely, lost. She was like a silver moon, and he like a man lost in a desert, floundering after her through the sand. She sailed over one's head, inaccessible. He hated her. He told himself viciously with an affected sneering smile, baring his teeth in the empty cabin, that she was not incredible, not impressive, not gallant and proud, not infinitely appealing. He told himself that she was too dashed cool and patronising, that she had a nerve, making up to him in order to get something out of him. He set himself angrily and deliberately to vulgarising her in his own mind. She was, he insisted to himself, no different from any common slut of an adventuress; and he began to imagine her with himself on the screen, in one of those movie dramas that secretly titillated him. He imagined her lying on a large couch, and saw himself leaning over her. It was perhaps as well that at this moment the ship heaved itself up with such sudden energy, that he was sent sprawling on to the floor.

"God damn it," he said aloud, and getting to his knees, found Gussy hanging on to the door that was slanting backwards at a very queer angle. She yelled with laughter. "Come on, Ike," she yelled, in her ear-splitting voice. "But my God, you poor little cuss, what's the matter with you? What're you doing? Saying your prayers?"

He didn't mind Gussy. She always talked to him like that. "You poor little cuss," she would say, standing on tiptoe and stretching her neck to look up at him, throwing back her cropped head. "You're more dead than alive, Ike," she'd say. She was, it appeared, fond of him and sorry for him, and she was the only person on earth who told him the truth. "You're a genius all right, I guess, Ike, but you're no gentleman. Don't try to put any o' that across on me. Fool the world if you want to,

darling, but I know one of my own kind when I see one, thank God. We're just like twins, Ike, you from the ghetto and me from the Irish gutter, and look at us. That's what America does for her immigrant children."

He had to his surprise asked her to marry him, but at that she had bucked. "Not on your life," she had yelled. "I don't want to be any more respectable than I've got to be. Do you want me to spend all my time in parlour-cars?"

Still, she was fond of him, and he, who could say that of no one else on earth, was fond of her. He thought she was wonderful. She had the thing he most admired, nerve.

But suppose she talked like that to Bridget Prime.

"Look here, Gussy, I hope you don't talk like that about me to Mrs. Prime?"

"Like what, you poor soul?"

"I mean, telling her I'm not—"

"Certainly I have. She liked it. Lord, Ikey, you are a fool. Do you think my saying so would teach her anything? What do you think she takes you for anyway? You don't understand these people. Bridget Prime likes me because I'm common, see? And she likes you because you're low. Get me? It's a change for her, and she likes change, but don't make any mistake, Ikey, don't go in for any melodrama, she won't like that a little bit. Don't make any mistake, Ike."

He looked at her with naïve admiration. He admired enormously this ugly little mick of a woman who had been brought up by a nigger washerwoman in Harlem and was now a Broadway star making fifty thousand dollars a year. What he admired her for most was the way she treated the thing called Society, the great world which he had so painstakingly imitated and so carefully approached,

bribed, flattered, almost conquered. Gussy made faces at it, laughed at it, was sorry for it sometimes. She was a free woman; he felt her superiority.

He looked at her now and wondered again, as he always did, at her power. She was ugly. She had little green eyes and an enormous mouth and no nose at all. The only pretty thing about her was her legs. Her voice when she talked sounded like a grating file, but she had several other voices. One was a bass voice, another was a bird's voice, high, high, like a nightingale, and when she sang her songs about piccaninnies and eukelele babies there was the thrill in them of all the sentimental heart-breaks in the world, and Broadway would shiver and hold its breath, until . . . until she winked or grinned, and then Broadway laughed and all the T.B.M.'s sat up as if a sea-breeze had blown through the theatre putting life into them. Gorgeous Gussy, she could do what she liked with 'em. When she leaned over wagging her knees and clapping her hands, the crowd was a shouting, uproarious young light-hearted gang of kids. She had only to make a face, they rocked, they swayed, they were convulsed with laughter. And my God how the girl could dance. Her feet were possessed. Her arms, her legs, seemed to be whizzing in a hundred directions. She looked as if she would fly into a thousand pieces. She was youth then, in a frenzy, the common raw youth of America, in a riotous bawling rasping ecstasy. She was the whole rushing pouring river of Irish, Sheeny, Dago, Swede, Polak and Slovak, yellow, white, brown and red American youth.

And she was a darned good sort and had a lot of horse sense. He knew this. He knew that about people she had more sense than he had, but he couldn't help it, he had a movie mind, and he asked himself as he followed Gussy down the lifting, creaking, twisting stairs to the

see-sawing lounge, what Mrs. Prime wanted, since she had consented to dine with him. What she wanted, he told himself, was money, but what would she call it, he wondered, and what would she give in exchange? He was prepared to go quite a long way to help her, on certain terms, a very long way indeed, he said to himself emphatically, when he saw her sliding and wavering towards him in a zigzag between the rows of little tables, past three drunken Americans, clinging to the arm of Mr. Parkinson.

How beautiful she was, sliding and slithering, but somehow floating towards him. She was incredibly white. She made all those tipsy brutes drinking at their little tables look suddenly hideous. The shrieking, giggling, painted women, the drunken man who had cut his face open falling into a glass case, even Gussy looked congested, dark, red, as if made of some coarse rough dark stuff, in contrast with her incredible fairness.

He felt, as he offered her a cocktail, a painful, pulse throbbing in his throat. He was inundated with rage, and a suffocating sense of injury. An obscure feeling of incomprehensible despair took possession of him, and he felt himself cringe before her. He thought, "Thank God, I didn't send her those American Beauties. It would have been a false move"; and he was aware as he looked at her of the dark blood mounting to his cheeks, and of that old sense of pressure, of a weight resting heavily on some nerve centre in his brain. Not shame, not an old old sense of injury dating from some bygone time, some persecution of his race that had been insulted over the earth for nineteen hundred years, not an instinct to cower before this incredibly distant unattainable lady, who was drinking his cocktails—how could it be? He was a free American citizen, a great financier, immensely powerful and triumphantly bored.

A steward brought Gussie a radio while they sat there.

"It's from Pete, Ikey," she said.

"Is it?"

"Yes, he wants to see you."

"Does he?" He was trying to keep his eyes from Bridget's face.

"When'll you see him, Ike?"

"What does he want?" A flicker of annoyance passed in his eyes that appeared slightly bloodshot.

"I dunno what he wants. He says it's a big idea. I guess it's some building scheme."

Ikey Daw looked bored. "He's got too many big ideas, that young fella."

"Cut it out, Ike. When will you see him?"

"Why should I see him?"

"Because he's a great boy." Gussy's little green eyes grew hard. She appeared to be getting angry. Something obstinate and sharp in her face made Bridget ask,

"Who is Pete?"

"He's a great architect, a little pal of mine called Peter Campbell. He won the twenty-five-thousand-dollar competition for the Radio Building. You'll see it from the Harbour to-morrow. You can't miss it. There's nothing on the skyline to touch it. It shoots up like a rocket and hits you straight between the eyes. It's something new, you see, and queer. He's got away from the Mesopotamian and Gothic and done something real American."

"We get in after dark," put in Ike Daw, "and say Gussy, where did you get that line of talk?"

Gussy grinned. "From Pete. You didn't know I'd been studying architecture, did you? You ought to meet him," she said to Bridget. "I'll fix it. We'll have a party.

Pete's the most popular man in New York, and Ike s jealous, but he'll see him all right, and he'll just do what Pete wants him to do, you'll see. Pete'll talk him round."

"Oh, will he?" murmured Ikey.

"Sure he will. Everybody does what Pete wants 'em to do. Besides, you'll do it, Ike, because I say so. If you won't help my little pal, we're not friends any more, see?"

"She knows how to get her own way, doesn't she?" said Mr. Daw with a grin.

The dinner-party, thanks to the little pills that Mr. Parkinson always had by him, was a great success. Mr. Parkinson swallowed one, and made Mrs. Prime do the same, saying in his high funny falsetto voice—"Here you are, Biddy," and then the cocktail table shot across the floor and he went with it, landing on his head in a flowerpot. But he didn't seem to mind. He picked himself up, ruefully feeling his head and smiling, and Mrs. Prime cried out, "Oh, darling Perky," rather crossly, and pulled his clothes straight. They were evidently great friends.

That sort of thing kept happening during the evening. Still, Mr. Daw's little dinner was very nice. It was like all pleasant expensive dinners, except that the ship turned over on its side once every ten minutes, carrying with it down the sliding slope of a rushing monstrous mass of water the panelled restaurant with its gleaming white cloths and its pretty shaded lamps; except that the waiters clasping bottles of champagne fell on their knees and shot swiftly backwards like crabs, and the peaches from California rolled round the floor, and the musicians went headlong with their fiddles and music-racks on top of them, after the piano, crash, into a heap in the corner; except that Gussy's slim little feet were covered with a

soft warm mess of scrambled eggs that came scuttling and spilling under the table from somewhere, and that the iced soufflé went into Bridget's lap. Otherwise one would have thought one was at the Berkeley or Claridge's or the Embassy Club or somewhere. The splintering of glass as the evening wore on did not seem unnatural. The musicians picked themselves up and went on playing the very latest tunes. The rhythm they beat out had the usual effect on one's nerves, and the sight of a bunch of men and women tangled up in a tablecloth on the floor was really quite amusing. One laughed, one was gay, one's pulses beat, beat, gently, to the syncopated drum, that tickled the little animal inside one, scratched its ears and made it purr, and one's mind was pleasantly confused, and what difference did it make that those two were strangers to Bridget Prime, were as foreign as a Chinaman and a Fiji woman? She didn't care. Wasn't it always like that? Did one ever understand anything anyone said. Did one ever know or like anyone except people whom one had known all one's life—as one knew Perky, who sat there so primly, blinking in a bewildered worried sort of way through his spectacles and holding on to the table with his arms round his plate when everything began to slide.

Bridget did not know half the time why she did things, she simply did what she took it into her head to want to do, and she couldn't quite tell beforehand what that would be, except that it would be something new and different. If one's curiosity was roused, why not satisfy it? She liked all sorts of odd people; and this woman Gussy Green had rather taken her fancy, and Mr. Daw for some reason gave her a slightly pleasant feeling of being frightened, but she didn't really know why she was dining with Mr. Ikey Daw, whom Frederika and Victor

detested, in a sliding lurching world of swaying walls and breaking dishes, and she didn't know why she drank glass after glass of champagne, or why Perky's worried little smile and Gussy Green's ugly face made her laugh and laugh, or why she thought suddenly, "Oh, God, this is Hell," when she happened to see the exhausted patient young steward staring at her so humbly, as if he were praying to her, in that crashing, creaking dizzy restaurant. She had an impulse then, at that instant to get up and go to him and say, "Take me out of this—you and I are the most unhappy people on earth"; but she didn't.

It was a pity. She ought to have known better than to have stayed on there getting all flushed and foolish on Mr. Daw's champagne. She ought to have known that this Jew, whom she regarded as dirt under her feet, but found somehow rather attractive, was dangerous, would turn melodramatic, would not understand, once he had held her all drowsy and befuddled in his arms out on the deserted deck, that he would think he had some claim on her. It was dreadfully stupid and rash and horrid of Bidy to go on sitting there beside Ikey, getting tipsy, with her lovely round chin resting on her hands, and refusing to look at poor Perky, who was frowning and getting more and more wretched. She didn't care about Perky's feelings any more. She didn't care about anything or about any man. She didn't even care in the least about herself, and this big black Jew with the beautiful brown hands was rather exciting, at any rate now when the world was sliding, sliding, looping the loop, and so she sat on there letting Ikey Daw look and look at her, until the restaurant was empty. She had just enough sense to say abruptly when they left the table, "Don't leave me, Perky," but there were more drinks and a piano in Gussy's

cabin, and soon she had forgotten all about Perky's being anyone in particular. They none of them seemed to be anyone in particular. They were merely four people, any four people, sitting in a swaying cabin with the wind howling outside and the Atlantic rolling away through the dark, and a voice wailing out coon songs, jazz songs, and hymns, songs about Moses and Elijah and Jesus, and one at last about "Lonesome Valley" that suddenly made Bidy want to cry—

" Go down in de lonesome valley
Go down in de lonesome valley, my Lawd—
Go down in de lonesome valley
To meet my Saviah there."

It was too awful. The room was suffocating. She would die if she stayed there another minute. She would simply die of drunken loneliness, sitting there with those people. She rose suddenly, staggered across the lurching floor, and was gone—with Ikey after her, while Gussy said in a tone of command to miserable hesitating Perky, "We'll go and find them, young man, as soon as I get my coat." Gussy was as sober as he was, but it took her some time to select the coat she wanted, and when they got out on the windy deck, there was no one—and that too was a pity. Even Gussy wasn't very clever that time.

It was two o'clock when Frederika, doubled up in her narrow bed, with her knees braced on one side of it and her feet against the other, heard Bidy's blurred voice saying good-night to Perky in the corridor, and heard Perky answer her in a tiny compressed furious whisper. She got up quickly, flung on her dressing-gown and opened the door. "What is it, Perky?" He was going dejectedly down the white corridor. He turned and looked at her.

Frederika stiffened.

"Oh—not again—not with those people?"

He smiled rather miserably, but quizzically too, as if bitterly and gently amused; amused to the point of despair. "It's all right, my dear," he murmured. "Just put her to bed. It's jazz and booze makes the world go round, so they say in the U.S.A."

She found Bidy sitting on her couch, white as wax and helplessly staring at the broken bottles, the roses, the slippers, the books on the floor. Her eyes were glassy, and everything in the cabin was sliding and scraping and jiggling about, and the air in the cabin was contracting and swelling and sucking at Frederika's ears. Beyond the little lighted cabin was the black gale, the monstrous sea. And there was a terrible soft strong rapid thudding of wind against the wall as if it were trying to get in, to get at them. Now the cabin was rising up. It hung suspended, and shivered as if transfixed on a pike, and all the great long hull of the ship quivered, hung breathlessly still, then with a final shuddering spasm dropped down, down.

Bridget tried to lift her heavy eyelids.

"That you, Freddie?" she asked, with a silly smeared smile, and Frederika, suddenly filled with a bitter fury of hatred for men, for women, for all men, and women, for herself and terrible Bidy whom she loved more than herself, flung herself on her knees sobbing, "Bidy—how could you? What's to become of you! What's to become of us all?"

Ikey Daw pacing the deck thought that he knew. In spite of Gussy's warning, he couldn't help judging Bidy as he would have judged any of those famous beauties of the film world. He had a movie mind, and was fond of saying that New York had Paris beaten to a frazzle for

immorality. And so now he said to himself, "She'll go wild in New York—and I'll see that she does—and she'll get lost there. I'll see that she gets lost too!—so that the Joyces and that nasty little fella with the squeaky voice can't find her. As for Gussy, if she comes butting in again I'll know how to fix her."

But he didn't understand even Gussy—and he was of course all wrong in his calculations. He knew nothing of the long chain of small linked events which bound Peter Campbell and Frederika Joyce and Bidy Prime inextricably together.

PART II

CHAPTER I

NEW YORK was feeling particularly bumptious that winter, and particularly fit. It crouched by the sea, its stone lips sucking the Atlantic, its belly deep-bedded in the rocks of Manhattan, and planned to lord it over the world. Looking down on it from an aeroplane you could see its steel-ribbed tail spread out along the Hudson river, and the tail, animated by the current of its iron traffic, seemed to wag as if with a mammoth impulse of satisfaction and of greedy anticipatory pleasure.

Viewed from a distance the city was strangely beautiful. The sun shining on its horny spiked helmet gilded the slim towers of its leaping buildings that had once spurted up out of the rock, geysers of stone and steel, and were now erect, petrified in the electric air. They looked ephemeral in the swimming light. Cutting the azure sharply, ripping holes in the pale canopy of heaven, they nevertheless were frail as phantoms. It seemed as if in a moment they might vanish, that if you closed your eyes an instant they might be gone when you looked again. There was something incredible about the place. The bright blue glinting water round it was all alive, ruffled by the wind and busy with shipping, but the city rose up into the air, silent, motionless, as if abandoned; as if it were a shell, empty; or a dream, substanceless.

Gazing, one was convinced that some superhuman agency had been at work here. It seemed impossible that men could have erected the smooth walls that were climbing the sides of the firmament and remained unsupported, ladders gigantically and lightly leaning against the ether.

But of course that impression was an optical delusion, a trick of windy sunlight and glittering sea-mist. As you approached, the arrogant profile dissolved and broke up. You saw that the buildings were solid, and that the place teemed with tiny black creatures no bigger than midgets, and you heard a muffled roar rumbling in the monster's chest. Unsightly lumps and bumps and scars appeared on its body. It was revealed wallowing in a rubbish heap of what seemed to be packing-boxes, hen-coops, garbage-tins and untidy waste of all sorts. The impression was that the ashman hadn't been along for some time, that the rag-picker and the pedlar of old iron was missing the chance of his life, and that really these long-necked sky-scraping beauties were very messy about the feet and generally careless of their appearance, for they were plastered all over, but especially round the waistline, with the most terrible tawdry trimmings, trinkets, brooches and belt-buckles of cardboard and iron and tin, that bore huge letterings and pictures, some in glaring colours.

The truth was that the place was in a turmoil of disorder. It was growing so fast that it was bursting through its clothes. We have caught it at the moment of crisis in a lifetime called adolescence. It was stretching and straining, flinging out its arms, kicking up its heels, expanding its chest and swelling the muscles of its biceps with loud guffaws of sudden hilarious delight in its own strength. It had no time to think of being neat and tidy, and why should it bother? Leave that to faded beauties

like Paris. Paris needs a hairdresser and a manicure. New York is young, boisterous, and intolerant of such cunning artifice. When it is old or middle-aged or grown up, it will begin to think about being well-groomed. Now it is going to enjoy itself.

The strange thing is that men should believe they built this city. There, at the base of a giant obelisk that recalls some ancient Egyptian monument, is a little black insect like a flea running about on its hind legs. That is a man, and there goes another and another. All those tiny black moving specks are men. Down along the bottom of the shadowy cañons between the steep cliffs of masonry where the wind swoops and shrieks pour endless swarms of them. They go scurrying, hurrying this way and that way along the asphalt bottoms of the streets, and dart in and out of openings at the base of the walls that rise up into the sunlight, and are shot up through vertical tubes inside the buildings, and spilling out of them scatter like buckshot along intricate corridors, filling the little compartments of the steel honeycomb; and when they want to go quickly from one building to another they step out on to elevated railways that whirl them through the air, or are shot down again into the bowels of the earth and rush about in trains through other intricate corridors underground, there being little ground surface left, since the buildings have absorbed it all; and certainly all those millions of little creatures are as busy as bees or ants, but to say that they lifted up these buildings on their tiny shoulders would be ridiculous. Engines did that. The force of steam and electricity did it. The dynamos and derricks did it. Men couldn't have done it. It needed machines a thousandfold more powerful than men to do this. But the men of the city, the citizens of New York they called themselves, thought they were

doing it, and as the great towers climbed higher and higher they went wild with excitement, for they had dreamed of this, they had seen the city rising up in their dreams, and now there it was. "Look," they cried to each other, "see what we've done." And clinging like leeches to those steel structures, they were hoisted into the dizzy air. But the city broke away from them. It became something greater than they had dreamed, and different, and now it is only obscurely conscious of them as of a ferment in its hot electric blood. They run by hundreds of thousands up and down its sinews, they whirl and jig about in the tides of its enormous energy, they feed and nourish its nerves, repair its tissues, scurry and swarm in batches to this spot and that spot in its awful organism that is for ever growing, breaking down and being renewed; but it ignores them. They die by thousands daily in its stomach and are ejected daily from its great intestines. It takes no account of them.

They do not admit this. They have recently become aware of the terrific power of the town that is erupting in every direction, but they still believe that the city is theirs to fashion, mould and govern as they wish. In this they are deluded of course. The Mayor has formed a Committee to control the growth of it. Laws have been passed to check the freakish egotistical antics of the buildings that are jumping up all over the place, blocking each other's view, and getting in each other's way. A group of public-spirited millionaires have gone on the board of that new company called the Manhattan Development Company, formed for the purpose of creating order in the welter of engineering, of making streets behave themselves and of keeping the skyscrapers within bounds. The Mayor's Town Planning Committee and the Manhattan Development Company are divided into

opposing camps on the subject of skyscrapers. The whole population is in a fever over the subject. There are those who are enamoured of them and are all for building higher and higher ones, buildings of a hundred stories, two hundred, with gardens, terraces and playgrounds in the air; and there are those who hate them, who would chop their heads off; but really all their arguing and fussing is useless. The City pays no attention to the opinions even of its leading citizens. While they talk, wrangle, boast of it and criticise it, plan and scheme against it, it goes on growing skyward, and drawing to it with an irresistible magnetism the wealth and energy of the world.

Built by men in one sense, using them anyhow for its creation, but willing, out of its own gigantic impulse, to be, and becoming by means of machine power a monster, it has come alive in the building, has forged a brain out of the struggling travail of its growing, out of the groaning granite slabs hurled through the air and fixed there, out of the churned sandpaste that now cements these, and out of the fluid molten steel that, frozen into girders hard and smooth as needles, pins its buildings to the sky. It has a life now that is special and peculiar to itself. Dynamos of a thousand horse-power mark the beating of its pulse, and the sound of its breathing is the soft mysterious throbbing murmur of a million wheels grinding, turning, whirring in its breast, while herds of trains go shrieking and rushing in and out of its yawning flanks and shoals of ships churn up the waters of its harbour, and innumerable bells are ringing in its head, and horns hooting and whistles blowing; but all that clamour is soft, hidden, mysteriously muffled and absorbed into its being.

The voices of men and women and children are inaudible

to its ears. Other things, more important than the life-spasms of human beings, compel its attention. It is busy talking to other cities, older and wiser than itself perhaps, but more tired, not only London, but Paris, Berlin and Rome. It is laying down the law to them. It says: "I will have so-and-so. Thus and thus it shall be in the world. Cotton shall cost so much, and the bread you eat so much. I will give you raw cotton and wheat if you'll pay for them, but I will not take your steel or the cloth from your mills, or the silk spun from the cocoons of your industrious silkworms. I will make my own silk, my own steel, my own cotton cloth, and I don't want any more Italians or Poles or Russians spilt into my lap either, keep them yourselves. I am sufficient unto myself. Mind your own business and do as I tell you." And all this in whispers, all this is soundlessly whispered across the Atlantic. It is the *enfant terrible* among cities. It is only half grown, yet the air round its head is alive with a thousand hurrying excited messages, travelling like lightning through the ether from China, from the Orient, from Italy and Africa, and from little isolated helpless islands that have pearls to sell or bananas or coconuts. "Take our lovely coral, our shells, our sheep's wool, our trinkets. Buy! Buy! What will you give us?" they cry silently, sending out their voices along the waves of the air, and their words buzz round the conceited ears of New York like myriads of midgets.

And then there are all those other American cities to be kept in their places, especially the raw young upstarts of the west. Chicago is putting on side the whole time. Detroit, since it has become the breeding yard of the Ford car, is getting bumptious. Kansas City shows signs of intolerable pride. It has built itself an Acropolis as good as the old one in Athens, it says, or better—not

Athens U.S.A., you hobo, Athens in Greece over there round the corner of Italy's boot-heel. All these cities are building American towers. There isn't a single self-respecting town in the United States that doesn't cherish the hope of building, some day, sooner or later, the highest skyscraper in the world.

The "Chicago Tribune" Tower Competition has made a great stir in America, and caused a lot of heart-burning in the bosoms of cities. When that newspaper announced that the "Chicago Tribune" One-hundred-thousand-dollar competition, the greatest architectural contest of history, would result not only in the achievement of what the "Tribune" desired, namely, the most beautiful office building in the world, and not only would give Chicago an architectural gem of the first water, but would add permanently to the resources of the modern architect a mine of new ideas, and stated furthermore that this was the first time in the history of America that any corporation, civic, commercial or political (and the "Tribune", please note, was all three) had recognised the importance of a commercial building as a force for beauty and aspiration in the daily life of the American citizen, why, cities like Detroit, Kansas City, Denver and San Francisco got jealous. They said to themselves that the "Chicago Tribune" wasn't the only newspaper in the country, nor was Chicago the only town. Detroit especially, having recently harnessed very cleverly the water-power of the Great Lakes, was feeling a bit above itself, so that it was rather peeved by all this, and made up its mind to out-tower the "Tribune" tower, and out-Woolworth New York's Woolworth building. And at just about the time when the Victor Joyces were due in America it was being rumoured in New York that Detroit was going to build the world's tallest skyscraper, rising eighty-five stories

into the air and attaining a height of eight hundred and seventy-three feet.

Now New York didn't like this. It simply could not tolerate any city but itself possessing the world's tallest skyscraper. It got mad (that is American for angry), and the more it thought about Detroit's impertinent boast the madder it got and the more determined to build, however high Detroit's tower turned out to be, a building much higher still.

And so with all this rivalry going on in the cities of America, cities which could only express themselves, their ideals and their ambitions in buildings, in new railway stations, hospitals, museums, office buildings, and so on, it really was foolish of those little millionaires and aldermen in New York to talk about limiting the height of skyscrapers. One can imagine the city simply laughing at them, if indeed their talk attracted its attention for a moment. Probably it did, for it noticed most things. It had a thousand ears and eyes. It could carry on any number of conversations at the same time, and took a capricious interest often in the most trivial things.

Ever since the *Aquitania* left Southampton it has been talking to her, for instance, and finding out about her cargo, her passengers, and so on. It knows already that Victor Joyce has been seasick and that Ikey Daw has been buying cotton in Louisiana, May wheat in South America and beef in Australia. It is interested in these people, especially in the activities of Mr. Daw, but it pays no attention to Peter Campbell, who is hurrying through its Grand Central Station like a little black beetle, scurrying along in the midst of a swarm of beetles with his tiny legs twinkling over the vast white floor of the railway station.

And yet Peter Campbell was the champion and de-

fender of the skyscrapers. He was the man above all others who pleaded for them and he had the notion in his head of remodelling nothing less than the whole town. He had a colossal impudence. He kept saying that New York was a mess. He wanted to grapple with the city, to take it in his hands and shape it and carve it, to pull it down and rebuild it the way it ought to be. He was the centre of a group of young architects who wanted to design on a single unified plan the whole of Manhattan Island and the shore of Hoboken. He had a design in his office of the shore line of New Jersey, which would make the Grand Canal in Venice look like thirty cents. For a year now he had been laughing and coaxing the Presidents of Railway Companies and Banks and Consolidated Rubber and Oil to get together and let him and his friends design their city for them. He had been getting at the Mayor's Town Planning Committee and the Board of Estimates and half-a-dozen real estate corporations and engineering corporations, and been to the great G. W. Gluckstein Real Estate Investment Banking Corporation that had financed more big buildings in America than any firm in the country, and of which Ikey Daw again was a director; and had paid visits to the New York Supply and Inspection Company and the great new electric generating stations on the east river. And he had been arguing and pleading with old Josh Billings and little Sam Bottle and Bill Jennings, who were on the board of the Manhattan Development Company, and with his father-in-law John Jamieson. All winter, spring and summer he had been going up and down the town with drawings and sketches bulging his pockets and ideas bursting in his head. He wanted to scrape away all the little gimcrack packing-box buildings round the bases of the great towers. He saw the city in his imagination as

a mammoth grove of beautiful towers, five hundred, a thousand feet high, rising from the smooth ground with wide spaces between them. The idea of raised sidewalks and interweaving streets at different levels didn't appeal to him. He said it was stuffy. Space and light, with great separate towers and clusters of towers rising precipitate and terrible from the ground, was his idea. All they had to do, he argued, was to get together, adopt a plan, begin at the bottom end at the Battery and work up town with a steam shovel, shovelling away the rubbishy streets, and in twenty years or fifty there'd be a city rising up from the shore of the Atlantic that would be more wonderful than Thebes or Babylon. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon? "Gee!" he shouted, with this newly-invented process of arc-welding they could build sky-scrappers two hundred stories high, and have such gardens in the air as no ancient sybarite of a potentate had ever dreamed of. He could talk the hind legs off a donkey. He would talk and talk till a gleam would flicker across the sagging faces of the dyspeptic Bank Presidents, until the owners of real estate would begin to laugh and take notice. It was as if, looking at his intensely serious blue eyes, dark with excitement, they caught a glimpse of his vision, and were tickled by his daring. Well, why not? Didn't they own the town? Couldn't they do what they liked with it? No more little streets choked with traffic. Plenty of room for motors on the smooth open asphalt spaces, and everybody could live out of town who didn't like being in the air. Something had to be done, that was certain. The city was getting out of hand, running away with them.

He had at last persuaded the Directors of the Manhattan Development Company to let him show what he could do with a lot between Xth and Nth. The Middle

Western Railway had been planning a new Railway Station, the Consolidated Rubber people had been thinking of a new office building, Sam Bottle had wanted a monument to the great industry of Bottle's Hooks and Eyes, and the "American Eagle Newspaper" wanted a tower. Now these concerns had got together and agreed to allow him to design a group of buildings which would be one building, and house them, railway terminus, newspaper plant, rubber tyres and all.

Sam Bottle, who had made a great pile of money out of hooks and eyes, had sent for him in June and said to him:

"Now see here, young fella—I wanna build the finest building in New York and the highest, the highest, you understand, and I want you to do it for me. It's gotta stand out. It's gotta make a brand new bump in the skyline. It's gotta be the highest building on earth, higher than your radio building, and all built out of hooks and eyes, Bottle's hooks and eyes, get me, boy?"

"But look here," Peter had said. "Hold on a minute. I've got another idea. I've got a grand scheme. Listen. Will you? What's that mess doing down there? Look at it. Why build one skyscraper? What's the good of that? Why not build the whole of that shore there? You could if you wanted to, you and Ike and a few others. I tell you, you guys ought to get together and make this town what it ought to be, what it's bound to be, the greatest city that ever was built by man, the monument of a new civilisation, New York, the rubber-necking skyscraping beauty, the lovely steel giraffe that sticks its head up through the sky and winks at the angels."

And little Sam Bottle, his cherub face beaming, had nodded, had been tempted, had gone strutting about excitedly on his plump, short, wobbling legs in his vast

gleaming mahogany office that was like the cabin of an airship, with the seagulls dipping and swooping round the great plate glass windows, and had surveyed the harbour spread out far below him, all ruffled and gleaming and crowded with ships, so crowded with ocean liners and tugs and little white yachts and fat floundering ferries that you could scarcely see the water. And he thought, did Sam Bottle, mild and innocent millionaire by accident, with his plump pink face smiling round his big cigar, that this young fella had got hold of a bright idea and that as he, Sam, owned a good bit of that town and that harbour he would help him, and the love-light came into his little pop-eyes as he looked down and out over Manhattan.

Josh Billings had been more difficult. He was old and grumpy. Peter had paid repeated visits to the gloomy old house on 72nd Street, and had at last brought him round. It was agreed, subject to Ikey Daw's finding a part of the money, that they would combine, let Peter cart away the twenty or thirty little brick houses cluttering the lot and the half-dozen gimcrack buildings standing on it, and build there a block sky-scraper. He had shut himself up during the month of August, and emerged with designs and a set of drawings that had been approved at a meeting in September. They weren't, of course, finished, and no definite undertaking had been given. The Directors couldn't decide finally without Ikey Daw, since they would look to him to underwrite a good part of the capital; but they had told Peter to go ahead, and Mr. Jamieson, driving away with his excited son-in-law from the meeting, had said he guessed it would be all right. "But you keep calm, Pete. Don't you get so excited," he had added. "You'll get sick if you let yourself get so excited." And Peter had answered, trying to sit still on

the grey cushions of the big Packard car that whirred them up town between the precipitous walls of Fifth Avenue:

"I know, sir, but I can't help it. You see, it's not me, I'm nothing. It's the city. The city's got me all right, and it's using me, but I've got it by the throat now myself. Look out there. See those shop windows, those walls, the line against the sky ahead of you? This street's changing as we look at it. It's alive. It's got a life beating and squirming in it. It's like a boa constrictor, and I'm going to wrestle with it. Gee whiz! what a chance."

Unfortunately his friends, those other young architects, thought he talked too much. They got peeved, and said he was too damned fond of blowing his own horn. When he was carried away by an idea, it was true that he forgot to be modest and tactful. They had dropped away from him when his block skyscraper was accepted. And his partners were getting fed up. The office had been plunged into confusion all summer because of that building. Their best draughtsmen were constantly being taken away from other jobs to pull Peter's drawings together. If the thing came off it would be a great coup for the firm, certainly, but they weren't too confident. They had seen Campbell's schemes come to nothing before this. In the meantime there was the sky-scraper the Chicago people wanted him to build for them. He'd got to secure that contract whatever happened. He had left the office that morning on the run, breathless, with ten minutes to catch the train, and very worried because he would be in Chicago on Tuesday when Ikey Daw arrived from Europe. He was a little afraid of Ikey, who was none too friendly.

This was at twelve o'clock in New York and at twelve-

thirty on board the *Aquitania*, the middle of the same day which ended with Bridget Prime getting drunk on Mr. Daw's champagne. The identical moment was not quite the middle of her day, but exactly the middle of his, for the day was a spiral turning like a whirling funnel of light, moving westward and dividing the earth into two halves of light and dark, and as the clear arc of shadow slipped along the earth's surface, millions of people inside one edge of it dropped asleep like drowsy flies and millions of others stirred and rubbed their eyes and awoke. But of course in the star-swarm that was travelling the heavens, this spinning of the earth through day and night was too rapid to be visible. An eye watching the stars splutter, fizzle and go cold could not count the rotations of that little top. As for the building activity in New York, that would be less noticeable than the appearance of a slight feverish roughness, a tiny wart, on the side of the earth's face.

Nor would we, were we in the position of the great watching eye, notice Peter or distinguish him in the swarm of the railway station from the other beetles. He is quite tiny in the great marble hall under the high vaulted roof painted like the sky, and bespattered with gold stars. Compared with that building he is no bigger than a flea. We need, to observe him, the help of a microscope. We lean over the city that is teeming with his kind, and look through the glass. He is magnified now to the size in which he conceives himself and is conceived by others of his own species. We see him hurrying on in a scurrying mass towards the barred gates beyond which the long trains, like steel snakes, lie waiting in their dark cages. He has a soft felt hat squashed down on his head. There is nothing striking about him. He is running and breathless, as is every one else. He carries a leather case, banging

against his legs, and his brown coat is flapping, and as he bumps into a rushing figure on his right and is bumped into by another on his left, he laughs in a friendly sort of way as if he were friends with all that rushing crowd of jostling men. It seems a pity that he is in such a hurry, for he might be knocked down and trampled on, and although he is chuckling, although there is a reckless, gay, good humour about him, one can see that he is exhausted, that he is making a desperate scrambling effort. It is almost as if he were pursued, were flying for his life from the city, and as he glances swiftly back over his shoulder we catch a look of apprehension in his eyes. He seems to be afraid of something, someone, but he is not pursued, he is only looking at the station clock. Our spyglass is a miraculous instrument that puts us into Peter Campbell's life, adjusting our senses to his minute scheme of time. He has divided the swift flying instant of his life into infinitesimally small segments, first by eighty into years, and these by twelve into months, and the nine hundred and sixtieths by thirty into days, and these again by twenty-four into hours, and the hours by sixty into minutes, and finally each minute that is a fortieth millionth part of his instant of life again by sixty into seconds; and now looking, not at his watch, because he is in too much of a hurry to get it out of his pocket, but at the station clock, he tells himself that he has four minutes and a half to catch his train, time enough to send that radio to Gussie; for the whole machine of his world runs by clockwork, all its wheels fitting into this rigid little scheme of time, and he and all his brother creatures are obedient to it; and yet the scheme gives him no sense of security. He knows that at any moment the whole thing may go bust, and his allotment of time be snatched from him. His life is a whirling bubble. He agitates inside it. The prick of a

pin, and where will he be? On the wind, a speck. So he hurries frantically. To do what? Well, for the moment to catch his train.

He is aware of many things as he hurries through the crowd in the station. The flying instant in which he spins is immense. His mind whirls like a smooth-spinning air-wave travelling at an incredible speed. Pictures move swiftly across the diaphanous curtain of his memory. It would be impossible to describe all the sights, sounds, thoughts, that it is gathering into itself as he runs through the station. We haven't enough time to write these down, or enough paper. We must land him somehow on his train. We jump with him for an instant back into the dance hall in Harlem, full of black rollicking giants, where he was last night, and skip through the air into his wife's pretty skylit bedroom above Park Avenue and listen to her shrill complaining voice. But he does not listen, does not want to look at Adelaide. She gives him a headache. She fills him with a heavy, sticky, guilty compassion that is like glue oozing up in his stomach. He is impatient in her presence, and very gentle.

"I won't stand it any more, Peter. I simply can't stand it any longer. I shall get a divorce."

He can hear her shrill childish voice, see her sitting up in her bed, her gold-backed mirror in one hand, her powder-puff in the other. "Mother won't let me stand it any more, Peter, she says——"

"Oh, hell! Adelaide!"

Adelaide's image flicks itself off. He sees himself escaping from her, dropping down in the elevator to the street. He sees the city shoot up suddenly round him as he steps on to the side walk. There it is, towering above him. He feels it leaning over him, gigantic blocks of swaying masonry, for ever about to fall and crush him.

The city obsesses him. It produces in him a sense of acute suspense, of excitement, of exultancy, of suffocation, and he is aware of himself, minute, futile, impudent. "A flea on its hind legs beating the air"; so he sees himself.

He has swerved in the meantime to the right, is running down a corridor lined with glass behind which lights glow as in an aquarium, with flowers, fruits, and a thousand shining objects displayed behind the glass walls; and now he is writing out a message to Miss Augusta Green, s.s. *Aquitania*. "Dear Gussy, I must see Ike next week. Big idea. Please work it. Love, Pete." He shoves the slip of paper through the bars of a cage, with a crisp green-back bill, and is off again, running, leaving the message to wing its way through the wind and to find the exact right spot on the rolling Atlantic where the great ship is moving through a storm.

No more single skyscrapers. Only big blocks of them, and finally the whole city conceived in a single design. The mass looms, a vague shadow in his brain, beautiful as a bank of cloud. There's the skeleton of a building standing behind him. His attention darts out and back through the rushing crowd to where the monstrous open scaffolding of steel rises up like a spider, or like a gallows, and he sees clinging to its skinny arms, that spread out and up through the dizzy air with the blue sky showing through the gratings, little men with hammers, sticking like sucking leeches to the thin girders that bridge patches of glittering space.

One fell this morning like a drop of ink. They do sometimes. Scarcely anyone in the city noticed. Only the people near the spot on the pavement. He was a Swede. There's a big blonde woman somewhere, high up in a little room behind one of a thousand windows, with an apron over her head, rocking backwards and

forwards, and crying out in a strange tongue that she is alone and that God has forgotten her. Oh, hell! Why must he think of her? He had told Johnson his senior partner, had asked him to find her, but the head of his firm had refused firmly. The accident, he had said, did not concern them. It was the contractor's business. This had seemed to be true, but was it true? He was responsible for the steel skeleton. The great skinny gaunt horror had shot up into the air out of his brain. Soon it would be decently clothed with slick creamy cement. For him it was finished, and now that the builder had planted the root of it deep in the rock it was growing without him, and he, Peter, wanted to forget it. Still there it is, he cannot rid himself of the feeling that he is in some way responsible for the workman who fell like a plummet through the air, and whose spilt life made a grease-spot on the side-walk. And there will be others, since there is no end to this business of building. The side-walks will be smeared for miles with grease-spots. He is going to rebuild great slabs of the city. The block skyscraper is only a beginning. Holy smokes! what a chance! The city will rise up, slim and lovely in the sunlight. It will be controlled, its energy conquered, its body carved and compressed into a thing of incredible perfection, balanced and symmetrical. From the Battery to Grant's Tomb, each skyscraper will be a small stone in the mosaic. The masses will be measured by miles, and the façades along the east and west rivers as you slide past them will unfold like a scroll, a banner of stone carved and cut into intricate and curious patterns to catch the light of sunrise and sunset. Oh, God! Oh, God! He is bursting with the conception.

He will talk to his mother about it. He will describe it to her, and in the telling it will take shape, and he will

watch its image shining far away in the distance in her fierce blue eyes that are sunk in her worn gentle stubborn face. She is expecting him, she has had his telegram. "Sweetheart I am coming by the Albany express. Will spend the night on way to Chicago. Love, Peter."

Her thin cheeks flushed as she read it, and the blue light in her eyes flared up shining out of her withered face; and she ran out to the shed at the back of the house calling in her light, thin, quavering voice: "Chris, Peter is coming. Isn't it grand? Peter is coming to-day." And Chris had lifted his pale narrow head in the shadowy tool-shed, where he was bending over a table all covered with bits of wood and metal, and giggled joyfully, biting his nails in an ecstasy. He was pleased too, although he did not know how to say so, and she knew that he understood; so she stood there in the door of the tool-shed holding the telegram in her hand, with the wind whipping the strands of her soft, sandy-coloured hair into her eyes. One did not notice that it was going white. There were still reddish-gold glints in it. One couldn't think of her as old. She was so spry, so light on her feet. She had always been a skinny little thing, as obstinate as a mule and as fierce as a lion, but a wisp—puff—you could blow her away.

She was waiting for him now, as a girl might wait for her sweetheart. They were sweethearts really, though she tried to hide how much she cared for him. But she wasn't much good at pretending. He knew that she was thinking of him now with a terrible intensity of longing, and imagining very accurately what he was doing, how he was running that minute to catch his train in New York, and would almost miss it. She knew, and he knew that she knew. She could see him, and he could see her, in her checked blue and white apron, beating up the rich

brown batter in a yellow bowl to make the sticky gingerbread for him that he liked so much. He can see her quite plainly, her worn hands working, and her sweet withered lips puckered, and he can see the little dark narrow house she lives in, with the iron-railed front steps and the fanlight over the door. It is surprising how much he can see, for he looks, as we have said, like a beetle hurrying on in a swarm of beetles. One would suppose that he could see scarcely anything, running along so close to the ground. His view is of course grotesquely distorted and limited by crowding obstacles, his ears are drumming with the confused roar of the city, yet he thinks he understands something of this blessed show, the world, and he dares to want to understand everything; and somehow in the stress, in the overpowering confusion, his spirit does spread its wings, leaps free, goes skimming above the resounding roof of the railway station, darts out between chimneys, through the smoke, and sees those other cities across the Atlantic with which New York is carrying on conversations, remembers them, revisits them, drops jubilantly into a gay French café, pauses an instant over a heap of old broken Roman stones, compares quickly an arch there with a design that he has with him folded in his bag, and is aware of ships coming towards him across the ocean, and of one ship, to which he has just sent a radio; and suddenly, for the flicker of an instant, a face appears to him, disdainful, arrogant, and slightly haggard, and he is aware of an emotion that is a response to something or to someone, someone who is signalling to him out of the past or the future, out of the beyond anyhow; and for a second he feels an exquisite suspense, as if he were on the verge of a discovery, but he does not make the discovery. The moment slips past him with its secret.

"Middle West Express. Albany first stop. Ticket, sir, porter, sir."

The station clock shows him that he has a minute and a half left to get on his train. He drops his suitcase. He fumbles for his ticket. He mutters, "Now where the hell——" A large negro in grey uniform, very placid and sleepy, picks up his bag and says softly, "In yo' hand, sah."

"Well, I'm damned!" Peter looks up into the big black face and grins. The negro grins back kindly. A great gentleness emanates from him, and a mournful good humour. He is a dark, comforting refuge in all that crowd of white men. He seems to be dreaming, of cotton fields, perhaps, and possum hunts and little fat piccaninnies tumbling in the sun. There is a warmth round him and a great laziness, almost the drone of bees is audible. Peter relaxes. He gives himself up to the care of the black man who shepherds him through the gate.

"Parlah car, sah? Numbah six? Yes, sah."

They hurry down the dark underground platform where the train is waiting. The train is ablaze with light. The negro lounges along with great smooth lazy strides. Peter runs after him, past the lighted windows in the steaming, queer-smelling gloom. The train-conductor is lifting his arm, is raising his whistle to his lips.

"Heah you ah, sah." Peter tumbles into his car. His negro shepherd tosses his bag after him, his big brown palm closes on a silver coin, his white teeth flash out in the darkness as the train moves off, a snake sliding out of its cage. Peter, dropping into his green plush chair, takes off his hat and mops his forehead.

Suddenly he felt exhausted; and as the train drew out of the station closed his eyes. Things round him went

dark and vague. He drifted into a state that was between sleeping and waking, but quite different from either. He remained aware of the other passengers in the rows of swivel chairs, of the swaying of the car, the smoky steam-heated air and the throbbing rushing noise of the train, but as if these things existed in a world that was quite separate and intangible. Another kind of space surrounded him. His ghost feeling, he called this state of mind, and with a sigh, both pleasurable and apprehensive, he let himself slip into it.

She came, immediately. She always did when he relaxed in that way. Not that he went out of his wits and thought that she was really there. It wasn't anything silly like an hallucination. It was simply that his memory, which seemed to be saturated with her personality, recreated her for him whenever it got a chance, so faithfully and with such freshness that it gave him a feeling of pain in his side, as if his heart were contracting slightly and hurting him.

"I wonder where she is now," he thought. "In England, I suppose, in the country somewhere, or maybe at sea. She is connected with the sea and with ships, but not ordinary ships. A pirate ship maybe. Yes, that's the sort of thing. Some buccaneer went off with her once—in the old days, in one of her other incarnations—some guy like Captain Kidd. She would like that. She would have been happier then—in that adventurous age—than she is now."

He stirred, and opening his eyes looked out of the window. The train was whirling him along the Hudson River. He saw the flaming October woods crowning the Palisades on the other side of the great grey-green stream, and close to him a yellow road dotted with skimming motors, and a shifting, slipping litter of billboards,

chimneys and roofs; but he saw these things as if he were absent-mindedly watching a camera-film unwind itself, while in another way he saw, close, palpable, and quivering with an intense vivacious reality, the face of that distant woman whose being seemed to have the power to obliterate such objects as the bald heads and hats showing above Pullman seats.

Five years ago in Vienna he had sat behind her in the stalls at the Opera. That had been his great chance. He had been able that night to watch her for three hours, and although most of the time the auditorium had been shadowy and he had only for a moment, when she got up to leave the theatre, looked full into her face, still, it had been enough, enough to last, and to make him feel that he knew her. There was something slightly Mongolian about her face, the long slits of the black eyes, the broad cheek bones. The large pearls in the tips of her ears had glinted, and when she talked one caught a glimpse of sharp white teeth. Her hair was dense on her small head, like a close dusky hood. He could model it now if he tried. Some day he would model her bust, placing carefully that little haughty head on its long throat. She held herself like an arrogant black swan.

But her voice was almost a man's voice. She had talked during the entr'acte to the grizzled Englishman who was with her, and he, behind her, had listened as he sometimes listened to a piece of music that he wanted to remember accurately. He had not wanted to hear what she said, but how she spoke, which was much more important.

"Yes—I went over the *Tiger* before she was launched. Jimmy took me round—but I fancy we shan't build many more of that type. Oh, of course they'll put up the usual fight at the Admiralty. . . . No, Bob isn't going to stand

again. . . . Bidley's in Paris. . . . More beautiful than ever. . . . Yes—very odd—to be the loveliest thing in the world—and to pick the one man . . .”

He had listened and memorised well. Now, in this train rushing up the wide valley of the Hudson, he heard again her low, husky voice, the short, slightly hoarse periods, the terse emphasis and clear enunciation.

He frowned slightly. The negro in a white jacket, wanting to ask him what he would order for lunch, hesitated by his chair. Peter did not notice. “I wonder if she will ever come to America,” he was saying to himself. “She must come. All this is so darned queer; it must be magic.” He half closed his eyes.

“When will you come?” he asked, silently and deliberately, of someone a thousand miles away, whose name he did not know.

CHAPTER II

THE Radio Building, Brown, Johnson and Campbell, Associated Architects, was the very latest thing in skyscrapers a year ago. It isn't now. While I write, other buildings are going up that will put it in the shade, and there is a rumour that a rival firm is going to build just behind it a building that will make it look quite insignificant. But it had its picture in all the papers last year, and was still the talk of the town, having created a sensation in the architectural world and put the noses of all the other sky-scrapers out of joint. It was one of the sights of the city, the pivot of char-à-banc tours, rivalling Bronx Park, the John J. Jamieson house on Fifth Avenue, and the streets of New York's Chinese quarter. It was so strange

that a lot of people felt uncomfortable at the sight of it, and said it was ugly. What they meant was, of course, that it inspired terror. It was the awful logic of its perpendicular lines that did it. The effect was of an almost unbearable concentration on a single idea, upward movement, aspiration, suspense, whatever one called it. The walls that seemed to rush skyward inspired the breathless feeling that one has when one is being driven at a terrific speed. Looking, one was hoisted up suddenly by the neck and flung with a twang into the blue. And so great was the power of this impression that, standing opposite the building at a distance across the iron tangle of Century Square and watching the tiny *char-à-bancs* come round the corner of its base and stop while a minute man shouted inaudibly through a megaphone to the occupants of the car, one wondered why those small figures leaning back to look up didn't all fly out of their seats and go spinning up the slim flank of the compelling building towards the distant, hypnotic, inaccessible tower.

Its profile was stark. The series of five shallow setbacks seemed not to break the precipice of its sides. Nothing broke up that effect of height. The window reveals were shallow, thin horizontal lines, submerged between streaming vertical piers of marble. The whole edifice had the delicacy of a nude. It appeared to be almost unornamented, but cunningly modelled and cut carefully as a stone-cutter would cut a beautiful fluted column. Indeed, it was clear that it had been conceived and handled in its immensity as a single pillar. It was feminine and changeable. I have seen its white tower at sunrise so beautifully flushed with pink that it seemed to be made of porphyry, and towards evening the shadows seemed to drape it in vertical folds of gauze, while on a gloomy day against a steel sky it stood out, naked and

haggard. But it was, of course, most beautiful at night against the dark, when Peter's flood-lighting streamed over it to make it translucent as ice. It reminded one too, somehow, of a silver trumpet. One could imagine a call like that of Wagner's Valkyries sounding from the throat of its tower across the jagged roofs and clanging streets.

I am sure that Peter was secretly romantic about this building, but he never talked about it that way. When Sam Brown, his partner, said the Radio Building was the neatest, nattiest, waterproof, fireproof, airtight structure in the city, he laughed and added, "Sure, and thanks to Sam it's the dandiest automatic machine-run contraption in the city. Why, we've reduced the human element in that building to an absolute minimum, haven't we, Sam? It's a darn well-behaved building, let me tell you, and if the whole staff went on strike, it would wake up in the morning just as usual and wash itself and feed itself and get on with the day's job without bothering anybody. The elevators would start running themselves, the boilers would get their breakfast and start warming up the rooms, the telephones would begin switching themselves on to different calls, and every little machine in the place would bustle round and get busy without anybody to tell it what to do."

When Peter took you over the place, he would buck about the latest design signal-control micro-leveller elevators, controlled and run without the interference of the operator at a speed of eight hundred feet a minute, and transporting vertically a population of five thousand people (in the rush hours one left the ground every six seconds), and show you with pride the new type of fireproof, sound-proof, space-saving metal partitions of the offices, and tell you about the reinforced-concrete floors, fifty-six miles of Wild's light-weight battleship linoleum had been

cemented to them; and he would explain to you how the patent automatic telephone operated itself at night when the telephone operator had gone, switching itself on to one room after another till it got the man it wanted; and taking you down into the bowels of the earth he would show you the Utica Imperial Super-smokeless Mechanically-stoked Boilers that fed themselves with coal, and tell you how fifty million dollars' worth of heat was wasted in smoke every year in America, but that these boilers consumed their own smoke, converting it into heat; and he would chuckle when he explained the Johnson Dual Thermostat Temperature Regulator that controlled the heating throughout the building. This was a system controlled by clocks which automatically changed the heating from day to night conditions and back again, except that in rooms used during the evening the wise little machine maintained the day-time temperature until midnight; and if some careless person had left a door or window open somewhere in one of the thousand rooms and the machine called for more heat, there was a safety contrivance that gave warning when things got dangerous. "You see," he would say, "these appliances don't make any mistakes. It's only the human beings that make trouble and go round throwing cigarette ends and sneezing microbes and spitting." And he would keep on saying, "This is the very latest. Have you got this in London?" about one after another of the uncanny little labour-saving devices that so tickled his fancy. They really did thrill him. It wasn't bluff or a joke. Brown, Johnson and Campbell was a lively-enterprising firm, and it was Sam Brown's feeling for the romance of modern engineering that had drawn Peter Campbell to him rather than any sympathy along aesthetic lines. Nevertheless, in spite of his enthusiasm

for machine-craft, there were days when Peter felt that the pursuit of beauty through a howling mob of plumbers and plumbing jobbers, contractors, engineers, electricians, manufacturers, was too much of a good thing. Sam Brown had given himself up almost entirely to the engineering problems of his profession. He had specialised for twenty years in apartment houses, and had been one of the first to build the modern duplex apartments with their lofty gothic living rooms which made Peter shudder. Johnson had done one or two large hotels before the war. Both he and Brown had, however, caught the skyscraper fever, and been swept along after the war into bigger and bigger engineering propositions, until in 1920 when Peter Campbell joined them theirs had become one of the best-known firms in New York for the construction of office buildings. Johnson, who was somewhat pompous, had theories. He was fond of likening the modern architect's office to the headquarters staff of an army preparing a war campaign. He had a lot to say about team work and civic building and civic architecture. He said the conglomeration of New York architecture could be sorted out and analysed, and order brought out of the present chaos, by an intelligently-guided community effort. He was, theoretically, in sympathy with Peter's enthusiasms, but his private room in their offices was too much like a mediaeval chapel to inspire Peter with confidence. It contained little furniture beyond a Madonna in a niche, a painted chest and a piece of Genoese velvet. Whenever Peter went into it he felt singularly depressed and doubtful about Johnson's getting a move on with the Mayor's Town Planning Committee. As a matter of fact very little came out of that room except high-sounding phrases. It was from Peter's room, where an unholy confusion reigned, that most of the designs of the

firm fluttered forth, to be persuasively discussed and elaborately explained to clients by Johnson, and roughly but efficiently handled by Brown.

The three of them made, Peter thought, a pretty good combination. He was fond of both his partners, and it never struck him that they didn't perhaps like him as much as they seemed to do. It never occurred to him that a good many people disliked him because he was gifted and because a lot of other people loved him. He didn't understand people. He was too intent on the pursuit of his shy nymph through a welter of steel rails and Portland cement to find time to analyse human beings. He turned from his work which exhausted him to his friends for pleasure, for relief, for affection, and when he didn't get these things he was always surprised. Evidence of professional jealousy merely bewildered him. He didn't understand. He was incorrigibly naive. When he heard that some of his less successful colleagues were saying that his Radio Building wasn't original and had been too directly inspired by the design of the Finnish architect Elrid Sarinen, who had won the second prize in the "Chicago Tribune" Tower Competition, he had flushed, looked puzzled, and said, "Why, of course I studied his drawings. I learned a lot from them. Who could help being influenced? Aren't we all of us? Hasn't he given us a new understanding of the problem of high building?" But then suddenly he had become very dejected, and some days afterwards he had gone into Brown's room to ask him if he thought he really had copied Sarinen's design. Brown had been rough with him. "For God's sake, Pete, you're a regular kid. What's the matter with you? Don't you know yourself when you've done a good thing?"

But Peter had answered that no, he didn't know. How

could he? And he didn't even know where his ideas came from. Out of the blue, or maybe out of other people's heads, how could he tell? It was queer. He had funny dreams.

"Oh, stow it, Pcte. Don't be a jackass."

The men who worked for him, his draughtsmen, assistants, specification writers, and so on, believed in him. They thought there was nobody like Mr. Campbell.

He was a very different man in his office from what he was outside it. Even his appearance changed. He seemed bigger and older, and his face as he bent over his work-table appeared to be all forehead. His manner, too, was different. In his office he was always perfectly calm, extremely lucid in his exposition of problems, and even when preoccupied patient of interruptions. Sometimes, however, he would be so deeply occupied in thought that he wouldn't hear when one of his men approached him with a question. At such times, his high, curiously modelled forehead would show a deep vertical line going up from between his eyebrows, and his eyes would look blind.

And sometimes as he sat there in one of these brown studies his face would grow gradually brutish. It would become oddly smudged and thick. His forehead would seem to recede after a while and his nose to flatten, while his lips would appear to be pulled out and distended as if by some suction from outside. His face would then have the blind, hungry look of a very gentle sick animal suffering from an intense craving. He would look almost imbecile.

His assistants did not mind, perhaps because they were used to it, but his wife had once seen him like that, at a concert, and had been badly frightened, so frightened that she had shaken him violently and dragged him away from

the place, to burst into hysterical tears outside in the motor. Ever since then she had hated with a nervous terror what she called his artistic temperament. It was fortunate for his work that she never visited his office. His men looked after him. When he was in one of his trances they did not attempt to rouse him. However important the business in hand, they knew that it was less important than what was going on in his head. They had found this out by experience. Hard-headed, ambitious, skilled workmen, they nevertheless recognised the quality in him which set him apart from them. They would say to each other in matter-of-fact tones of respect, "Leave the boss alone, he's off." And they would wait until he suddenly came out of his abstraction and began swiftly to write down something, or reached for a sheet of paper to draw on. Sometimes the hour for closing the office would arrive. Then one of them stayed behind, and if he still went on sitting there until the last one had to catch a train home, he would call the elevator boy and explain that Mr. Campbell wouldn't be leaving just yet and was not to be disturbed till he was good and ready to go.

After some fuss he had got permission to go in and out of the building after hours. He would come there sometimes at night when the great edifice was deserted save for the Cable Company's offices on the ground floor and the newspaper that went to press in the cellar, and if he were in one of his intense creative moods, he would spend most of the night in his office.

His partners, Brown and Johnson, who were both older than he, were less impressed by his manner of working than his draughtsmen. They humoured him, called him a great boy, and seemed very friendly, but they resented his success both in and outside the profession. His fertile imagination was a great asset to them, but they

didn't altogether approve of him professionally. They said he was biting off more than he could chew, and that it was bad business to turn down orders for good-sized office buildings on the chance of getting something bigger. His first design for a block skyscraper had impressed them more than they would admit. They recognised that it was very daring in conception and that he had shown an amazing power in grouping his great towering masses, but they were not generous enough to say so, and had criticised it freely; and their criticism had had even more effect on him than they had intended. He had seemed quite discouraged. He was too easily discouraged about his work. It was the easiest thing in the world to take the stuffing out of him. He had said, "Well, I guess you're about right, you fellows. I guess it's no good," and had shoved the drawing into a portfolio. A week later he had begun a new one which, to their amazement, was even better than the first. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of ideas in his head. Small and slight and rather soft, with eyes like forget-me-nots, a skin that flushed and paled easily, and when he was not working a sort of hilarious gentleness that was very attractive, they could see that he was animated by a creative impulse out of all proportion to himself. And though they were decent enough men on the whole, they envied him not only this driving power of his but what they considered his luck in marrying Adelaide Jamieson, one of the prettiest girls in New York, and the daughter of the great steel magnate.

"It's all very well for you, Pete," they would say "to go rushing round wasting your time talking about block skyscrapers and the New Jersey shore line, we've got to work for our living."

He wasn't, they said to themselves, sufficiently "on

the job". He didn't have an eye to the main chance, he couldn't be trusted to nip in on a big thing and secure a contract, and he didn't make as much use of his father-in-law's influence as they expected him to do, and sometimes when his presence was most needed he would disappear for a couple of days and come back with a face like a cheese.

"Been bending the elbow, Pete?"

He would look remorseful then, with a queer, scared expression in his eyes that made them feel somehow sorry for him, and would set to work again furiously. It was impossible not to get on with him, he was so darned good-tempered, but they didn't consider him dependable, and when they lost the contract for the new Telephone Building through his missing an appointment with the Directors, of whom Mr. Jamieson was one, they lost their tempers too and went for him.

"Your little picnic has cost this firm a hundred thousand dollars, my boy. It was a cinch. All you had to do was to walk in and put the blame contract in your pocket."

"You want me to quit, is that it?"

"No, we don't want you to quit. We want you to get down on the job and stick there. We don't want any more monkey business, that's all. You've made a hit with your Radio Building, and what you've got to do is to capitalise your success. Understand? That building's a good enough advertisement to keep this firm busy for ten years, if we handle things with any sense. Now about these Chicago people—you hop on the train and get out there quick. They want you and nobody else. It's no good one of us going. It's up to you, and climb on the water-waggon, Pete, climb on and hang on. What's the matter with you? What's worrying you? If I had half your luck I'd drink ice water all day."

They weren't the only ones who thought that he failed to appreciate his good fortune in having married one of the prettiest heiresses in New York. Most of Adelaide's friends thought him hopeless as a husband. They said, sighing solemnly, that artists were always immoral. He had in some circles a very bad reputation. There were those, of course, on the other hand who maintained that Addy Campbell was a perfect fool. New York was full of adventurous women who were ready to take him away from her, but these unconventional and impulsive creatures were not in her set. In her set flirting was still the fashion and playing with fire the young matron's favourite pastime. What one asked of life was not love or an overwhelming passion, but excitement and a continual whirl of gaiety.

Addy had married Peter Campbell because he was talked about at the Coffee House as Peter the Wizard, the funny little cuss from Campbelltown. She knew what that meant. It meant that he was a genius. She had her authorities in whom she believed, just as she had her dressmakers. It was her habit to buy her hats in Paris, but her ideas she always procured at home. Indeed, she did not approve of the French type of mind. She said so emphatically after each annual visit to the Place Vendôme and the Rue de la Paix. The French were, she said, a degenerate and depraved race. He would sigh helplessly when she said things like that, smiling gently, in his bewilderment, at her babyish face. He did not understand her at all.

She had married him because he was a genius, and because she had taken it into her head that she wanted a genius of her own; and he had married her because she reminded him of a soft little downy chicken. He had thought that she was gentle and kind and cosy, like a warm,

fragrant, softly breathing baby; and she wasn't soft at all. She had only pretended to be, in order to get him for her own, and when she had got him she had found out that a genius wasn't at all what she had wanted, and she had very soon begun to say to him:

"You may be a genius, Peter, but I don't see that that's any excuse for not behaving like a gentleman."

But she was so delicious to look at, that it was almost impossible for a man who could see to understand her even when he was used to her ways. Her face might have belonged to a child of five. She had big round brown eyes, a curly pouting mouth, and enchanting dimples. Her small teeth were white and regular. She was bewitching when she laughed, and when she was thinking spiteful, mean little thoughts, her expression was particularly sweet and innocent. Her husband had come to fear that innocent wide-eyed gaze of hers, but he didn't in the least understand why.

Adelaide Campbell is a very curious young woman. I am not sure that she is a woman at all, biologically speaking. She doesn't seem to me to be properly made inside. It is doubtful whether she has any of the usual organs, stomach, kidneys, and so on. She would certainly be disgusted with me for mentioning such things in connection with her, and she is quite certainly frigid. Sex is to her an abomination. She hates everything to do with it, but she has exalted emphatic ideas about love. The memory of her honeymoon is a horror to her, and she hates even now going to bed with Peter. At the same time she wonders miserably why he doesn't love her more. What she would like best would be an endless courtship. The happiest months of her life were those when she was engaged to him. She can't help being like this, and she is unhappy in a blind, confused, restless

way. Her little brain darts this way and that way and whirls round and round like a small wheel, while she laughs and chatters, tosses her head, waves her pretty hands, rolls her pretty eyes. Her sweet, high, childish voice rises and falls, tinkling and gurgling and cooing and screaming, but she has found that she can hold Peter's attention by none of these little tricks. The only way to do that is to wound him, or burst into floods of tears and accuse him with sobs of making her unhappy; and this is easy because he does make her unhappy. She is perhaps in love with him, in a way, as a marionette might be, an elaborate doll, animated by a semblance of life, and conscious perhaps of missing something, of being condemned by its maker to go on for ever imitating gestures that have some meaning unknown to herself. There is something pathetic about this childish creature who is so perfectly made and has a machine inside her working her legs and arms, instead of such ordinary human organs as a heart pumping warm blood through her body.

I fancy that she could only exist in a country that is populated largely by Ford cars, McCormick Reapers and Singer Sewing Machines, and in whose great cities the chief articles of consumption would seem to be Wrigley's chewing-gum and Camel cigarettes. One has an impression sometimes, as one whizzes through those cities, looking up at the monstrous blazing signs in the heavens, that the Reapers smoke the Camels, the sewing machines chew the gum, while the Ford cars make the world go round.

In any case, when I think of Adelaide, I think for some reason of the great prairies and deserts, spotted all over with Ford automobiles instead of horses, of the long roads stretching across the vast continent, across mountains, and gigantic rivers and miles of yellow whirling sand, where instead of tea-houses and rest-houses

for men, there are to be found every few miles immaculate little buildings as neat as chemical laboratories, all enamelled in white and red, with beautiful pumps full of the beverages that thirsty automobiles require, oil, gasoline and so on.

In any old world, people would long ago have tired of Addy Campbell, but in New York she is one of the most attractive members of the younger set. They are like a gang of beautiful children, that crowd. They have the most elaborate and expensive toys, steam-yachts and motor-boats and sailing-boats, polo ponies and racing cars, and private wireless stations, and all sorts of talking and singing machines. I see them against the gayest and brightest of backgrounds. They fly in and out of New York by land and water. The blue sparkling waves of Long Island Sound are dotted in the summer with the white sails of their pleasure-boats. Their beautiful country houses are filled with sunlight. The young women are like flocks of white birds. They spread their little wings and fly off to polo grounds and tennis courts and long golden beaches, where they lie in the sand and swim about in the sparkling Atlantic like silver fishes. There is a tinkling of glass in the evening, the sound of singing mingled with laughter, the sound of the cocktail-shaker shaking, and always there is jazz going on, a syncopated jig that makes their toes tingle and sets them dancing. Dancing is the thing they do best and like best, and this throbbing rhythm in their muscles is the primitive thing in them. It has come to them from the negroes, those other black children who pervade their country with a lazy, rollicking savagery, a gentle guileless lust of worship of the sun, the earth, and a kind homely Father God who looks after His children. This dark race is humming, strumming, singing to them, singing

lullabies and hymns and wild throbbing dances, and its music, echoing and reverberating through the skyscraping walls of the city, carries them on up and down the country, wafting them to Palm Beach in the winter, jingling under the coconut palms, making the plam leaves shiver.

There is something unreal and fantastic about the lives of these young women. They seem to be quite separated from the tussle and struggle, the clang, the roar and the turmoil of their great bounding bursting country. The men work of course. They are all in business of some kind, stockbroking, banking, manufacturing. Some of them are plumbers, but super-plumbers. Others make bricks, by the million. They are lucky. Every morning they plunge into the clanging streets and into the romance of industry, plumbing and all the rest of it; but the women live in a sort of Arabian Nights harem, and know nothing about the real life of their men.

Adelaide was a very moral young woman, and although she belonged to a set where husbands and wives changed partners frequently, not many of her intimate friends liked the idea of living with a man until they were married to him. They talked a great deal about the love affairs of their friends, but rarely were any of them swept off their feet. How could they be? Why should they be? They didn't really understand that sort of thing. They liked to be admired and to feel their power over men. They even liked to be kissed and petted illicitly, but they preferred this to be done by moonlight, and when they had got all that and done all that, then they had got what they wanted, and they said American men were bores.

There was nothing inevitable about their actions. They remained cool and self-possessed and discontented, and never did anything that they thought unbecoming.

What it amounted to was that they were a lovely little bunch of Narcissuses, very much in love with themselves.

Addy had, in common with most of her friends, an obsession about getting fat. It was more important to keep thin than to have babies, fall in love, or even keep alive at all. Better starve than grow fat. They were constantly stroking their hips, these young women, and craning their necks to see their flat little behinds in mirrors. It was an unspeakable horror to them to think that they might, if they weren't careful, stick out behind. The highest compliment they could pay each other was to say, "My dear, you're as thin as a rail."

Addy saw herself in many attitudes. One of her favourites was that of the virtuous misunderstood wife. Another was the serious woman of culture, another was the cosmopolitan woman of the world, very much at home in Paris and London. Peter interfered with these attitudes. She was a little afraid of talking art and literature in his presence, though he never said anything unkind, only burst out into a yell of good-humoured laughter sometimes when she got something wrong, mixed up some one thing with another thing or used the wrong word. As for Paris, he had studied for four years in Paris, and was impatient when she talked about its being so gay, and of how one met simply every one from New York there, and he flatly refused to go with her on her annual trips. But the rôle of virtuous misunderstood wife he could not interfere with. She clung to that with a desperate grip. Had she ever looked at another man? Never. He couldn't deny it. He didn't. He knew that no one could call her a flirt, and she never touched a drop of anything to drink, nor so much as tasted a cocktail. She always said that nice men didn't get drunk when women were about, and

explained in London that the men of her set in New York were almost always sober, even at dances.

Since the law prohibiting the sale of liquor had been introduced into America a new kind of snobbishness had been evolved in New York society. It had become a sign of the greatest good breeding to be able to break the law and remain sober. Only the very few, the very very rich and the ultra-refined, had been able to achieve this. They alone could afford to drink champagne and burgundy, and they alone had a taste sufficiently educated to like wine, and besides the men of this set didn't have to work so hard, they weren't so dead-beat at night as to be speechless until they had had four cocktails. The working people, of course, didn't drink anything, but all the others, the lot between the very top and the bottom, could afford to drink only spirits, whisky and gin, and so on.

There were a few houses in New York where one could get the usual wines served at a London or Paris dinner-table. Mrs. John J. Jamieson's was one of them.

The Jamieson house, unlike Peter's Radio Building, was one of the sights of New York because it was not perpendicular, but spread out to cover as much ground as possible. It was only two and a half stories high, and was built round three sides of a large square courtyard, into which one entered through very fine wrought-iron gates. The gates were French, the stone it was built of was also French. Its many bland windows that looked out on Central Park were heavily and richly curtained with Venetian lace. Viewed from the Park, it looked modest and precious and discreet. Behind it, but at a distance, gigantic cubes were piled high into the clouds. The conductors of char-à-bancs, who shouted its name through megaphones to the visitors from Denver, Kansas City and Chicago, would say: "On the right is the palatial residence

of John J. Jamieson, President of the North American Steel Corporation, one of the swellest private residences of this city. That house is worth two million five hundred thousand dollars, without the trimmings. The ground it is built on is worth fifty thousand dollars a square foot. The side-walk in front is worth a damn lot too."

The remarkable thing about its gleaming interior was that it contained nothing American except Mr. and Mrs. John Jay Jamieson themselves. The servants were English, French, Irish, Italian and Swedish. The marble columns and stairs came from Carrara, the rugs came from France, Turkey and China, the mahogany doors came from England, also most of the furniture; although there was a picture gallery in Italian Gothic, a boudoir with Chinese lacquer walls, and a couple of French drawing-rooms hung with Gobelin tapestries.

Mrs. Jamieson liked everything that was foreign, and in particular everything that was English. She had an English butler, English footmen, an English chauffeur, an English secretary, and an English maid. It was said that her house was the only one in New York where distinguished English visitors found themselves properly valeted. She made a point of entertaining distinguished foreigners. She had travelled a great deal, and had selected from each country the best that it had to give, or rather to sell, and on the whole England had the most. She admitted the superiority of French cooking and French clothes, but she stuck to her Rolls Royce and her London bootmakers.

Adèle Jamieson had more sense than her daughter Adelaide. She had not always been rich, and had learned a thing or two in her youth in Kansas City, and then in Chicago and Pittsburg with John. John had been wont to call her his prairie lily, and she was still very pretty, with

her tall, slight, graceful figure, her soft, curly grey hair, and her small pink face. She was a very determined woman, rather hard under her light airy manner, and something of a bully. She had almost always managed to do what she wanted, but it had not always been easy. She had had to fight for what she wanted, and she had fought, until now she was recognised as one of the most brilliant hostesses in New York; and even in London, where she had several times taken a house for the season, she had been successful, and had entertained Edward VII. when he was Prince of Wales. She was clever enough to know that she didn't know much about anything, and she always consulted experts, so that she made almost no mistakes. It was recognised that she had a very good business head and it was rumoured that she had had a great deal to do with John Jamieson's early success. Now, of course, she did not have to bother about John. John was negligible, though she was very fond of him, and as one of the richest men in the world he fitted very well into her New York house, which contained a very good Rembrandt, an excellent Gauguin, a couple of fine Vandykes, a Carpaccio and a doubtful Botticelli. She had bought all these with the help of Joseph Duveen, who knew that the Botticelli was doubtful and told her so. John didn't know one from another. He took no interest in pictures, but he did not interfere. That was the great thing about John; he never interfered. He let her do just as she liked. Perhaps he was afraid of her.

But they were a very united couple all the same. And she had been true to John for forty years. She had never been tempted to be untrue, but if she had been tempted she would have resisted with the grim power of the Early Christians. Indeed, she was an Early Christian first, and a woman of the world second. She had

learned and studied how to be the second, but the first she had been born and could never get away from, however much she might want to hide the fact—and she did hide it for the most part quite successfully.

She was a very clever woman and could make people do pretty much what she wanted. She was clever enough even to know when she was wrong. She had wanted a house on Long Island twice the size of the one her son-in-law had built her, but she had let him have his own way, and admitted to herself that he had been right. It was much more elegant for a woman who could afford to build a house as big as Buckingham Palace to build a small one, quite perfect in every detail; and it was perfect. She had given Peter a free hand, and he had furnished it completely, even down to the Romney and Reynolds portraits in their oval frames and the spindly cabinets filled with old Wedgwood. All the same she disliked her son-in-law, and thoroughly disapproved of him. Sometimes she positively hated him for being so attractive, so gifted, so altogether desirable in a worldly way, and yet so immoral. But what exasperated her most was that he didn't *look* bad—but innocent. It was the weakness in him, the youthful sweetness, that something sensitive and innocent and vulnerable, that attracted and exasperated her antagonism and made her want to have him constantly at hand so that she could bully him and make him squirm. It wasn't by any means merely for Adelaide's sake that she kept on commanding him to dine with her, to stay with her in the country, to sit in her box at the opera. It was partly for the look of the thing, because her brilliant son-in-law might have been a feather in her cap had he been devoted and dutiful, whereas he was too often conspicuous in her entourage by his absence; but it was also because her dislike of him

and her disapproval of him attracted her to him, and her craving to make him and see him suffer drew her to him as love would have done. Her hatred and Adelaide's love for Peter were as a matter of fact much the same thing.

But Mrs. Jamieson, for all her fragile grace and languid, plaintive manner, was a much more vigorous woman than her daughter. That gentle way she had of leaning back and looking at you and smiling, her head a little to one side, her slim knees crossed, her long feather fan lazily moving, was all affectation. The soft shimmer, the effect of something tender wrapped in gauzy clouds of tulle, of something very easily crushed, all that was a disguise. She was as strong as a steel trap; and her delicate light voice, that too was affected. When she lost her temper she forgot and shouted suddenly like a fishwife; but she didn't often lose her temper.

She loved her daughter with a jealous, exclusive, animal passion, but she had no illusions about her. She thought her a fool and was glad of it, for she enjoyed running Adelaide's life for her, and would have found it annoying had the child had ideas of her own. She hadn't. She was content to take her ideas from her mother, so that all was serene, except for Peter. They were inseparable, those two, this mother and daughter, this Adèle and Adelaide.

There was simply nothing that went on in Park Avenue which Mrs. Jamieson didn't know about, and there was nothing she enjoyed so much as worming out of her child all the little intimate secrets of her troubled married life, and advising her how to behave to her husband, how to receive or rebuff his advances, for instance. How to hold a man, was the way she put it.

They had a long conversation on the telephone every morning, so that it was a matter of course for Adelaide

to ring up her mother as soon as Peter left her that day for Campbelltown.

She was very pretty to look at on her lacy pillows, with her tousled brown curls spread out round her childish face. The brilliant autumn sunlight streamed into her bedroom through the rosy taffeta and frilled white organdie curtains, on to all the shining costly things on her dressing-table, the gold-backed hair-brushes, the gold-mounted scent-bottles, the scattered jewels. Her voice was plaintive and sweet as she talked into the telephone receiver.

"Is that you, Mother darling? Did you sleep well? No, not a wink, I was too miserable. Yes, he's gone. No, he won't be back for your dinner on Wednesday night. Yes, I told him how you felt about it. Yes, I did. I said I simply couldn't stand it any longer. Yes, I said that this was the end. No, not cross. But, darling, he simply didn't pay any attention, not even when I cried. He was playing with the Peke most of the time. Yes, he did seem a tiny bit ashamed. Yes, a little bit sorry, but he didn't really mind anything but one thing. I told him I'd written to Mrs. Campbell, that I thought she ought to know. Yes, because of his father. That's what makes it so awful. Yes, he minded that. He looked quite scared. Well, so am I. I'm simply scared to death when he starts drinking. What do you think will become of him? Do you think I ought to try to stand it a little longer, for his sake? Oh, Mummy darling, I'm so unhappy. No, I've nothing to do this morning. I thought we might go and look at that collection of Wu's. Oh, yes, he kissed me good-bye. What did he say? Nothing much. He was in a hurry. Oh, you know, Sam Bottle and Josh Billings and those railway people. He said he had to see them before he left. But darling, he's always

in a hurry, I can never get him to talk seriously. He just says 'all right' and looks worried for a minute and then goes off, and I hear him laughing with the elevator boy. No, there's not another woman in New York who would put up with it, but you see I'm so worried about him, so afraid if I do that he'll go all to pieces. After all, I have some influence. Yes, let's have a good talk. In an hour. All right, Mother dear."

She had leant back on her pillows, a little frown wrinkling her forehead. What she wanted was not to lose Peter but to keep him, and make him suffer, so that he should realise her power. It was necessary to do this for some reason that had to do with her opinion of herself. As long as he escaped her, her opinion of herself was damaged, and that was unbearable. She was not really frightened by his drinking. She merely thought it disgusting. Had she understood what Amanda Campbell understood, she would perhaps have had the courage to take Peter away, out of New York, she might have packed up and gone to live maybe on a ranch somewhere, she might even have stopped nagging, stopped saying cutting, exasperating things to him; but how could she understand? Even if Peter had tried to tell her, she wouldn't have known what he was talking about; and he didn't try. He merely sat there, silent under her jibes, his high, open forehead flushing crimson, his blue eyes going dark, and dumb like an animal. And she was not really jealous of the vulgar women he went about with, because she did not believe that he preferred them to herself. To have thought of that actress, that awful Gussy Green, as a rival involved a flight of imagination that was beyond her. She did not believe that he could be untrue to her, and it had never occurred to her that he might want her to divorce him, might be relieved and glad if she carried

out her threat. She believed that he loved her and that she would ruin his life by leaving him. She was bound to believe this, because of her opinion of herself, which was cemented firmly, like a hard rock, into the centre of her little being. It had been suggested to her ever since she was born that she was something rare, something priceless, something to be coveted and cherished and adored, and so she considered herself in this light. And Peter, of course, gave her no real reason for thinking that he did not love her. He was never cross, never rude. That sweetness of his was there for her to bask in if she would. He almost always came home ready to be affectionate, and he tried to be interested in her chatter even when he was dead-beat. Often he was charmingly attentive, and when she met his advances with a snub he always looked surprised and disappointed, as if every evening he expected to find her different from what she eternally was. His only revenge was to go away and enjoy himself, as she put it, somewhere else, getting drunk perhaps with some of his low friends. He never, she remarked to herself proudly, drank at home.

She did not know enough to be really jealous, but it hurt her vanity badly that her husband should not be abjectly devoted as husbands ought to be; and to satisfy her vanity she had worked out a very pretty explanation of his indifference. She was persuaded that she appealed to all that was best in Peter, and that she must save him from that low brute, his other self. The low brute she identified in some obscure way with the artist, with that imponderable something in him that was so frightening, that made him moody and queer, that she had seen once transfiguring him; and her idea, in order that she might save him, was to make him like other men. So she had begun her nagging. She was continually urging him now

to take exercise, and remarking that he was soft, that he would soon be growing a tummy. She was continually holding up to him as an ideal the type of sporting Englishman who hunted, fished, shot grouse, and kept his figure till he was seventy; and when Peter, who hated all sport and couldn't stick on the back of a horse, said, "Dash it, Adelaide, if I lived the sort of life you want me to live, I'd never get any work done," she would look at him coolly, sweetly, secretively smiling as if she were keeping something important which she knew about him to herself, and say, "Well?" on a long note of question.

The truth was that she no longer cared anything about his work. She had no confidence in his new schemes for building block skyscrapers, and she wasn't interested. She wanted him to go on designing pretty French or Italian or Spanish or English houses for people to live in, or to stop work and behave like a normal being. She had ideas about beauty and about the mission of artists in the world. The mission of an artist is to create beauty, she would say, and that Shelton thing is hideous. She didn't really admire his Radio Building, although she pretended to. She couldn't understand what made people talk of skyscrapers being beautiful. But Peter refused to build any more private houses. He said he was sick of designing pretty backgrounds for silly women. This remark of his had caused a scene. She had asked him in horrified tones if he meant her mother and herself, and when he had said, "Oh, hell! Adelaide, leave your mother out of it," she had worked herself up into such a state of nerves that she had prophesied for him utter, ridiculous failure. "You are small," she had flung at him. "You are a small, weak man, and you think you can rebuild New York. Why, they think down town that you're just a boy, playing at it. They don't for a

minute take you seriously. You, Peter dear, you! You're not even a man, you're half woman." He had turned white as death when she said this, but she hadn't noticed, having flung herself on the sofa in a paroxysm of tears. She had been reading a book that she had found in his room on "The Intermediate Sex," and had been profoundly shocked and utterly bewildered by it. Now the undigested phrases which she didn't understand came spurted up through her shuddering little chest. "Oh—oh—I may be silly, but you—you make me so unhappy. You're so queer. You're not normal. You know you're not. You're vicious. That's why you don't love me. You're an intermediate, that's what you are."

He had burst then suddenly into a wild shout of laughter, his white lips straining in convulsive merriment, and had left the house. There had been another scene of reconciliation afterwards, of course, for that was what it was all for. She liked scenes of reconciliation. They made her feel, for the moment anyway, that she really was close to Peter, that he was hers; and in the delicious wave of emotion that swept them into each other's arms she forgot completely what the fuss had been about. She hadn't meant what she had said, she hadn't, of course, understood a word of it, so she didn't remember it. Some instinct of unconscious cunning had prompted her words, knowing they would wound, but she didn't think about them any more afterwards. They had passed through her light brain and were gone from her memory. What she remembered was that she must save Peter who was weak from his low friends, his queer moods, his impossible unconventional tastes, and his work that exhausted him. Her mother in all this business was her great ally. They had for a long time been conspiring against Peter, to save him; but when Adelaide had approached her father with

the suggestion that it would be much better for Peter to give up architecture and go into his office, Mr. Jamieson had waved her away. "You leave the boy alone," he had said mildly. "He's a great boy"; and when his wife took up the subject again, he had been unexpectedly obstinate. "I guess Peter hasn't got a head for business, Adèle," he had said. "I guess we'd better leave him alone," and once with a flicker of anger in his patient eyes "You keep your hands off that young chap, Adèle. Don't you go meddling with that boy." So that the two women had been obliged to carry on the business of reforming Peter in secret, and they had not, up to the present, succeeded very well. He continued to defy them, to be gentle, affectionate, impossible and happy. That was the fatal thing, his seeming so happy. That was what Adelaide couldn't stand. When she said "I can't stand any more, Peter," that was what she meant, though she didn't of course realise it. What exasperated and baffled her was the love of life that kept bubbling up in him, making him laugh and flooding his face with light. It was the joyousness in his nature that attracted all sorts of people to him and made them love him, the cook, the elevator boy, dyspeptic stockbrokers, hard, discontented women, children, dried-up old maids, and Adelaide herself. It was this in him that she loved and that she tried to destroy, because it did not have its source in herself, had nothing, indeed, to do with her, and was almost an insult to her. Poor Adelaide, she was a miserable butterfly beating her wings feverishly in her brilliant world, and she was jealous of her husband's happy good humour.

It persisted, in spite of her, or at any rate it seemed to, so that she did not realise how much she succeeded in hurting him. She couldn't read the signs. If she saw him wince and go white or scarlet, she didn't take this

as meaning very much, because he never answered back or lost his temper, but only smiled in a bewildered, helpless way, and would say slowly in his kind, drawling voice, "Oh, well, I guess you're right, Addy, maybe you're right, dear." And since she was certain that she was right, she could not possibly know how wrong, how suffocating, how intolerably bad for him was the conventional right that she held over him.

And he, though he knew it instinctively, couldn't himself quite believe it. Every time that he acted on an irresistible impulse to escape from her awful, brilliant, silly world that set all his nerves on edge, he felt guilty. She was his wife, and he was the American son of those Pilgrim Fathers whose austere morals and chivalrous ideals had somehow by some miracle prevailed through the welter of skyscrapers, motor-cars and millions of the twentieth century, and were still powerful over the consciences of men.

One hears a great deal nowadays about the wickedness of New York. Ikey Daw was voicing the sentiments of the city when he proclaimed that New York had Paris beaten to a frazzle for immorality. I wonder. The boast makes one doubtful. Surely it is very young to boast of one's wickedness? New York is, no doubt, very wicked, very wicked indeed, but it does boast about it. It is absurdly anxious that we should know it. Why, it simply screamed at you when you arrived, to take notice of how wicked it was. It went in for a regular vice parade, with flags flying, brass bands blaring, banners festooned across the streets, just like a political parade. Indeed New York is so very fond of parades that sometimes one procession meets another coming from the opposite direction, and then there is trouble in the street. The National Conventions of Bootleggers, Hijacks, Pimps, Prostitutes, and

so on, with their banners summoning you to visit the Red Light Districts, the Opium Dens of Chinatown, and a lot of other resorts of infamy, waving over their heads, comes slap up against the Salvation Army maybe, or the Christian Scientists, or the Theosophists, or the Baptists, or a convention of Dental Surgeons, and a fight ensues; for they are all militant, these organisations, and each is determined to clear the streets of the other, so that New York shall be not only the richest and the wickedest city in the world, with the highest skyscrapers, but also the most moral and the most devout and the cleanest-mouthed, with the finest, liveliest churches in Christendom and the best-cared-for teeth. The trouble was perhaps that the skyscrapers set the pace. To be wicked enough and wild enough and religious enough to match them was expecting a good deal of New York's citizens. Anyhow, there was Peter pursuing an elusive sprite called Beauty through that howling mob of drunkards and fornicators and Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Dentists and Plumbers, with the smartest gunmen in the country fighting on Tenth Avenue, and the most expensive prostitutes in the world flaunting on Broadway, and a flood of Portland cement pouring into it from the yawning holds of ships, and all the time he was worried by his little American conscience. It was no use. He wasn't completely an artist. Something spoiled that for him, and distracted his attention, something in the nature of a still small voice, a whisper, telling him that he must above all things be good and true and kind and keep his heart pure.

But Adelaide Campbell didn't understand anything about all this. She had the mind of a very spoiled little girl five years old, and every day she would run to her mother to talk about Peter and say that she really couldn't stand it any more, that she must divorce him, knowing

all the time that her mother knew that she had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

Every day they would meet and put their delicate heads together and discuss Peter in mysterious murmurs. They did it now on this beautiful shining morning as they drove down Fifth Avenue in their exquisite shining clothes, behind the windows of their expensive shining motor, between the endless rows of extravagantly shining and glittering shops. Everything shone and glittered that morning. Everything seemed to be made for them, these two bright hard women. The whole of Fifth Avenue seemed but one great smooth projection of their gorgeous idea of themselves. They surveyed it with sidelong glances as if they were looking into a mirror automatically, for their heads were turned towards each other, and they were as absorbed as a couple of conspirators planning to blow the place up.

Mrs. Jamieson had done some useful thinking that morning since her daughter's telephone-call, while she was being massaged and manicured and read to in French, and she had decided that this business of threatening Peter with a divorce was worn out. They must try something else. It had flashed upon her that having tried most things they might try kindness. So she said now at the corner of 58th Street, opposite the Plaza:

"Why don't you do what he would like for a change?"

Adelaide gaped. Her eyes opened wide and her mouth too. "What?"

"You needn't look so idiotically silly, darling, women sometimes do what their husbands want, you know."

"But Mummy, what do you mean?"

"I mean to suggest that you try to please Peter and see how that works. You've not the faintest intention of divorcing him, I've known that all along, but the point is

that so has he. He's not taken in a bit. As a matter of fact, he probably wishes you would." Mrs. Jamieson was being rougher than usual.

"Oh, no, Mummy. That's impossible. I'm quite sure that he is in love with me. Why, if I give him the least encouragement——"

"I know all that. He's gullible enough and soft enough for almost anything. But he's an artist all the same, and you exasperate him."

"Mother!"

"Well, he is, and you do. I'm speaking to you plainly, and I tell you that Peter will run off and leave you one of these days, sure as fate, unless you're cleverer with him than you have been."

"But what shall I do?" asked Adelaide looking scared.

"Go and live in Campbelltown."

"Live in Campbelltown?" Her wail of horror, penetrating the glass screen, made the driver turn his head.

"Hush, darling, be quiet. I don't mean anything dreadful. My suggestion is that you open the house there for the hunting season this fall. Peter is always panting to go down there. Well, go with him. You can hunt and fill the house with your friends. You can ask the Joyces down for a week-end. They are both sure to hunt."

"But Peter doesn't."

"What does that matter? He'll be quite happy mooning about, and it will take him away from his work, that's the great thing, and he'll be grateful, darling, that's the point, and being grateful he'll behave himself. A lot can be done with a man by kindness." Mrs. Jamieson smiled sweetly, then looked wistful, then pensive. "I'm afraid we have been rather hard on Peter." She sighed.

"But his mother, and his awful brother?"

"Oh, you needn't bother about them. You needn't

even see them. Mrs. Campbell won't come near you, you may be sure."

"But how can I do it? The house hasn't been lived in for years. It must be all musty and shabby. It would have to be all done up. Besides, I hate the place."

"Well you're wrong, it is quite a gem in its way. Don't you touch it. It's much better as it is than anything you could get anywhere else. Leave it to me. I'll send Miss Brown down, and she'll get it ready for you. All you have got to do is to warn Peter. You might write him this evening."

"But I've only just written his mother to say that I can't stand it any more, that I must get a divorce."

"Well, write again, before they take you at your word. For all you know, Peter may not intend to come back to you at all, after the scene this morning."

Adelaide had turned pale.

"But Mummy, I don't understand you. You always seemed to be so angry with Peter, and you've been telling me all winter to get a divorce." -

Mrs. Jamieson smiled a beautiful sad smile. "I am angry with him, darling, for making you unhappy, but I have at last come to the conclusion that you would be even more unhappy without him, and so for your sake I have changed about the divorce, and I'm even prepared to do my little bit, to be kind to him, to be indulgent, and I will try, dearest, to forgive him for being such a brute to my child. You can send him my love when you write."

"Oh, Mummy, Mummy darling, what a perfect angel you are," cooed bewildered, frightened Adelaide, nestling closer and closer, and taking her mother's hand under the sable rug; but Mrs. Jamieson smiled. She was thinking that Peter would not be at all pleased by her little plan.

CHAPTER III

No one knew how scared and lonely he was, because what frightened him were things in himself that he could tell no one, and what made him feel lonely was the knowledge that this was so. His instinct warned him not to let on when he was suffering from nervous depression. New York was a hard-boiled town, intolerant of sensitiveness. You could as reasonably expect gentle treatment from an army of Robots or a roaring menagerie. If you couldn't lash the place with a whip, the next best thing to do was to laugh at it. He had learned to laugh pretty well, even when he didn't in the least feel like it.

He didn't know what was the matter with him, but he knew that there was something; an insufficiency of the thyroid gland, his friend Jim Baker at the Jameson Institute for Biological Research had said, he was of the hyper-pituitary type; well, so was Shelley, if that was a consolation. He had looked himself up in a book, and there was the portrait of Percy Bysshe Shelley, and a fascinating analysis of the divine songster's internal secretions. The "Ode to a Skylark" springing like a fountain from a lot of shy little tucked-away ductless glands; at the base of the brain, were they, or somewhere near the stomach? He couldn't remember. The appendix used to be the fashion. Now it was glands. Everything depended on your endocrine system. He and Shelley had had the same headaches, because they had too much juice in them of one kind and not enough of another. Dreams, heart-throbs, logic, all a question of juices. Baker leaning over his test-tubes, cooking little messes on glass-topped tables, parts of a hen in solution; the hen had had its neck wrung five years ago, but the bits left over were still alive and

kicking. "I'm after the secret of life," Baker had said. "This tissue's living. I've kept it alive in this bottle for five years. Look at it." The immortal headless hen who couldn't die was a thing of beauty to Baker, but it looked darned tired all the same. Sometimes he thought of himself like that, saw himself in a bottle on a laboratory shelf. He might leave his carcass to Baker. They'd cut him up then and find out how songs to skylarks were made, and lovely architectural designs. Then they'd know it all. "Love will soon be just a matter of hypodermic injections." Wasn't that what he'd said? "You'll go to a doctor, and he'll stick a needle into you, and the elixir will spurt into your being." Iseult's fatal potion, dispensed from a laboratory. When the drug wore off and you had provided your eugenic mate with a child, you'd be free again. How simple it all was. Endocrines; one's fate working itself out stealthily inside one. Why fuss?

Because he loved it, was fascinated by it, this thing called Life, this place called the World, as only a raw young American could be, someone who had just landed from the back of beyond, someone perfectly green, quite unprepared for it, a regular hay-seed, all agog, his eyes popping out of his head with excitement, suddenly waking up in the midst of it, as a country bumpkin whisked out of his log-cabin and plumped down into the middle of Coney Island might do. It was in some such way that he saw his life, saw himself riding on the switchback, hanging on to the edge of his seat, running breathlessly from this stunt to that stunt, trying them all; the joy-barrels, the mirror maze, the shoot-the-shoots and the side-shows, entranced, tickled, delighted, fascinated by the wooden cow that gave milk, by the dime museum, the fat lady, the midget and his wife; standing open-mouthed

at night on the pier above the sea, in the dark warm crowd, watching the beautiful, the miraculous fireworks, throwing his hat into the air, laughing aloud, wanting to hug everybody, all the kind warm-blooded folk who were there close to him, who he felt were his brothers. Awfully gullible, of course, ready to trust any friendly stranger, and quite bewildered when he found his pocket had been picked. But he didn't mind much. It wasn't that sort of thing that worried him. He had a feeling for pick-pockets and tramps and cardsharps and people of that sort. He envied them. He thought to himself, "Reformers and scientists can't get at them, anyhow. They're safe, they're free." They were almost as interesting as the snake-charmer with the cobra round her waist, or the strong man who could lift a hundred-pound weight above his head in one hand. When you were out on a spree, that is when you were alive, in a gorgeous place like Coney Island, that is to say in the world, you didn't ask for references or birth-certificates or wait to be introduced, and if you were done in, spoofed, fooled, well, it was usually worth it.

And if you plunged from enthusiasm to despair, from loving it to hating it and being dead sick of life, it wasn't a case of being undeceived. It wasn't that he came to suddenly, out of his dream, and found the whole thing was only a cheap bluff. He didn't. Or rather, he knew it was, and didn't care a damn, and loved it all the same, the whole big roaring whizzing monstrous joke, and enjoyed it just as much, though he did see the crazy machinery work the puppets and did smell the sawdust and dung under the animals' cages. He found the circus rider quite as sweet, sitting behind the tent-flap, all rumped and haggard with the paint off; and the strong man quite as wonderful, even more so, because his hundred-pound weight was

made of cardboard, and he had the nerve to go on bluffing, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the whole round year. No, it was nothing in the queer gripping drama that depressed him, but something in himself, a sense of weakness, of incapacity, of insufficiency. His work was a torment to him because he never felt that he had got a thing exactly right. He always saw what was wrong with it when it was too late, and in his profession, when a thing was wrong it was wrong in three dimensions, and on such a scale that it shouted its faults to the heavens. Even the Radio Building wasn't perfect. The tower was just too heavy. It needed several inches shaved off its sides, but there it was, high up out of reach, immaculate, obdurate, in white Georgia marble, and he couldn't get at it. On the other hand, the pursuit of his profession made a mess of his life. He could discover no connection between doing good work and being a good husband. In fact it was rather the other way round. Beauty flourished, at any rate for him, in the muck-heap, the ashbin, the mire and mud, not in tinkling immaculate drawing-rooms and frilly boudoirs. But he had been brought up to be honest, loyal and kind, and art, he observed, was intolerant of such things. Musicians, for instance, were often very like criminals or idiots to look at. It was all so complicated. One's mind soaring, one's heart bursting, one's glands secretly choking one. He couldn't seem to grasp the thing, life, that he loved so. It was because he was so in love with it that he raged, ached, tumbled up and down, from heights to depths, conscious that the meaning of it, that the thing itself, was escaping him, slipping out of his hands like an eel.

Not always. There were moments when he felt immense, when the shell that encased him seemed to dissolve, and he became one with the great swelling tide

that rolled smoothly beyond the coast of his little island of experience. His mind was a spigot that tapped a great reservoir. Sometimes a flood of light poured into his soul. He believed in his soul. That is to say, although he knew that he was a worm condemned to die, he was acquainted with another mysterious being, psychic twin of the worm. Such moments came to him most often when he was working.

His office was a refuge. It was suspended in the sky like a balloon attached to the earth by a steel wire, an elevator by which he could slide up and down, but when he was up there in his little floating basket, he forgot about this. He seemed to be sailing away through space. Sitting at his desk, he looked out into the blue. His windows framed square bits of the heavens. Sometimes a bird, an adventurous, aspiring sparrow, or a seagull, dipped past, or an aeroplane appeared in the distance, otherwise nothing was to be seen but the ever-changing, ineffable ether and the panorama of the clouds.

If he crossed the room and looked out and down, he could see the lid of the city. The roof of the city was like the floor of the sea. It was submerged under a sea of light. It was like looking down on some curious coral reef, some complicated crystalline formation, the work of fish, perhaps. Spikes and bumps stuck up, like stalactites on the floor of a cave, but geometrical, and there were cracks indicating imperceptible depths. If he leant out he could see that he was hanging over the edge of a vertical precipice, and could discern far below at the bottom of a well the tip of a church steeple and a little patch of green round it, like moss; but that was dangerous, at any rate for him, though men did wash his windows, sitting on the ledge outside and leaning backward over the abyss.

It was amazing how human beings adapted themselves

to the incredible and seemed not to notice it. He remained alert, nervous, on edge. It seemed to him wonderful that he should have collected a little world of his own round him, there in his sky-hole. Floating high in his balloon, he was tucked into a nest that was made up of twigs and grasses and tufts gathered from all the places he had been to and dreamed of, places that existed now and places that were long ago crumbled to dust. He had photographs of them and drawings, stacked in portfolios, or bound between the covers of books closely packed on his shelves. Italy in the Quattrocento, Egypt and Greece, and the caves of Ajanta in India. He could go from one to the other by taking a step, putting out his hand, and even without moving, without turning a page or looking, he could travel to them and could feel as he sat at his desk their influence penetrating him softly, could feel, for instance, the hot sand of dreaming Egypt drifting round him, hear the faint shouts of the camel-drivers, and listening intently could discern the distant dip of oars in the lazy shimmering Nile, while all the time the strident fevered screaming voice of New York clamoured in his ears, calling to him, yelling at him. He seemed to be a kind of fiddle in the hands of a diabolic and violent virtuoso, some gigantic force was playing on him, drawing a terrible nerve-wracking music from his being. Was it something in the air, he asked himself, that made him so sensitive, so god-damned jumpy, the actual vibration, perhaps, of the innumerable wireless messages that whirled past his windows, the actual physical echo in his chest of the city's voice, of the ten thousand telephones calling to each other, Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco and New Orleans, talking for ever to New York? He would hold his head in his hands and feel the hum and the pulse of the city working in him like a ferment, and see the skyscrapers

rising up round him. Dear God, how exciting it was, this business of living, and his profession, this matter of building. It was terrific. The stones seemed to be alive. Sometimes he thought, "I believe the damn skyscrapers would build themselves if we none of us lifted a finger." At night when their eyes blinked at him they seemed like a lot of monsters, like monstrous cats, and he imagined them putting their heads together when the world of men was asleep, leaning towards each other and nodding their long skinny stone necks, and hatching some plot to do in the darned little human beings who had made them.

After all, where did he, the architect, come in? he would ask himself. He merely added up a few figures, worked out a mathematical problem or two, imagined the towers rising up and the sun wheeling over them, the morning and evening sun casting long clean shadows down their slim flanks, and left the rest to God and the engineers. He didn't even have the fun of decorating them. One couldn't put lace trimmings on mountains. When he felt very bucked he called the sun and the moon and the storm-clouds his collaborators, but really he was nothing, he didn't count.

Though, of course, he was responsible for their holding together, and there was always a millionth chance that they wouldn't. You couldn't be absolutely sure that the old laws would hold. You knew that somewhere there was a point where the old formulas wouldn't work, where the old balance, well, wouldn't balance any more, and you knew that you wouldn't know when you'd reached it, not till the giant thing fell on you, or tore itself up by the roots and floated off over the clouds. So there you sat juggling with dynamics and so on, but not really knowing what you were doing, only guessing, reasoning, supposing, as exactly, as truthfully, as you could, while

they rose up in the air and loomed over you, casting their spell. "And we're every one of us aware of them all the time," he would say to himself. "Every Polak and Slovak and Italian and Dago is aware in his tenement, every Chinese boy in Chinatown, every Swede in her kitchen, every nigger in Harlem, and the Jews on Fifth Avenue, they are all under the influence, they all feel the daring, the defiance of these buildings, their massive lightness, their exultation, the miracle of the immense weight that seems to float upward; and they respond, and it drives them crazy, though they don't know it. It's because the poor boobs take part in the fantastic drama of New York architecture that they're all in a state of perpetual excitement, have monstrous dreams, believe in miracles and get drunk. By God! it's grand. It's crazy. It's terrible!"

The trouble was that he got too excited. Sometimes sitting in his office, wrestling with some architectural problem, he would get worked up to such a white heat of tension that he would seem to leave his body. He would remain there, but he wouldn't be there. He would go while he sat there to places he had never been to, places that he identified sometimes afterwards as existing sure enough. There was a house that he had often visited in this way. He imagined it to be in England, but he had never succeeded in finding out about it, though he had searched through innumerable numbers of "Country Life" and albums of photographs. It had seemed to him so beautiful and he had become so familiar with it that at last he had built it himself on Long Island for his mother-in-law. It was a successful house, one of his best, but now that it was built he wasn't happy about it. He felt guilty, as if he had stolen something. "But you can't plagiarise in architecture, you blamed idiot," Baker

said to him. "If the house does exist somewhere, where's the crime? It may have been designed by Adam, as you say. What if it was? You can copy the Doge's Palace if you want to. Who's to stop you?" He had talked to Baker about it. Baker had pooh-poohed the idea that the house had existed anywhere but in his own fancy. If it were a real house then Peter had seen it, or photographs of it. Baker didn't believe in such psychic phenomena as second-sight. Your subconscious mind was an immense cellar stored with forgotten memories, but it didn't contain anything you hadn't seen or experienced somehow, somewhere, at some time. They would argue.

"But I tell you I know things I never learned and I see things I never saw in my life."

"Rats!"

"What's the good of saying 'rats'? I know what I'm talking about. I tell you my head's a receiving station for the thought-currents of people I don't know, never heard of, all sorts, some beastly, some miserable. They keep on signalling out of space, out of limbo. Gosh, it's enough to drive you crazy. Sometimes I find myself talking Swedish or German to myself, saying the blameworthy things."

But James Baker, who loved Peter, laughed at him, scolded him, called him a fool, feeling a clutch at his throat, fearing that Peter would go mad one day. He would have been sure of it, had he known how uncomfortable Peter felt when he went down with Adelaide to spend the week-end with his mother-in-law in that house on Long Island. Those week-ends were a horror. The women chattering like parrots, filling the beautiful clear rooms with their noise, their shrill gaiety, their pretty silly tricks, had no business there, and Mrs. J. J. Jamieson

very slim, very elegant, very hard, almost perfectly imitating a great lady, she had no business there either. Often in the middle of a game of bridge with the gay New York crowd round him, he would be aware of a presence reproaching him, a presence that belonged to the house. He would turn his head quickly, look over his shoulder, almost expecting to catch sight of the person.

It was very queer. The effect on him was deep. The elusive personality was powerful and invigorating. It affected him like the sound of a wind in the high branches of a deep forest. He came to invite its presence. Sometimes at night in the country he would slip out of the house and lie down in the dark on the rough grass near the sandy shore and summon the dream, if it was a dream, and it would come with a kind of rushing sigh, and he would relax, and rest, and fall asleep under its influence. These impressions were absurdly associated with a flamingo, a ridiculous but lovely bird, standing in shallow water, with a pearly light shimmering on its wings. He could make nothing of the flamingo. He could do nothing with it but accept it, for it visited him often, appearing suddenly as a sort of herald of the deep stirring messages which were associated with the house. Were they messages? Was someone sending them out, signalling from somewhere? He had always checked such romantic flights of fancy, perhaps because the experience was sufficiently strange and vivid to frighten him a little.

But within the last year questions had begun to whisper in his mind which he scarcely dared formulate. It had to do with this strange dream experience, and with the woman whom he had seen in London once, in Paris once, and once in Vienna. But he told himself nervously that it was madness to connect the two, and he had never done anything about finding out who she was. He had felt a

curious reluctance to hunt her down and establish her identity. It wouldn't, he imagined, be difficult, for she was obviously someone of importance. This in itself put him off. He did not want to identify her with the world of fashion towards which his wife and mother-in-law were for ever propelling him. If she were a great lady everything would be spoiled. He would be obliged then to surround her in his thoughts with all the paraphernalia of her worldly position, and her image would be damaged. Much better to keep her to himself, isolated and strange, a mysterious nameless woman with a voice that moved him as the voice of a Sibyl or of the Delphic Oracle might have moved him.

"Good-night", she had said abruptly, quite close to him on the edge of the dark blue London street, "On Tuesday, then. That will be very nice." The canvas tunnel leading up to the lighted door of the great London house was dim. He had got out of his taxi behind Adelaide. The nameless lady was waiting for her car. There was a group of shadowy people round her, but he had heard the rustle of her clothes as she brushed past him, and had breathed in the scent that she disengaged. He had recognised her instantly as the woman seen two years before in Vienna at the opera, the one who had talked of tanks and aeroplanes in that familiar decided way. He needn't have been afraid of forgetting her. He knew now that he need never be afraid of forgetting her, even if he didn't think of her for weeks at a time. Once he had feared this and had said to himself, "If you forget her, that will be the worst thing that could happen to you. It will only prove that you are a clod. You know this, you know that somehow she is important, more important than anything"; but the crowded years rolling on with their rich load of experience had not submerged her.

Her image remained ineffaceable, holding for him a dramatic appeal that he did not attempt to explain, perhaps because the explanation was as simple as some rule of architectural design. Line, colour, the pattern of a personality, meant more to him, of course, than to most men, because he dealt constantly with line and colour. It was his job to penetrate their significance. So that after all it was quite natural that the long sweep of a pair of eyebrows, the intolerant curve of a nostril and the bitter line of a mouth should convey to him if not the whole at any rate a great deal of a woman's character. From such details he could construct the rest. He knew that he was not deceived, and that, God and the world permitting, were he to meet this woman, as assuredly he would meet her, somewhere, some day, he would find that he knew her better than all the people who had been lucky enough to be her daily companions. And so he did nothing about hunting her down, partly because he was confident, partly because he was afraid. What he feared was the terrible complicated business of being actually and according to the laws of nature in love. He had never been happy in love. There was something the matter with him that seemed to make that impossible. The truth was that the women who appealed most strongly to his senses were not the women he loved. Really he hated them, while those for whom he felt a deep tenderness, like Addy, or a genuine comradely affection, like Gussy, left the rough animal side of him unmoved, and this being so, he shuddered to contemplate what would happen to him were he once swept into the magnetic field of this woman's unique personality, which he knew, instinctively and finally, as if he had seen it written in the book of fate, would compel a complete response from both sides of his nature. He might, he felt, fail in such a crisis, horribly,

grotesquely, make himself ridiculous probably, and die of it. And she might not even recognise him as being anyone in the least significant, might dislike him, might not believe him if he told her that he had known her for a very long time, might even laugh at him. And always, anyhow, sex spoilt everything. One's imagination set on fire led one on, when it had the chance, to certain disillusionment. He and she were friends, or should have been friends, for always, since the beginning and for ever. If they met, even if by some miracle she responded, what good would that do? In the end they would be done in by their puny outfit of nerves, glands and so on. Human passions were mortal, yet there was something immortal about this. His recognition of her seemed to him to date from a by-gone age, another world. It was best to keep her in the world of dreams. There he was safe. He could think of her in that way without annoying her, and without involving himself in endless complications. After all, his imagination was the best part of him, and that part he gave up to her. She could invade it as much as she liked. But did she? Was it the tall dark Englishwoman with the gloomy eyes and cruel lips who visited him in his dreams? He did not know. He dared not suppose so.

But sometimes when he went to a rehearsal in Carnegie Hall and sat high up by himself in the dark unlighted gallery, with rows of empty seats round him, listening to the music that welled up from the distant lighted orchestra down below him, he suspected that it was she. Orchestral music, particularly the more nerve-wracking modern kind, stimulated his imagination in a peculiar way, gave his mind wings and set a wild beautiful stream of ideas racing through his head; and almost always when he sat like this, alone and very still, with the small distant reedy

fiddle singing up through the vaulted gloom, the tiny flute calling from its silver throat, or the horn sounding a faint dramatic summons like the trump of the archangel summoning him to the Last Judgment, he would think of her and wonder painfully, with his hands clasped tight together and his head bowed, whether it were not possible that he did really reach her sometimes across the distance; and he would will to do so, thinking hard, concentrating upon her, and sending his thoughts out to her on the long beautiful waves of the rushing music that filled the great empty hall.

Sound-waves, air-waves, thought-waves, they were all the same sort of thing. Wireless, the science of radio, was a step on the way to God. He would sit there, huddled up, an indistinguishable little blob under the shadowy roof, and wonder if there were not some way of communicating with her. "Do you hear?" he would silently whisper, "Can you hear?" while the vibrations from the fiddles and 'cellos and the wood-wind stirred the dark air round him. But he would come away from the concert-hall bewildered and exhausted, to find himself in the street, and he would laugh at himself for believing that she, the arrogant Englishwoman who had never so much as looked at him in the Viennese theatre, could possibly dream that there was a little man in America who remembered her face and her voice with such distinctness that remembering gave him quite often a dull pain in his left side. He would call himself a fool. But all the same, he suspected that he flew to her in his sleep more often than he knew, for he could never remember dreaming about her, and yet would often wake with a sense of her presence lingering in the room like a beautiful light or a faint heady aroma.

His mind was, he knew, more active, and active to a

better purpose, when he slept than when he was awake. He had learned to use sleep professionally. Often if he put himself a puzzling problem before going to bed, he would wake up in the morning to find it solved. But this didn't happen unless he had struggled and sweated over it beforehand. The condition attached to such little helpful miracles seemed to be a preliminary effort that resulted in a peculiar exhaustion. He had to be, so to speak, in despair and utterly humble, before his angel came on the wings of sleep to save him. But sometimes he couldn't sleep, and then, lying awake in the dark, he would become the victim of another kind of phenomena. No sooner had he closed his eyelids than pictures formed instantly before his eyes and succeeded each other with breathless rapidity, not visions, they were not in the least like dreams. They were definite, cold, finished designs, beautiful, elaborate and precise in drawing, but meaningless and glassy like photographs. His closed eyelids became a kind of movie screen. Immediately his light was out the performance began, and he was bound to look. He couldn't stop the performance, and he couldn't close his eyes to it or turn away his head, for his eyes were already closed, and whichever way he turned, even if he lay in his rumpled bed on his stomach with his face dug into the pillows, the pictures still passed before him ceaselessly. They wearied him. After an hour or two they became a torture. He had consulted doctors about the business, asking for relief, but they had not understood, had merely warned him that drugs were dangerous, particularly so for him. He knew this, and so he would lie there, night after night, seeing pictures, and imploring the God of Sleep humbly, trying to pacify him, trying to entice him by reflecting upon some mathematical problem, on the nature, for instance, of infinity. He would lie in

the dark and chant to himself in a monotone: "A collection of terms is infinite when it contains as parts other collections which have just as many terms as it has. If you can take away some of the terms of a collection without diminishing the number of terms, then there are an infinite number of terms in the collection." The pictures passed ceaselessly. George Cantor had answered the question—What is infinity? He had found a precise definition of an infinite number. "There are exactly as many points in a line a millionth of an inch long as in the whole of infinite space." The God of Sleep was not interested. The movie-show went on. He tried to become a child. He began timidly to count sheep going through a gate. The pictures were still passing, minute in detail, and excruciatingly clear like geometrical problems. Drugs were dangerous, peculiarly so for him. Everything, it seemed, was dangerous, because he had an insufficiency of juice in him. Was there no relief anywhere? Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child. Adelaide could not help him. He could not go to her because she despised him. In any case, there was no relief to be found in women like Adelaide. They were too fragile and coquettish. They liked to torment you, to excite you, to exasperate your nerves. The queer, coarse ones were the best, the wild free little micks, the gutter-snipes, or the hot-blooded animal ones, like Carolina Sal, the coon girl from Alabama. He got a kick out of vulgarity. It smacked him in the face and took him by the throat and brought him back to his senses. For after a few nights of this kind of sleeplessness the world receded. He lost contact with reality. Familiar objects became strange. It was, he imagined, a little like madness. It must be in some such way that the world appeared to Christopher. Chris suffered too. Did he struggle and

suffocate? Peter would begin to wonder whether he was so very different from Christopher. But that was dangerous.

When he felt like this, he rushed out into the turmoil of the lighted streets, flung himself into the crowd on Broadway, swam through the dark, warm, throbbing flood of it, under the silly, the monstrous, the gorgeous glare of the jiggling, jazzing lights, sniffed up the smell of the human herd that pushed and scuffled round him, and heard with relief the laughter, the lust, the hot, thick hatred and love pounding in their blood. Oh, he loved them, he loved them; they saved him. Or he went to Harlem and found big Joe banging his piano, while the saxophone whined and shivered in ecstasy, and Sal, wicked, doped, café-au-lait Carolina Sal, whose soul was white, danced to its love-spasms, in the middle of a burning fog, a circle of big black faces gleaming round her through the red mist like rollicking angels in a new kind of African heaven, laughing through the luminous haze with the gentleness of Jesus shining from their faces, their great white teeth flashing, the whites of their eyes rolling. Just over their shoulders was the jungle, the dark voodoo forest.

Or he went to a Slovak Dive that he knew of, or to the Italian bootlegger who hung out in the basement of a brown-stone house in Xth Street, where he could get drunk on whisky. He loathed the stuff, but it helped. It brought a blessed oblivion. He knew well enough that that, too, was dangerous. He didn't have to be told. It didn't need Adelaide to stand over him and prophesy that he would die, like his father, of delirium tremens. Trying to scare him into keeping sober, that was funny. She said the words "delirium tremens" as a cockatoo might say them. Nothing that she said meant anything.

She was a cockatoo chattering a lot of little parrot phrases. Poor Addy! If she only knew how scared and lonely he was.

It would be better if she would divorce him and be done with it. Indecency sanctified by Society and the Church was so much worse than other kinds.

He remembered his marriage, the awful wedding, the Jamieson house stuffed with lilies and orchids and roses as if for a funeral, and five thousand people shaking hands with his corpse in its narrow coffin. Marriage was the coffin, and how had he got there, he kept wondering, as she cut the wedding cake and laughed at him over her white satin shoulder? White tulle, a great cloud of it, wrapping her round, the naked, lovely bride exposed to the public in a drifting cloud. In Africa the clan assisted at the "nuit de nocés", put the pair to bed and stood round watching the aged, the eternally repeated, the classic mummified gesture of rape and possession, seeing to it that the thing was properly done and that the man was up to the job. In New York they only came to the train, to throw rice and confetti and satin slippers about under the iron vaults of the railway station, to lock the bridal couple into their compartment with hilarious mockery. And how had he got there, he kept asking himself, and could he jump out of the window! But the train moved off. He was alone with her in the tiny, shiny, suffocating box, with the W.C. in the corner discreetly lidded with green plush, and the marriage must be consummated.

He never got into a train now without remembering. It was unbearable to think of, even now, yet he kept constantly coming back to the little secret burning pain, like the moth to the candle, fluttering dizzily round it. Poor Addy! She had been bewildered, disappointed,

humiliated. She knew what marriage was. Someone had told her. She was there, meekly resigned to martyrdom, waiting to suffer the great outrage. Like a lamb to the slaughter, a white lamb with a blue ribbon round its neck. Her mother, the butcher, had handed him the end of blue ribbon. Her mother had said, "My poor little woolly innocent lamb, you are going to be eaten by the wolf. He will do so and so. Resign yourself." And she had resigned herself, had trotted along beside him bleating a little, pretending to laugh, because one must go through with the business of being eaten. Everyone did. One attained sanctity that way.

A lamb, bleating in a suffocating box, little inaudible bleats coming from her terrified heart. How could he? He was, alas, no wolf. He was so sorry for her. He wanted to get the window open, to jump out, throw himself under the train. She hadn't understood. She had felt humiliated. How could he have expected her to understand? He should not have married her, or anyone, that is to say anyone in the least like her. It was too dangerous, too complicated. These delicate adjustments, these sudden intimacies between strangers, these fine frail strands of emotion that bound one like iron cables, till one felt every blood-vessel bursting and one's heart breaking in one's side out of tenderness, out of compassion, and the panic, the fear, clutching, turning one sick. How could she know, how could she have understood? She had thought that he didn't find her attractive. Then when she had found out the truth, she had despised him. Well, perhaps she had had a right to despise him, if the cave man was the ideal, but he had had things to give her too, he would have laid offerings at her rosy feet that no other man on earth could offer her. He would have made it beautiful if she had let him, if she had given him

time, if only she had been gentle; but there had been something vindictive in her contempt, a desire to hurt him, a kind of rage, of hatred. One day she had discovered a new word—"Effeminacy". She had called him effeminate. That had done for him. He was effeminate, and God in His heaven couldn't help him. And of course she had confided this horrible and shameful discovery to her mother. She always told her mother everything. "But, Peter, I always talk to Mamma about everything." That was what she had said, her eyes wide with astonishment, when he, like a fool, had shown that he minded, that he smarted, that he felt as if he'd been skinned and exposed to the public in his raw, wet, red flesh. Anyhow she and her mother had put their heads together, and nodded, and whispered the mysterious word "effeminate"; and then, a couple of years later, she had announced glibly that it was his fault that she had no children. Would he please see a doctor? Very crisply she had spoken, lightly, airily, putting her hat on, turning her head this way and that in front of her mirror, holding up her hand-glass and pulling the corners of her mouth down. "Please be examined by a doctor, Peter. I'm lurching out to-day and playing bridge."

Oh, God!

But she did not like children. He knew that secretly she much preferred having none. That was the joke, dear God, that was the point of the farce. And when he had refused to go to her damned doctor, she had tried to compel him to do so. She had again brought her mother into it. He shuddered, remembering.

And yet he had been ravished by her beauty, and he was still sensitive to it. To look at she was still like a baby; and she, who detested children, appealed to him in spite of everything as children did, twisting strings in

him somewhere, in his entrails perhaps. Her ridiculous brown curls made him laugh. She had sumptuous, delicate limbs, a smooth, innocent, baby face, a full, dewy, pouting mouth; and even now sometimes when she played her little transparent tricks, enticing him back to her, he would find himself being hoodwinked by her round throat and the sweet, smooth discs of her eyelids into believing her to be warm and joyous and tender, as she could appear to be when she wanted to, when she lay smiling, inviting him to her bed, with her absurd curls flung out on the snowy pillows. Oh, God! Why did she do it? And why did he give in to her again and again, only to feel her, as he clasped her, turn into a frozen doll in his arms? He knew at those moments that she was exulting in her power over him, that she was going over in her mind all the things she had against him, and was planning new ways of humiliating him. She would make him do so and so in the morning. He would pay for the night he had spent by her side. Sometimes she didn't even wait until morning to come out with it. It would plump out then and there. "Now, Peter, you've got to promise to go with me to the Fairfax's ball and to be nice to all my friends;" or, "You will help Molly with her house, won't you, just to please me? I promised her you would." Her crudity was amazing. Her naïveté was extraordinary, so extraordinary that it was in its way her justification. Complete ignorance, he observed, was a kind of innocence, and in this sense she was innocent. She didn't know what she was doing to him. No tremor of physical pleasure had ever informed her. She was as immaculate as the Blessed Virgin, and it seemed that she regarded herself as having some such rôle to play in the general scheme of things. To allow oneself to be worshipped was, he gathered, one of the

obligations of the American woman. Marriage was a chilly, private chapel within whose walls a certain ritual went on. The Madonna, all a-glitter with little jewels and trinkets, and attired in a gorgeous embroidered mantle, stood meekly in her shrine behind the lighted candles, while the poor mortal who adored her knelt on the stones before her radiant altar. It was, he remembered, in some such way that he had first approached her. He had bowed his head. And it was because of the hush in his heart that he had been so startled to see her, the lovely little baby Madonna in her niche, make suddenly a coquettish, silly, libidinous gesture. That is to say, in a mortal it would have been libidinous, but she, being immortal, had not known what she was doing. She had merely been imitating some loose woman whom she had glimpsed in the lighted street from her shadowy sanctuary.

For he knew that she didn't really at all like what she called love-making, even now that she had got used to it and to him. It was one of the things a woman had to submit to, like being fitted for clothes. The duty of being a wife could be discharged with far less expenditure of vitality than that of being a well-dressed woman. Still, it was a pity that men demanded even this minimum, it was a thousand pities that they could not be content eternally in that very satisfactory attitude of worship.

It was all very strange. He had observed, looking about him with hurt, bewildered eyes, that Adelaide was not in the least extraordinary. Many of her women friends seemed to be like her, and many of the men, like himself, were apparently on their knees. They got up from them to go to their offices and earn the money necessary for the decoration of their shrines. There was a great competition in shrines in New York. If some poor wretch's Madonna noticed that her rival saint had

a more costly string of pearls than she, there was the devil to pay, for the little sacred images got down from their niches when no one was looking and compared notes. It was, he supposed, a sign of humility in their masculine worshippers that they, the husbands, didn't. The most they ever did was to signal mutely to each other a message of bewildered fatigue, as he and his father-in-law caught themselves doing sometimes; for this sort of thing went on, it seemed, for years. It got worse and worse, that is, more and more so, as one got older. The Madonnas, as they hardened into antiquity, became more exacting and exerted a bolder tyranny. They turned into heathen idols, rapacious and insatiable goddesses with dozens of arms like Kali, and with these arms they got a stranglehold of their victims. His father-in-law, the poor Steel King, for instance, was slowly being strangled to death; but he never uttered. At most, he waved meekly a desperate hand. Was he imploring or warning? Was it a call for help or a gesture asking Peter not to look? His son-in-law could not tell. Even when they were left alone together, during a blistering empty New York September, with their wives removed to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, some sense of decency, some unwillingness to admit the loss of their funny, romantic, childish notions kept them silent. They would meet down town for luncheon, and over their plates of alligator-pear salad—they even ordered from the waiter in the Club the food their wives had taught them to eat at home—they would gaze wistfully at each other and recognise silently that they were the helpless victims of the iron ideals of their Puritan grandfathers and grandmothers. Men must work. Women must be protected. Men must go on working, even when they were multi-millionaires and exhausted grey dyspeptics who suffered agonies

of indigestion from eating alligator-pear salad; and women must be protected, even though they were as formidable and as immune to the slings and arrows of fortune as armed battle cruisers.

He, Peter, could escape, he was still young enough, thank God, to break most of the Ten Commandments with gusto, and anyhow he was in love with the gimcrack world; and this shiny, zinc-lined shelf of the ice-box that Adelaide called Society, was, after all, a part of the great Coney Island establishment. It was the Hall of Magic Mirrors, Lord help us, he could laugh seeing himself and Mrs. John J. Jamieson and all the rest in that gleaming place of unfathomable false vistas and endless fake corridors, bulging and bending, growing enormous, growing tiny, and swelling with monstrous distended tummies, and then presto! pulled by the head and feet and lengthened till their necks were like macaroni. And besides, he had his refuges. There was the little house in Campbelltown where Amanda Campbell sat tranquilly knitting. He might go out on the frosty lake to-night in his canoe and call across the misty water to the ghosts of the Indians in the hills. It was October now, and the woods were all aflame with vermilion and gold; the air would be sharp and bitter clean in his mouth.

Back in New York was the heart of Africa. Darkest Africa, it was called in the Sunday School books. Stanley had gone there years ago, a missionary to the heathen; but all he, Peter, had to do when he wanted to be saved was to hop into a yellow cab and go whizzing up Lexington Avenue past a few dozen lamp-posts. There, round about 125th Street, under the shiny pavement of the flat monotonous streets, under the rows of grimy brick houses, with dirty newspapers drifting into their smelly basements, lay the dark mysterious continent. He could

plunge into it down a flight of rickety stairs, and there they all were, in their underground cave, dancing round the red camp fire, hooting and howling. The jungle spread round them, soft, suffocating, impenetrable. Its great leafy roof closed over his head. "Hi, Pete, hello!" they would call out to him, waving their great paws, slapping their thighs, welcoming him, drawing him kindly into the circle of their barbaric splendour, not minding his poor measly white face, letting the insignificant little white-man be one of them. "Law bless you, son, it's a powerful long time since yo been to see us." Big Joe, beaming, a tender gorilla, "What yo been doin' to yo' self, you look that peaky?" Carolina Sal, leaning her bronze arms on the little table, her strong shoulders drooping, her deep breast heaving, slowly, would almost go to sleep there beside him. Her smile split her brown face in two. Her big white teeth flashed between thick, soft, purple lips, juice of pomegranate staining them. There was a clink and a jingle of heavy invisible ear-rings, bangles, anklets, savage monstrous jewels grating softly as she breathed, though she wore none. Her dark kinky head drooped languidly, lazily, over the whisky glass. Her hair was a shadowy thicket through which her eyes, dreamy with cocaine, gleamed, delirious and kind. He could feel the strength coming from her in waves. It surged gently through him.

"Wanna go joy-ridin', honey? Well, don' you come along wid dis baby if yo's poah, 'cause my price is gone up since last I did see you. Hee, hee! A'm gettin' fashionable. I am, an' a'm awful busy 'cause Ma's gone to hospital for an internal operation an' I'se gotta git up early every mornin' and wash de kids and cook dere breakfas'. My, you oughta see dem chillun eat, piles an' piles o' c'on meal mush, piles and piles of it, an' all

over m'lasses. They jes love m'lasses." Her voice was soft.

Jiggitty jig jig bang, jiggitty jig jig boom wheeeee—and the Swanee whistle gurgled shrill and sweet in its bird throat like a whippoorwill laughing far away, and a warmth came from the brown fields where the cotton was pushing, and there was a drowsy pulse beating somewhere, down, down under his feet in the living earth, that was the lazy gentle mother of all men, black and white. Sal was the mother of all men. She was a rich, deep fertile field, and her children, her piccaninnies, were playing in the sun on her breast, tumbling about and rolling in the dust, laughing and turning somersaults, their little round bottoms top-side, and now they were all stamping and clapping their hands and banging on tin cans and shouting "Halleluja!" and making a hell of a noise.

It was grand. It was heaven.

They had wings, pink and blue, on their little pot-bellied bodies, and Sal was seated on a throne under a red umbrella, her bronze torso bare to the hips. He had seen a picture of her. Glyn Philpot, in London, had painted her in her African heaven, a black Madonna on a straw throne with a little piccaninny Jesus in her lap and heavy rings on her strong brown toes.

God's face was black. . . .

Somewhere in the distance along a blistering road a gang of slaves were passing, chained together. He could hear a faint voice calling down there on the earth—"Water boy. Water bo-o-oy", and the clanking of chains. The gang toiled in the heat, sweat rolled from their bodies. They were dying of thirst. Abraham Lincoln had freed them. No, not these. This gang stretched back across the earth to the Garden of Eden. The endless toiling progress of men through the ages, slaves chained each one to the next.

One had a red bandana handkerchief in his hand that he wanted to take with him when he died, and Carolina Sal, the kind black Mother of God, waiting for him in heaven under her red umbrella, would let him bring it, of course. "Why sho', you po' little lamb!" She, too, was clapping her hands now.

Jiggity jig a jig jig a jig bang. Jig a jig, jiggity jig, jiggity jiggity jiggity jig boom.

Parrots were squeaking in the trees and monkeys chattering, and the depraved, the sophisticated, the complicated syncopated tom-tom was beating wildly, was beating softly, and the gorillas were shaking, shaking, on their huge feet, their great arms jerking, was it with laughter, was it with ecstasy? What God were they worshipping there in their dark abysmal jungle?

Suddenly the branches parted. A pink flamingo winged its way high overhead. "Look!" he cried to Sal. "Look!"

"Bless you, honey, yo' drunk," she said gently.

Was he drunk? Not on whisky. Whisky was dangerous. He was in love with innocence and light and laughter, and something, someone, was signalling. The flamingo was a herald. Was this hell, then? He didn't know, but he sank, sank deep, and was at rest.

Adelaide had said, "Must you indulge your taste for vulgar people quite so much, Peter?" She referred to Gussy Green and that lot. She hadn't, of course, ever heard of Sal, she had a horror of black people, she talked of the Negro Problem. The blacks should be deported to Liberia, she said. They were a menace. And he had answered, about Gussy Green and her friends:

"I get a grand kick out of them. Gussy and I have a lot in common. We both like clams."

He had known Gussy years ago, when she was looking

for a job on Broadway and lived on Sixth Avenue in a room level with the elevated. It was dark, because the window was blocked by the great iron scaffolding outside. The trains rushed by, not an arm's length from her rattling window. The noise was terrific. Gussy had to scream in his ear. The whole crazy brick house shivered with the concussion, and Gussy's room with the plates of chicken bones from the Chop-Suey restaurant downstairs shoved under the bed, and the cocktail-shaker dribbling on the washstand, seemed about to crack open every five minutes or so and eject the whole lot of them—there was always a hilarious crowd of them—out of the window on to the rails. It was like living inside the gear-box of an engine. Now, of course, she was rich and had the Schumanns and Ikey Daw wound round her little finger, and had moved to a monstrous apartment not unlike Adelaide's, and was asked everywhere. People begged her to come to their parties. Even Adelaide couldn't avoid meeting her, but she was the same hilarious disorderly gorgeous Gussy, the same happy little guttersnipe, greedy for fun, for candy, for joy-rides, the same grim good sort, in love with life just as he was, with the jigging jazzing lights of Broadway and the rush and the turmoil. She would call him up on the 'phone. He would hear her ear-splitting voice joyfully screaming at him, "Come on, Pete, we want you. We're going to have a clam-bake. We're going down to sit in the sand and eat clams till we're sick."

Well, what was to be done about it? he asked himself in the train on his way to Campbelltown. Addy had written to his mother so she must know the worst by now, and he would have to admit to her that he too was no good, was taking to drink like his father, was not a whole man but a half-man, no better than Christopher—much worse,

as a matter of fact, since he was, after all, a responsible being. What would she say? What would she feel? Wouldn't it just about kill her?

And if Adelaide did divorce him, what would he do? Couldn't he, wouldn't he then go to England and find the woman he did not know, the one he could not forget? It was she who made him recoil from Carolina Sal's monstrous charms and from the muck and the filth of the swill barrel called the gay world, and the dope-dives, the whisky-bottles, the raw little idiot micks of Broadway with their asinine, lascivious giggles—not poor little Addy. It was dashed funny when you came to think of it, but what he felt really was a sense of disloyalty to her when he went out on the town, and deep inside him he suspected that what made him uneasy was the fact that he had married Addy, that he had ever married at all, ever been near a woman; because somehow, somewhere, in another incarnation, she had been his, and that union had been meant to last for ever. Gosh, what a joke! What a blithering idiotic dream! But was it so very funny? If she had ever been the love of any man, would that man want anyone else through the ages? How could he? Why should he? It would be enough.

But it wouldn't be safe to go and find her. It was better to keep her where she was, and he—well, he ought to have lived as a sort of crazy dreaming monk content to think about her.

CHAPTER IV

AMANDA CAMPBELL glanced sideways at the book on the low table beside her, then, with a slight nod of approval back to the sock she was darning. She always read in the evenings while she sewed. At the same time she kept an

eye on Christopher. When did she not have an eye on Christopher? During the morning, when she was busy helping her coloured cook with the housework, she would keep going, her duster in hand, to the backdoor, to make sure that he was safe in the shed that was his carpenter's shop, or she would put her head out of one of the bedroom windows that looked into the backyard and would ask Marius, the hired man, who would be sweeping up the dead leaves, or mending a drain-pipe, or chopping logs for firewood, whether he had seen Christopher; and Marius would say, "Yass, 'm, he's busy in there, powerful busy. Don't you fret yourself," and she didn't. She knew she could trust Aunt Clo and Marius, but all the same Christopher was never out of her mind.

He sat now on a stool by the chimney-piece, his delicate unearthly face flushed by the firelight, his thin knees drawn up nearly to his chin, and his fingers fumbling round his mouth. Every now and then he lifted the long hand that hung slack by his side, and with one finger pointing at the blaze made signs and circles in the air, as if he were working out some geometrical problem, or communicating in a mysterious sign-language with the spirit of the fire. He had been in a great state of excitement all day over Peter's coming, talking rapidly in undertones to himself and running up and down stairs after his mother, standing in the door of Peter's room, laughing and sniggering and cracking his finger-joints, while she made the four-poster bed; and after luncheon he had slipped off, when she wasn't looking, down the village street, and had come in an hour later with a mysterious package which, with a great display of secrecy, he had hidden away under the sofa. There was something very interesting about that package. Every few minutes, when he thought she was absorbed in her book,

he would get down on his knees and look under the sofa to see if it was safe; and she, of course, pretended not to notice. It was some surprise that he had prepared for Peter; he would be terribly disappointed if she showed that she suspected anything.

But now he was quiet, except for the gentle curious movements of his long hands and a slight twitching of his thin shoulder-blades.

The room in which Amanda sat was crowded and shabby, but pleasant. Although it was really too small for its heavy old furniture, though there wasn't much room between the fireplace and the big mahogany sofa covered with black horsehair in front of it, and the high mahogany dresser against the wall, it was nevertheless comfortable, because all those old things had settled down into it years ago, and had stayed where they were for so long that they had become accustomed to each other and to the little room, with its two high windows on the street, stiffly curtained in Christmas green brocade that was fastened into high gilt cornices near the ceiling. The curtains were still crisp and stiff, but the carpet, which had once been a gay red with a white pattern, was faded to a pale strawberry pink, and the upholstering of the two armchairs on either side of the fire was worn. Crocheted antimacassars of white lace decorated their high curved backs which were tufted with black buttons. It was an old lady's room, but Amanda, with her broad smooth brow and bright blue eyes, did not look like an old lady. One didn't think of her in that way, though she was sixty. Not that she tried to look young or to keep in the fashion. She had put on her best dress this evening to receive Peter, but it was very plain and of no fashion at all, with its soft grey folds and long sleeves and its little frill of grey tulle round the throat and wrists. It had been a very

long time indeed since Amanda Campbell had taken any interest in her personal appearance, and even when she was young it is probable that she didn't take much. There was something about her peculiarly unselfconscious and transparent. Her direct, candid, vivid gaze was, and always had been, directed outward, and that look in her eyes, so intensely blue, seemed to be like a light shining in her frail withered body, so strongly that one did not notice her worn hands, or the shrivelled flesh of her thin throat, but received from her an impression of youth and of extreme candour.

Her sprightly personality lent grace and even elegance to the shabby little house she lived in, at least so Peter always thought, chuckling over the light, positively skittish, way she did her dusting and sweeping. The house had only two rooms on the ground floor. Behind the small parlour where she now sat was the dining-room, which was larger, and contained the Steinway Grand and was lined with books. Among these were complete rather shabby editions of Zeb Campbell's works, of Trollope, Charles Lamb, Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot. The English poets of the nineteenth century were bound uniformly in fat volumes of green cloth. Motley's "Dutch Republic," Gibbon's "Rise and Fall," Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" and Froissart's "Chronicles", occupied shelves behind the piano with a lot of boys' school-books, histories, geographies, books of elementary science, dog-eared and dilapidated. But nearer to hand, where Amanda could reach them, were newer volumes which showed titles relating to the science of Astronomy, the Einstein Theory of Relativity, the Nature of Space, and of Atoms, and Darwin's "Descent of Man," together with Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell's "Mysticism and

Logic." This room was used as a sitting-room in the evening when the supper had been cleared away. It was cool in the summer, because a verandah shaded by a trumpet creeper ran round two sides of it. From the verandah one had, through the screening vines, across the fence that divided Amanda's garden from her opposite neighbour's, a glimpse of the lake between two other houses. The seclusion of the verandah was at the best relative. One couldn't be seen as one sat sewing, but one could see a good deal of what was going on in other people's backyards if one wanted to, could see the milkman going up the back stoops, and so on—but one didn't. At least Amanda didn't. She guarded her privacy jealously and paid no attention to her neighbours, detesting busy-bodies and gossip; not enough attention, some of them thought, considering her a rather unsociable woman.

Campbelltown was a sociable place. It had its country club on the lake, where there were golf tournaments and tennis tournaments and dances; it had its boating club and yacht-racing and fleet of sailing canoes; it had its sociable churches, Episcopalian and Presbyterian, and its good public library, and five miles away up valley it had its racecourse that brought crowds of people down for the month of August. There was a winter colony as well as a summer colony, people who came down to hunt and go ice-boating and skating on the lake, and there were the old families who stayed there all the year round.

The old families of Campbelltown and Jordan Valley had a very good opinion of themselves. Family trees put away in portfolios proved their connection with certain dignified houses in England, but they did not display these or mention them, though John Prescott had been known to say that there weren't more than a dozen real American families in the whole of New York State,

and half of them were in Jordan Valley. By real American he meant Anglo-Saxon, the descendants of English gentlemen. Not that the Prescotts or the Gilberts or the Campbells aped English ways, or set any great store by English customs; they didn't. America was good enough for them. If they went abroad and renewed acquaintance, as they did sometimes, with their distant cousins in England or Scotland, they came back eminently contented to be at home again and sit down at seven o'clock to a country supper of fried chicken and corn fritters and large hot cups of coffee with thick cream. They did not care for display of any kind, or for other ways than their own. They were sufficiently sure of themselves to take it for granted that outsiders would recognise their good breeding, and they kept themselves to themselves, evolving a type of their own, and a manner of living that was only vaguely and unconsciously reminiscent of that tradition which had come down to them from those country gentlemen across the Atlantic. There had always been gentlemen-farmers and horse-racing and a pack of foxhounds in Jordan Valley ever since anyone could remember, and there had always been some Campbell or Gilbert or Prescott rich enough to keep up a racing stable and to take on the hounds. They were not dependent on the New York crowd to keep up their hunt for them. The Jordan clans were prosperous people whose sons went out into the world to make their fortunes, but came back again when they had made them to settle down in the country, because they liked the life there among the rolling wooded hills, because they loved their old white farmhouses that they had made comfortable, with their nice bathrooms, their gay chintzes, their wide fireplaces, full of crackling blazing birch logs, on frosty autumn evenings, and loved the sparkling mornings when

the hills, as now in October, were aflame with the burning gold and vermilion of the maple trees. One of the Prescots had invented a talking-machine that had poured and was still pouring millions into all their jolly comfortable laps. It was the Napoleon of talking-machines. It had gone out into the world and had fought its way to China, to South Africa, to Alaska. It had wiped every other talking-machine out of existence, simply wiped them off the face of the earth, and built itself a palatial residence in New York, a high, glittering office-building inhabited by hundreds of its offspring; but the Prescots stuck to their early American farmhouses, with their green shutters, their prim gardens of hollyhocks and larkspurs, their neat white-fenced paddocks, their long stables, and went on with their haymaking and hunting, driving about the country in dog-carts and buggies and buckboards behind spanking chestnuts, only using their motors when they went up to the city, that is to New York.

The old people of Campbelltown looked askance at New York. They looked out at it, from the leafy bowers of their shady verandahs, with contempt and aversion. Most of the houses in the little town had verandahs. There were a few square white houses with beautiful Queen Anne doors that dated from the time of the Georges. These were prim and fragile, set back from the street behind small white gates, and gave the town its aristocratic air; but there were others, designed after no known school of architecture, that were, if not beautiful, at any rate very commodious and inviting, with their rambling wings, their inconsequent gables, and their pleasant broad front steps. Most of them were built of wood, painted brown or grey or pale yellow, with roofs of wooden shingles, and all were sheltered by the great

elm trees that towered high over their gables, their magnificent branches interlacing across the wide quiet streets, letting a scattered sunlight down through the great green tunnels to dapple the road. In the summer the little town was green and shady and cool. In the winter it was white, with snowdrifts piled up against wood-sheds, but at this time of year it was embowered in a glory of flame and gold, for the frost had been sharp and the trees had caught fire in a night. Nothing could exceed the brilliant shimmer of that golden light, pouring through those transparent yellow and scarlet leaves. The street was a riot of every shade of yellow, crimson, vermilion and bronze, and the falling leaves, still crisp and vivid, were spilt under the trees on the ground, and through the gay, glittering, dancing leaves appeared, far above, the blue sparkling sky, towards which little clouds of white smoke curled up from bonfires of dead leaves that gave a sharp, acrid scent to the frosty air.

The main street of the town ran parallel to the lake. Half a mile up, away, that is, from the shops, the post office and the ramshackle Mansion House Hotel, with its long verandah and rows of rocking-chairs, at the bottom of the hill where the Campbell house stood, there was a sunny opening above the bridge over the river which flowed down the valley from the lake to join the Hudson a hundred miles away. The Indians had used the river for trade, bringing their deerskins and bearskins down that way in birch-bark canoes, and the young people of Campbelltown still used the same kind of canoe for pleasure. There were boat-houses on the river banks tucked in among the long trailing branches of the weeping willows. On summer evenings, shadowy forms in light muslin stepped out of the little white gates, there was a sound of young voices calling, the tinkling of mandolines

under the willows; and presently the slim canoes would shoot out across the lake, silent as swallows, making no ripple, the long, dipping paddles cutting clean into the silver surface of the still water.

A pleasant place to live in. One understands why its old families who had made it what it was refused to allow that contractor from New York to put up a brand new first-class hotel there. He talked himself hoarse, he offered an extravagant price for a lot, it made no difference. John Prescott called a meeting of the leading citizens of the town, and they turned the offer down. Let him build his hotel across the valley on the other side of the racecourse. They didn't want their town spoilt. They were jealous of outside influence, and resented every newcomer who built a house on the shores of the lake. Indeed, John Prescott and Bill Gilbert had bought up most of the wooded shore to prevent that sort of thing.

These people, these older ones, were very obstinate, and loyal to each other. They hung together. "What do we want with a new hotel," they would say, "bringing a gang down on us from New York? Wants to boom the town, that guy? Well, I guess we don't want any booming. I guess we can look after ourselves."

John Prescott had been furious when he found out that Zeb Campbell, before his death, on one of his sprees in New York, had given Isaac Daw a mortgage on the Campbell place. He drove in from Prescottville six miles down the valley in his buggy behind his fast pair of greys to see Amanda about it, and gave her a piece of his mind. "Now why didn't you make him come to see me, Amanda? Say, look here, why did you let him go to that Jew?" But Amanda had stood up to him.

"You mind your own business, John Prescott," she had

answered, flushing. "Maybe Zeb didn't want to go to you for money."

There had been a coldness between them ever since. Amanda had a way of putting people off. "She's too darn proud, that's what's the matter with her," John Prescott had said, grumbling, very much put out, but feeling a kind of admiration for the little woman all the same.

They all admired her and were loyal to her, but she annoyed them. She was so afraid they would be sorry for her that she was often much more rude than friendly; and then she was cranky, you couldn't get away from it. She didn't seem to like having people drop in to see her, even her old friends, and she almost never went to see anyone herself, however often they asked her, so that they had gradually left her alone. But they felt conscience-stricken and uncomfortable about her, and would say to each other that it wasn't good for Amanda to be shut up like that by herself all the time. Living so much alone with that queer son of hers was making her queer herself. Some of them would shiver when they passed her front door, thinking of poor Christopher. That sort of thing in a family was a kind of curse. It cast a gloom on a house. You sort of felt it when you went into her dark little hall, and like as not, there was Christopher himself staring at you, white as a ghost and always sick-looking, with his big pale blue eyes shining feverishly, and nodding to you maybe with that gentle mysterious smile of his that was so pathetically foolish but somehow seemed uncannily wise too. It was a wonder, they thought, that Amanda kept as cheerful as she did, and an awful pity that she stayed away from church. You would think that a woman in her situation would find comfort in religion, but her troubles had only made her more defiant and

irreligious. She was as perky and as chirpy as a cricket when you met her, but very ready to take offence, and stiffened right up if you asked after Chris. She wanted the whole town to pretend he was like other people. Well, they did pretend for her sake, and they felt very kindly towards her; and when she went briskly down the street, light of step, in her modest black clothes, with her soft sandy hair slightly untidy under her small black hat and her reticule swaying on her arm, followed by her son, who was usually talking to himself and pointing this way and that way at the trees, the birds, the sky, they would nod cheerfully and call out, "Good morning, Amanda. Good morning, Chris."

Some of them remembered her as a slip of a girl, when Zeb brought her home as a bride to the Campbell homestead, a pretty little thing with shining blue eyes and soft reddish straw-coloured hair. Old Asa Bellowes, who was a hundred and two and sat all day in the back of Sam Smith's store smoking his pipe among the kegs of lard and sides of bacon, could tell you all about what a handsome young couple they were, though she didn't come up to his shoulder, and how Zeb had taken her off to furrin parts, and broke her heart mebbe over there with his wild goings-on, for she come home alone one day, six years later, with a baby in her arms and two boys hanging to her skirts, and Zeb he never turned up for a year or more, an' then roarin' drunk, on top of a coach with a lot of gay sparks from the races. They drove right up the street at a gallop, yelling and hollering, and stopped at the gate of the Campbell place; and Mrs. Campbell she came outside and stood right there in front of them and said she wa'n't at home, or words to that effect; but she took him back arter a spell. Yes, he come back to her all right, and did pretty much as she told him; but he never

was no good, was Zeb Campbell, though some says as how he did paint some mighty purty picters. So old Asa would ramble on, if he had a drop of rum in him, cackling with hollow, eerie laughter and clearing his flabby turkey throat and spitting. He didn't mean any harm. No one in the town meant any harm to Amanda Campbell, and many were fond of Christopher, who was so gentle and weak in the head and had such a beautiful innocent face. Indeed, Christopher had a number of friends in the town, especially among the poorer people. There was Giuseppe the Dago who trundled bananas through the streets and along the country roads on his barrow, he was a great friend of Christopher's, and Wu Yang the Chinese laundryman, and big Sam who ran the motor garage. They liked having him about. They had a protective, respectful feeling for him, as if he were someone special and apart, removed from them mysteriously, set above them, as it were, by virtue of his helplessness and his simplicity; but Amanda didn't realise this. She hadn't an idea that Christopher's slight form and narrow fair head had come to be almost a symbol in the place. She was always on the defensive about him. She didn't believe in any of his friends except the small ones, the ragged urchins who came hanging round his carpenter's shop, and who would stand with round eyes watching him by the hour at his bench while he made them toys, small birch-bark canoes, and fantastic figures in wood that jumped up and down on wires. Sometimes if he were in a cheerful mood he would smile and babble away to them while he worked, in a rapid, almost incomprehensible, tongue; but none of them ever seemed the least mystified or surprised by his prattle. They would just stand there and stare, fascinated by his quick fingers, and going off in the evening with some toy he had made for them, they

would show it proudly in the town, saying, "Chris Campbell, he done it," so that not even the bigger boys ever jeered at him or laughed.

But Amanda Campbell didn't know all this. Nor did she know that she was a thorn in the side of the good people who had known her husband and who resented her poverty, considering it a sort of disgrace to their community and a blot on the town's reputation that she should be obliged to live like that, in that dingy little house, instead of in her own home which stood empty and which Peter Campbell never came to. They were proud of Peter and of the name he had made for himself as an architect, but they resented him, too, because he didn't come home to live, and didn't look after his mother properly. As for his wife, well, they could do very well without her. They would have been nice to her for Peter's sake if she had taken the trouble to be friendly, but she had shown that she considered Campbelltown not good enough for her, so that ended it. When they read her name in the social columns of the "New York Times" they sniffed, and they were not in the least impressed by Mrs. John J. Jamieson, leader of Society. What was New York Society, anyhow? When you came down to it, was there any such thing? They presumed to doubt it.

Amanda Campbell came from Boston. They preferred that, because they preferred Boston to New York. Boston, being further removed from Campbelltown, did not irritate them so much. Her family wasn't, to be sure, a real old Boston family, still her father had been a very distinguished Professor at Harvard, and they approved of such distinction. The Campbells spoke of Amanda's father as "the illustrious Professor". Professor Simpson had once paid a visit to Campbelltown, and had taken some pains to correct their use of that word "illustrious".

"I would beg of you, ma'am, to note," he had said to old Mrs. Campbell, Zeb's mother, who was now buried in the family graveyard under the hill, "that in this country every Tom Dick and Harry is illustrious, and every small discovery in the realm of science is hailed as a miracle that is destined to change the face of the world. I would have you understand that I am a man of very mediocre ability, and that my daughter is a flighty ignoramus."

The Campbells had rather liked that, but his words had thrown Amanda into a rage; not the ones about her, but the way he spoke of himself. She had upbraided him stormily for such talk, getting quite scarlet in the face. She had been somewhat given to rages in her youth. Once when she was ten years old she had been sent home in disgrace from school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for throwing a bottle of ink at a schoolmate; and Professor Simpson, issuing from his library, had advised her when told of the occurrence to take to the study of mathematics. "You will find the pursuit of that science very delightful," he had assured her, "and an excellent antidote to the passionate turbulence of your nature." She had, curiously enough, believed him, and had taken his advice; and she had found that it worked, and all her life had kept up the study as best she could, even when things were most difficult for her. It had become her one secret cherished pastime; but she realised now that to most people it appeared a ridiculous pursuit for an old woman, so she never spoke of it, and hoped that the people of Campbelltown didn't know.

There had been a long period of years after her marriage when she had had little time to read, much less to study. She had trailed round France and Italy for three years with Zeb while he drank and played at painting. She had borne him a son in Paris and another in Naples and another

in Cornwall, where she had stayed in a fishing village by the sea for two years while he amused himself in London; and then in Campbelltown, three years after that when he came back home to her, she had borne him a fourth son, Christopher; for she had loved him unreasonably, with a fierce, desperate, passionate tenderness, not at all consistent with that other philosophical and logical side of her nature; and although he was a drunkard and a dilettante, she had remained, almost to her own mortification, under the spell of his charm, the indescribable charm that Peter his second son had inherited. It was when Christopher was five that Zeb had died, struggling in Amanda's skinny arms to get away from the lions that prowled round his bed; and Amanda in a fury of remorse, of pity, of anguished shame and revolted tenderness had locked her lips for ever on the secret fear and the secret guilt that she felt in regard to her boys. She already knew by then that she had been guilty of a crime against Christopher in bringing him into the world, and her instinct warned her that she had cause to fear for the others; but she kept these things to herself, and determined to fight, to fight what? it—the nameless thing that was the source of weakness in them.

Little Amanda Campbell, fighting for her sons, a skinny little soldier of a woman marching along through a host of shadows, marshalling her small squad before her—it is like that that I see her. She wasn't anything of an Amazon, more like a belligerent sparrow, some small fierce ruffled bird. Zeb had run through a heap of money. She found on his death that she was poor. Some of her friends and relations advised her to sell the Campbell house, others offered to pay for the boys' education; but she said no, she could look after her own sons, thank you, and the house belonged to them. She couldn't afford to

live in it; she would let it in the summer, but young Zeb must have it when he grew up; and then when young Zeb died at nineteen, after a long and expensive illness, some kind of queer creeping tubercular paralysis, John Prescott had again advised her to sell the place and offered to buy it himself; but she said no, Archie her third boy, would make the family fortunes. Archie had a good head for business, and would be rich enough to live like a gentleman; and then Archie had been drowned in the lake. Death had got two of her sons by the time she was forty, the two normal, ordinary ones. Peter and Christopher were left. The Campbell house now belonged to Peter. He had taken over the mortgage from Mr. Daw, and intended, he said, some day to come back there and settle down when he'd had enough of building skyscrapers. But Amanda almost hoped he wouldn't. She was almost grateful to Adelaide for hating Campbelltown. It seemed safer, somehow, to go without Peter than to have him there, living close to her. Though she hated New York, she felt somehow that in delivering him up to the monstrous city she was propitiating the fates on his behalf. As long as she didn't show the white feather, didn't dispute his possession with them, they might leave him alone, might let him anyhow live. But she only felt like this when she was very tired, when her power of clear reasoning failed and she lay awake at night listening to the wind that came down the lake from over the hills. It was difficult for Amanda to look calmly at the lake, just as it was difficult for her to go into that empty room in the big house where her husband had screamed and sweated to death; but she did take walks along the lake shore with Christopher; and she did go up to the big house once a week to air the rooms. She forced herself to do this; and insisted to Peter that she liked doing it, asking him particularly not

to put a caretaker there. It wasn't morbidity. It was her way of fighting her ghosts. She didn't believe in giving in to herself, and she had a theory that people had no right to be unhappy.

"There's no room for unhappy people in this world," she would say to her boys, in her short, brisk way; and this might have been her one creed, the full statement of her philosophy, for all she ever said to them. Peter never remembered her moralising or preaching to any greater fullness. What they had learnt from her concerning the high purpose of life and the seriousness of moral issues they had learnt from watching her and living with her, not from listening to her words. Her words had been few, but there had been her life for them to look at.

It was there for him still to contemplate, to depend on, to find relief in, if and when he wanted. He felt it beside him. He felt her existing beside him, strong, small, light and indomitable. He was aware of her as if they were standing shoulder to shoulder. She exerted no pressure. She did not even lay a hand on his arm. And he depended on her and thought of her gratefully, and of her passionate love that was deep and dumb. "You keep your money," she would say to him scornfully. "You've earned it, and you may want it. I don't. Chris and I are all right. If I get into a fix, I'll tell you"; but she never did tell him. It was her pride, her cussedness, he sometimes called it; but he knew that his intimacy with her owed its charm to that very quality. It was she who was shy with him and who kept her distance. He had only to look about him, indeed he didn't have to look further than his own wife and mother-in-law, to realise what possibilities for tyranny, for cruelty, for exasperation and hatred, existed in family ties. He knew that to him this close bond, this awful secret intimacy of blood between his mother and himself

would have been unbearable had it not been for the special delicacy of her reserve. She had chosen to give up, as it were, her title of motherhood and to claim none of its privileges. She carried this mode of behaviour to such lengths with Peter, asking him no questions and offering him no advice, that one day he asked her why she never told him what he ought or ought not to do, and she had looked at him in surprise.

"But how can I, Peter?" she had said. "How can I be sure that I know better than you what's good for you?"

He had remembered long afterwards the puzzled look in her candid eyes, and the wistful gravity of her face.

How could she be sure that she knew what was good for him? It wasn't easy to say that when one was as far from indifference as she was, and when she could count on so little outside in the way of ordered social traditions to help him. His inheritance? They never mentioned it. The big, boiling, blustering, bragging world of young America? She despised it. What sort of standard of morals or taste could that polyglot concourse of uprooted races supply, with its mushroom religions, its hysterical enthusiasms, its vast provincial ignorance? What, indeed, was there to guide him except what she knew, what she had learned painfully, in her long struggle, and what she kept turning over now in her deep tucked-away solitude. And yet she kept silent about her fears; and when they talked, as they did talk, it was almost always about some book he had sent her, or the amazing peculiarities of the age they lived in, and abstract questions of science and philosophy, like a couple of enthusiastic students.

In fact she handled him with what seemed to him a skill in the art of human intercourse worthy of some famous sophisticated lady of the French eighteenth

century. It amused him to find in her such resemblances. They were right. Given as he was to grotesque flights of fancy, tempted constantly by the shallow conventions of his wife's smart New York world to irreverence and a defiant delight in vulgarity, he nevertheless approached his mother always with a grave, exact sense of what was appropriate to her, and it was with a certain hurting knowledge of the pathos of her life that he observed, watching her at her housework, at her interminable dusting and darning and mending and cooking, that she should have been not only a *femme savante*, but was a very great lady.

He reflected sometimes that she had been obliged to spend forty years of her life doing things that were distasteful to her, and that she had done them with elegance, with sprightly good humour, without betraying a sign of distaste or resentment, with even what appeared to him now as a positively reckless ardour, spending her strength extravagantly, pouring out her life carelessly, as if it were of no consequence. She, who was a thinker and a philosopher by inclination, a worshipper of the clear, silent spirit of abstract thought, who cared nothing for what she ate or drank or put on her back, or, indeed, for any of the so-called amenities of life, but had all the same a liking for the conversation of witty and scholarly people—she, of all women, had been involved in an endless struggle with beefsteaks and blankets and saucepans and medicine bottles, and with the endless problems presented by a group of turbulent boys: violent tempers and ravenous appetites and torn breeches and muddy boots, to say nothing of illnesses. Measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pox, scarlet fever, they had had every damned childish ailment that was going, and she was, as he remembered her, for ever nursing them. He could

recall her thin, exhausted face leaning over him in the night, could see her in her shabby flannel wrapper going from one rumpled feverish bed to the other with a lighted candle, her bright eyes sunk in her head, could hear her voice, a humorous note in it even then, sounding thin and sweet in the darkened sick-room, as she tenderly upbraided them. "Now, Archie, you must keep covered up. You must *not* kick the blankets off again. Yes, I know, but you've got to be hot and all sticky and horrid, you've just got to stand it. I'll give you another drink if you promise——" and then, on a sigh of soft appeal, "Oh, Archie, do promise." She would sometimes appeal to them like that for help against themselves. "Can't you stop being naughty for a little while?" she would ask in desperation.

But they hadn't helped her, and what had she got out of it? Not one of them had been any good to her really. They had all gone off and left her except Christopher, intent on their own lives, taking from her everything she had to give them, and spending it ruthlessly and foolishly on themselves. And what had she not given them? What had she withheld? The small fortune that would have left her with freedom and security in her old age was gone. She had spent it in order to send three of them to Groton and to Harvard, and for himself, so that he could spend a few years at the Beaux Arts and wander a year longer round Europe, she had mortgaged her house; and it wasn't as if she had ever felt certain of any of them, of their ability to last out, to be a credit to her. She must have known always that they were not a good investment, that they were too soft, too violent, too sensitive, that the chances were that when they came up against the great grinding American machine they would fail. Or had she obstinately believed in them, in spite of the

taint in their blood that had had its way so completely with poor Christopher? How was one to tell? She was so obstinate, even in her most transparent deceptions. He remembered the subterfuges to which she had resorted in order to shield from them the drunkard who was, God curse him! their father. Not one of them had ever dared suggest to her by a sign that he knew the truth. They had all together kept up an elaborate fiction about him. Even now, more than thirty years after his father's death, Peter and Amanda never mentioned this subject. But she had spent more than her fortune, much more. Her youth? Her mind? What of these? Though still so very youthful in some ways, her vigour was gone, and her mind was too tired now to grapple with the problems that would once have delighted her. Peter could see this, and it was to him the most pathetic thing about her. For years she had been obliged to put aside her books; and then, when at last she was able to turn to them again, she had found that what once had been a very amusing exercise was difficult and bewildering. She still cared, that was the point. It wasn't at all that she had grown indifferent or lazy. She was still the ardent little inquirer after precise knowledge; but her power for close thinking had left her, and she knew it. She knew that she could not do now what she might have done; and he was able to judge of what that might have been from what she still was; and by the eager, wistful way in which she had set about catching up; for science had progressed far since she had turned aside from its trail through the heavens. What she had read and thought about in her youth was overgrown with moss now, and all she could hope to accomplish before she died was to find out just a little of what the thinkers had been up to during her long absence. The upshot of it all was

that she had thrown away her mind for their sakes, and acquired character in its place. But again, it was her sons who benefited, not herself. She did not even know that she was remarkable.

Often when he came down to Campbelltown he felt all this, and with it such an intense sense of their intimacy that he was frightened, not for himself, but for her. It seemed to him unfair, almost cruel, that he should know her so well, that she should be so exposed to anyone. Her essential quality he felt to be her aloofness, her separateness. She stood, she had always stood, even when they had all clung to her skirts, alone: small and frail and solitary. He had seen her like that ever since he could remember, a light, slight, little creature of immense dignity, wrapped in a kind of virginal purity that protected her like armour.

Now she sat waiting for him. There was a pleasant smell of burning wood in the room. The birch logs crackled, their bark curling and crisping as the pretty flickering flames crept round them, and a faint hissing came from a piece of driftwood tucked in behind them, from which lovely blue and green lights wavered up through the ruddy glow. A basket of pine-cones stood on the brick hearth. When Christopher began to fidget and shuffle his feet Amanda said:

"Put some more pine cones on the fire, Chris," an expression of vigilant tenderness in her blue eyes; and he did so, while she watched him, her needle poised in one hand, the woollen sock bulging over her darning-egg like a rudimentary doll, grasped by the throat in the other; and when he had successfully selected one by one half-a-dozen of the pretty stiff hard cones from the basket and tossed them into the burning logs, she smiled and said crisply, "Thank you, Chris, such a delicious smell," and

turned again to her book. She was always pleased when he did some little useful thing for her. She would say to herself with pride, "There now, see that!" But she did not delude herself about him. She knew better than anyone how helpless he was, and how it was due solely to her own obstinate patience that he had learnt to dress himself neatly and to behave well at table. She had trained him to do many things as one might train a dog to fetch one's hat or handkerchief, and she felt a fierce pride in the knowledge that he gave the world an impression of being much more normal than he really was. Even Peter didn't know how bad, how naughty he could be sometimes. No one knew, and no one, Amanda was determined, ever should know, except, of course, old Aunt Clo, who believed in a Host of Devils and would say quite cheerfully, when the ugly sly spirit lurking in him looked sullenly out of Christopher's eyes and made faces at them, "Lordy, Miss Campbell, da's de dibble got into dat po' chile again." Old Clo didn't mind. She knew it wasn't Chris really. She would go calmly on with her work when he stuck his tongue out at her, and if he showed signs of getting very bad would turn and scold the Devil in him roundly, apostrophising him in accents very like those of her negro preacher whom she went to hear twice every Sunday, "You come out of dat boy, Satan," Amanda would hear her say, "or de Lord God Jehovah he'll smite you wid de thunder and de lightning. Aint' yo got nothin' else to do but come botherin' roun' here and makin' dat chile suffer?" And presently she would burst into a loud, voluptuous, rollicking hymn of praise, her voice tolling and wailing joyfully through the kitchen above the sound of her egg-beater, and poor Chris would cower as if overwhelmed and then be soothed by that warm flood of rhythmic sound.

Amanda's method was different. It was her habit never to pay any attention to the ugly being that was not Christopher but that without warning would take possession of him, and when it faced her in her son's pale, tormented eyes, to smile it out of countenance. She had a light touch in grim matters, and a way of tossing her head at spectres with a quick, defiant jerk, and she said to herself that if Chris wasn't like other people, she hadn't such a high opinion of ordinary people as to wish he were. In a world of greedy busybodies he, at any rate, was devoid of ambition or greed or vanity. He never used the word "I", never complained, never asked for anything, never said he was cold or hungry. He would have starved had food not been put before him, would have shivered patiently half-frozen through the night had she not tucked the warm blankets round his shoulders; and he never boasted or said, "I did so and so," but on rare occasions would allude to himself in the third person, saying, "Chris was glad to see Peter," or he would scold himself, mimicking his mother's tones of reproof; and sometimes when he was very depressed he would sit huddled up in some corner out of the way, and repeat softly to himself, "Poor Chris. Poor Chris."

Amanda didn't believe in devils, but she was comforted by the warm-hearted superstitious coloured woman who loved Christopher and took for granted that he was possessed by a demon. Indeed it sometimes seemed as if the absurd, enormous, fat black woman, with her eyes rolling under her red bandana and her talk of black magic, did understand him better than any of the doctors whom she had consulted and who had been able to do nothing for him. A very interesting case, they said. His cleverness with his hands was most astonishing; but none of them had really believed what she told them

about his being in some ways not less but more highly developed than a normal man. It wasn't only, she had insisted, that he had very acute senses, and could hear things that other people could not hear, and see abnormally far, but he had as well premonitions, especially in regard to Peter. He seemed to know when things were going badly with Peter over there in New York. Sometimes he would wake up at night and come into her room to rouse her, shuddering and whispering Peter's name over and over. And he would stand there by her bed wringing his hands, the tears streaming down his face, until she got up and promised to telephone to Peter in the morning, and led him back to bed and soothed him by telling him over and over again that Peter was within call, but that he was asleep now off there in New York and must not be disturbed. And she had found out afterwards, to her secret terror, that these dreams did sometimes correspond to something that had happened to Peter in New York; but after forcing herself to discuss this fact with one or two medical men who obviously thought it nonsense, she had kept the discovery to herself, and refused to admit even in her own mind that she had come to trust and fear these dreams of Christopher's as if they were signals of distress sent out by her other son without his knowing it through the din, clang and roar of the great distant city, and reaching his brother somehow, here in the little village. But she had never, because she was secretly afraid of all such things as psychic phenomena, told Peter about this; and so, since Chris couldn't tell him, he didn't know. He only knew that there was some peculiar bond between himself and his brother, and only felt that poor Chris understood him for some reason better than anyone. He was always very gentle with Chris, and seemed to enjoy being with him.

Once he said to Amanda, "I like being with him because he's got no gol-darned preconceived notions about me—because he's got no theories of any kind and no ideas in his head. He just gets me, that's all, and loves me and doesn't worry. Gosh! what a relief. He makes me feel wonderful. He's so peaceful, dear. You see, events don't concern him. Nothing that's happening on the earth has any effect on him. He doesn't know the world's in a mess. He only knows you and me and eternal things. He doesn't even know that he's going to die. He is living in that other world of timeless being, and he thinks, each minute, that it's for ever—that this is for ever—this little house, this shady street, this bird singing, this sun shining. Think of it, Amanda Campbell, think of the chance he's got, with nothing to worry about, to find out eternal things, and I tell you, he does. He's in touch with the mind of the universe—the cosmos tells him its secrets. Can't you feel it, can't you see it sometimes in his eyes? That's what makes him uncanny, and worries people. Of course, he's no use in this world of ours. He doesn't understand it, but he understands something beyond and outside it. If only he could tell us. Gee! I'll bet he'd have something to say worth hearing!"

He would go out with Chris to his carpenter-shop, sit down on a wooden box, and talk to him by the hour. Sometimes he would stay with him all the morning, talking away about his work, and his problems, as if Chris understood all about such things as architecture and aesthetics and the mysterious connection between the imagination and the subconscious mind, and he would complain bitterly to him of his own limitations, his futility, his disgust with his work, and having no time to accomplish anything. "By God, Chris," he'd say, "if only I had a little more time, a hundred years more, say. If

only the clock would wait a bit. Time's an illusion, Chris, so some people say, but it's a damned difficult one to get rid of. What do you think? You don't worry about it. So why should I? But I do. You see, when you're lonely in a crowd and everything round you seems queer and unnatural and unexpected, as if living were like walking along a strange road you'd never travelled before, then you realise that time is passing you like a wind. That's the trouble with seeing too many things and noticing too much. Now if I just sat here with you, looking out of the door of this shed at that fence yonder, the Time question would be all right."

He didn't mind what he said to Chris. He could think out loud. It was as safe as talking to God, or to some utterly innocent saint who, because he loved him, did somehow understand; and indeed Chris would listen with an expression of rapt adoration on his face, forming the words Peter spoke with his lips, laughing with delight when Peter laughed, frowning when he frowned; and long afterwards, sometimes months afterwards, he would suddenly come out with long quotations from Peter, speaking whole lucid sentences, in Peter's own drawling manner. One evening, for instance, while Amanda was reading, she had been startled by hearing him say suddenly in a queer, clear voice, "There is another world, behind the appearance of this one. This world is a damned noise, the other is silent. It can be reached in dreams, I know, because I have reached it."

There was a rapt expression on his face. His pale eyes had shone strangely for a moment, in the dim, lamplit room. Then his slack jaw had dropped foolishly, he had looked frightened, sniggered, and begun to bite his nails.

Amanda thought of all this now as she sat reading.

"Circumstances on the surface of the earth, for various more or less accidental reasons, suggest conceptions which turn out to be inaccurate, although they have come to seem like necessities of thought."

What was Christopher thinking of now, she wondered, sitting there making those mysterious signs to the fire, he who did not take into account circumstances of life on the surface of the earth? Was Peter right? Did he tap some mysterious source of knowledge unknown to themselves? How could one tell?

Usually she read eagerly, with a wistful intensity and a kind of grim, suppressed delight, concentrating, for all the activity of her worn, pricked fingers, for all her darning and the litter of socks and wool and scissors and so forth in her lap, on the meaning of the printed pages, as a student might do, some young engineering enthusiast, her head tilted to one side in the lamplight, and her withered lips puckered; but to-night she read out of contrariness, because she was too excited to want to read, because she was expecting Peter and did not want to be in such a flutter over his coming. "Nonsense," she had said to herself, "you just sit and read quietly and behave yourself, and get on with your mending."

The book she was reading was by the Englishman, Bertrand Russell, and in spite of her restlessness she found it delightful. She was a great admirer of Bertrand Russell and read all his books, even what she called the wrong-headed ones.

"The most important of these circumstances is that most objects on the earth's surface are fairly persistent and nearly stationary from a terrestrial point of view. If this were not the case, the idea of going a journey would not seem so definite as it does. If you want to travel

from King's Cross to Edinburgh, you know that you will find King's Cross where it always has been, that the railway line will take the course that it did when you last made the journey, and that Waverley Station in Edinburgh will not have walked up to the Castle."

Amanda laughed. Her laugh was a little light chirping sound in the silence of the room, scarcely louder than the chirp of a cricket; but it made Christopher wheel round and stare at her, startled, while his hands, as if they were frightened beings animated by an unreasoning terror of their own, fluttered before him.

Amanda looked up from her book, and meeting the startled, imploring eyes of her son, showed no surprise or nervousness. She continued to smile, her lips humorously curved, her eyes steady. The quick catch of her breath caused by his sudden movement had been instantly repressed. No one would have noticed it, and she spoke gaily, in her gentle, sprightly way, as if he were sure to be interested, as if she knew that he would like to share Bertrand Russell's little joke with her.

"Listen, Chris. It is so amusing. I will read it to you. It's about a journey. Listen. 'You therefore say and think, because King's Cross Station is where you always thought it was, and Edinburgh stays in Scotland where it belongs,' that's where it does belong, Chris, it's the capital of Scotland and I've been there, 'that you have travelled to Edinburgh, not that Edinburgh has travelled to you, though the latter statement would be just as accurate. The success of this common-sense point of view'—common sense is a great thing, Chris, but in that other lovely world of science it's just foolishness—'depends upon a number of things which are really of the nature of luck. Suppose all the houses in London were perpetually moving about, like a swarm of

bees; suppose railways moved and changed their shapes like avalanches; and finally suppose that material objects were perpetually being formed and dissolved like clouds. There is nothing impossible in these suppositions. Something like them must have been verified when the earth was hotter than it is now. But obviously what we call a journey to Edinburgh would have no meaning in such a world. You would begin, no doubt, by asking the taxi-driver, "Where's King's Cross this morning?" At the station you would have to ask a similar question about Edinburgh, but the booking-office clerk would reply, "What part of Edinburgh do you mean, sir? Princes Street has gone to Glasgow, the Castle has moved up to the Highlands, and Waverley Station is under water in the middle of the Firth of Forth."'''

Amanda had put down her darning and taken the book in her hands. As she read she glanced over the top of it at her son. Her thin, reedy voice did not falter. The words she spoke sounded fragile and clear as the tinkling notes of a spinet, a little out of tune, but touched with delicate precision.

She was saying to herself as she read, "His spirit is imprisoned. In spite of all they say in their medical books I know his spirit is there, perfect and whole, locked up, like a prisoner in his poor head, trying to get out. I can see it. It is looking out at me now from his eyes. Oh, poor Chris, my poor, poor Chris!" And smiling brightly, as if really she were still enjoying the delightful book and had no sense whatever of any danger threatening in the quiet room, she said, "Isn't it amusing, Chris? Isn't it fun to think that the idea of place is only a rough sort of guess, that there is nothing logically necessary about it and that it cannot be made precise? That's what Bertrand Russell says, and he is a great

mathematician, one of the greatest in the world. Peter admires him awfully. He's done, you know, what my father, your grandfather, Professor Simpson of Harvard, wanted to do and dreamed of doing. He has worked out the philosophy of numbers. You know what I mean by numbers, don't you? One, two, three and four. Well, he has explained what they mean, has linked them up, you see, to other things, things like the movements of the stars and so on, and has made a new lovely wonderful pattern of abstract thought for people to study."

Amanda was not talking at random. She knew what she was about when she talked in this way to Christopher, and now as she watched his strained, quivering, grimacing face relax, she gave a little sigh of relief. The danger, if such a small darting furtive thing could be called danger, was over, and Christopher, soothed and cheerful again, was imitating her gaiety and sniggering happily and saying, "Peter—Peter—coming to see Chris"; but quickly a look of suspicion came into his face, a sly, ugly look of doubt, of distrust. "Peter, Peter?" he insisted, this time questioningly, and Amanda nodded reassuringly.

"Yes, Chris, Peter is coming. We're waiting supper for him. Don't you remember. He'll be here by eight o'clock. He'll take a car in Albany. He should be here very soon now. You can watch for him out of the window if you like. See, I've not drawn the curtains."

It was true. Although it was quite dark outside, the crisp brocade curtains were not drawn, and the square panes of glass in the low windows reflected in their gleaming depths the fire and the lighted lamps as if another fire and another lamp were lighted out there in the street.

Christopher crossed to the window and stood with his back to her looking out, placing his face against the glass

and shading it with his two hands so that he might see out better into the dark. He was counting to himself, "One, two, three, four." He counted up to eight, then began again. Amanda, watching him, let her work fall into her lap. The room was still and deep. The fire spluttered and hissed faintly. "Seven, eight," whispered Chris to himself. "Time for Peter." From the distant kitchen Aunt Clo's voice came wailing joyously; a hymn about the blood of Jesus. "Wash me white—wash me white—in de blood of de Lamb."

There was a letter from Adelaide Campbell on the chimney-piece. She had not opened it. Once Adelaide had written to her; "Peter is drinking again. Perhaps you can do something with him, I can't"; and Amanda had replied in two lines; "Don't tell tales on your husband, even to his mother." Now, looking at that envelope, she stiffened in her chair. Peter would tell her what was in it, if he wanted her to know. She compressed her lips. Her clear eyes widened slowly, and the blue light in them went dark, almost black. It was the same sort of thing that happened to Peter's eyes when he was hurt, and one might gather from Amanda's eyes that she was suffering, as she sat there so still, thinking, her lips slightly parted, her soft, silent, breath quickening; and presently one of her worn hands, the finger ends all rough from her needle, stole up to her left side and pressed there. There must have been things concerning Peter that she could not think about without feeling a physical pain in her side, but quickly she gave herself a little shake.

"Circumstances on the surface of the earth for various more or less accidental reasons suggest conceptions which turn out to be inaccurate."

Why had she not been able to keep her mind on her

book? Was she too old now to spread her battered wings and fly away into that other world that held such a magic healing for her mind? The world of universals, the world of timeless being, unchangeable, rigid, exact, could she not escape there after all? Delightful to the mathematician, to all who love perfection more than life—she had read that somewhere. Ah, but did she? Did she? "The world of existence, fleeting, vague, without any clear plan or arrangement, containing all thoughts and feelings, everything that can do either good or harm, everything that makes any difference to the value of life. According to our temperaments we shall prefer the contemplation of the one or the other. The one we do not prefer will probably seem to us a pale shadow of the one we prefer, and hardly to be regarded as in any sense real."

Dear God, who had said that? Fleeting, vague, no clear plan or arrangement, containing everything that can do harm, that was life. Timeless being, unchangeable, rigid, exact, the world of universals, inexorably calm—which was real, which? She did not know. The familiar things in the room swam before her eyes. Was the room a dream? Were the Chinese Pagoda and the silver in the cabinet floating away through space? She did not know. She was a tired old woman. Her mind was rusty. She didn't know anything, and perhaps now she was beyond the point where she could learn.

The only thing of which she was certain was that she loved Peter and Christopher and must never be afraid. "It's unlucky to be afraid," she whispered to herself, defiantly, crossly.

And then suddenly Christopher began to jump up and down. "Coming," he said. "Peter coming," and a moment later she too heard the sound of an automobile coming down the street. It stopped in front of the house,

its lamps shining. Amanda and Christopher hurried out into the hall. Aunt Clo running from the kitchen, a clean apron round her ample rolling waist, flung the front door wide open.

There he was, safe, just as he had been the last time, not a bit changed, grinning his broad, happy, good-humoured grin, and his love for them shining in his eyes. "Hullo," he said in his nasal American drawl, "hullo there!"

But Christopher had darted back into the sitting-room and was down on his knees poking under the sofa. He reappeared with his package and thrust it into Peter's hands before he could even get his coat off.

"Hullo! What's this?"

"Open! Open!" cried Christopher, very excited. "Open quick!"

It was a large nickel-plated alarm-clock such as could be bought in the village for a dollar. Peter held it up proudly.

"Laws now, honey, look at that!" said Aunt Clo, her hands on her hips, "a present for yo, Massah Pete!"

But Chris cried, "Look! Look!" and pointed to the hands of the clock which was ticking loudly. They all bent forward in the little hall and looked, and the hands of the clock as they stared at its round face were seen to be moving backwards, the other way round from most clocks. They were very surprised.

Chris was spluttering. He was making a desperate, frantic effort to explain something.

"Time," he spluttered. "Time for Peter. No more w-w-w-worry."

Peter was the first to understand.

"Why, of course," he shouted, laughing. "Why, gee whizz! look at it. It's going the other way. In

another couple of hours it'll be only the middle of the afternoon. Now I call that some clock! Why, that's grand, Chris! It's the grandest clock I've ever had. Don't you see, mother, what he's done? He's worked it all out and put the clock back for me, done in time for me."

Amanda saw. Her eyes were wet as she said crisply, "That's very nice of you, Chris, to have thought of that for Peter." She was imagining poor Chris working it out in his feeble head, with his friend the village clock-smith, making repeated mysterious visits, explaining nervously, stutteringly, what he wanted, to sleepy, dreamy Mr. Bowles, who was a friend of the family.

But Christopher, radiantly happy at the great success of his surprise, was standing ecstatically on one leg.

CHAPTER V

AMANDA and Peter talked until very late that night. Long after Christopher had gone to bed and Aunt Clo, having cleared the supper table, had withdrawn to her room over the kitchen, they sat together talking. Why go to bed? asked Peter. Why waste the hours they had together? Besides, he could sleep in the morning while she did her chores. She was, he declared, the best company in the world, and incredibly young.

"Anyone would take you for my best girl," he said. And indeed, under the flattery of his attention, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright, she did look more like a girl than an old woman. He caught her round the waist and kissed her first on one cheek, then on the other, before he set her down in her chair by the fire. "Pretty Mummy," he said, putting a footstool under her feet.

He was so glad to be with her that he seemed to have forgotten his fatigue and his troubles. He had found no sign of reproach or apprehension in her face, and had said to himself, "Adelaide couldn't have written. She was bluffing again"; and so with a sense of relief he gave himself up to enjoying himself and making much of his mother. His way of doing it would have piqued Adelaide had she looked in on them that evening, for his manner was just the one which she would have liked him to adopt with herself, and his eyes were fixed on the little old lady in the high-backed chair with a shining, vivid look, as if entranced by a sight of which he could not have enough. Adelaide would have been greatly surprised had she been there, but no one was there to bother them or to think it silly of Peter to sit on the floor holding his mother's hand.

"It's grand being at home," he said. "And it's grand talking to you. Lord, what a relief!"

It made him laugh just to look at her. He reminded her of the time, not so very long ago, when she had run away from home, had packed her bag and slipped out of the house, and mysteriously disappeared for twenty-four hours. No one knew where she had gone. Not even Aunt Clo, who had promised not to let Christopher out of her sight until she came back. Aunt Clo didn't know to this day. She thought, the simple creature, that some dreadful calamity or some solemn lawyer's business had obliged Mrs. Campbell to leave home; and Peter would never have known anything about it at all, he believed she would never have confessed, had not the people at the Observatory given her away; though he knew, when by the grandest fluke he ran into her on '42nd Street, that she had been up to something. She had looked awfully guilty, oh, yes, she had, like a girl who had been to a secret meeting with her sweetheart, and was terribly

happy but conscience-smitten. And she had refused point-blank to tell him where she had been or what she'd been doing. She simply hadn't had the courage to confess that she had run away from home, from Christopher and Aunt Clo and all her dusting and mending and so on, to see the solar eclipse with her old astronomer friend in the Observatory.

"Don't tease me about it, Peter."

"But it was grand, dear, and I love you for it."

"I shouldn't have gone. Only it was such a great temptation. Professor Brown had written."

"I know, dear, I know. Thank God he did, and thank God you committed in your wild, unbridled enthusiasm that awful sin!"

But Amanda said, who was he to accuse her of enthusiasm? Judging from his letters he seemed to be trying to swallow half the universe—that was biting off a little more than he could chew, wasn't it?

"Oh, no," he objected. "I don't want much. I only want to rebuild New York City, and find out a few things."

"What kind of things?"

"Oh, things about space, and the so-called laws of nature, age and decay and so on, and what the great blamed scheme of things is about."

"Well," she remarked in her dry way, "you'll be kept busy for some time."

"Till I die, mother, please God. Till my time's up."

He had some drawings to show her, a set of plans of the Chicago office building and a rendering of his block skyscraper in a wash of Indian ink. She put on her spectacles to look at them and puckered her lips.

"Well, it's very queer, Peter." You could tell that she didn't like it. "It's quite different from anything

else you've done. I guess I don't understand it. You get me used to something, and then you change right round."

He laughed, smoothing her head with his hand.

"It's Mayan," he said, "and Aztec. They built perpendicularly, you know, in South America hundreds and hundreds of years ago."

"It looks sort of adobe to me."

"Well, it's that too. I thought I'd try to get some Red Indian into it."

"Do those gentlemen in New York like it?"

"They say they do now. They didn't at first, but I talked them round."

"It's kind of scary," she said.

"That's fine. That's what I wanted."

"Oh, if that's what you want!" she gave a little sigh.

"I guess I'm stupid, Peter. I can't seem to understand architecture at all. Those high buildings make my neck ache."

He took the papers away from her. "Don't you bother your head about them."

"But I'd like to. Only it's no good pretending to be clever, is it? Or saying I like New York when I hate it?"

If he had been a little disappointed, he had got over it quickly, and he took her up gaily. "Of course you hate it. It's a perfect mess. Gosh, you ought to see Fifth Avenue. It's full of holes and muck. Every blamed building more than thirty years old is coming down to make room for the new ones. They're like mushrooms sprouting up under the others and shoving them out of the way, and by golly, they're in such a hurry that they don't give us time to cart away the carcasses of the old ones before the new ones are climbing the sky. There's

never been anything like it. We've got to keep our heads. We've got the greatest chance since the Renaissance. But the fifteenth century in Italy was different. They took their time then, and went slow, and had some respect for artists. They let Ghiberti spend twelve years on his bronze doors, thought a man's lifetime wasn't too long to do a good thing, a pretty door-handle or something. There were men of taste in control in those days, black-guard Popes and bloody Borgias who loved beauty. Well, we've got a Jew fella like Ikey Daw, and he don't care, but I'm going to make him care. I'm going to get him excited about building, about building beautifully, Amanda Campbell, in masses half a mile long and a couple of thousand feet high. Michael Angelo was a man alone with a hammer. He had the idea of carving a mountain into a Colossus with his own two hands. Why shouldn't I build and carve cities? I have machines to help me. The money's erupting like lava out of Vesuvius. The energy's volcanic. It only needs someone in control. It only needs an idea, a vision of great propriety. I have it, the vision, the idea—a sense of the great decency, somebody called it. I have it in here, inside my skull. I'm drunk with it, reeling with it. My head's full of towers, light as feathers and high as the Matterhorn. My head's crammed with beautiful clear angles, geometric masses, walls that stream up, stream down, breathless, straining, the architecture of suspense, of aspiration, and of the plumb-line, of precision, of ten-thousand-ton weights weighed on a scale as finely balanced as a chemist's. But these engineering fellas grab the designs out of my hands before they're half finished. They're in such a darned hurry that a building's half a mile high before you've given 'em the drawings. They don't care. They're the builders. I'm only an architect,

the man with an idea. I tear my hair and curse them to hell. They don't give a damn. I'm a rabbit squeaking.

"But I tell you what, mother, I want to get hold firmly with my fingers of that slippery eel called Beauty, Plato's, the absolute, the final, that lies coiled up there among the stars. Sometimes I see her out there. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of her face. I want to get hold of her and drag her into the light of day and set her on her feet on the earth, cage her, chain her, rivet her on Manhattan Island, visible and solid, imprisoning her in great buildings of stone, in a lovely sculptured sarcophagus, a mile long, sixty stories high, modelled as one casket, and moulded to her fragile limbs, and paid for by Sam Bottle's hooks and eyes, Josh Billings's rubber tyres, Bill Jennings's railways and Ikey Daw's newspapers. By God, it would be a grand joke. The Eternal Mother of Venus and of Apollo and of Helen of Troy and all the rest of them, the shy, flying spirit of the dawn and of the night, beauty, dear, that visits us in our dreams and slips quickly away just when we are about to wake, to grab her, to catch her and hold her and pin her down in New York with iron shafts through her body, and bind her there on Manhattan, enormous, stunning, exposed, stark and huge, so that she will remain when I'm flicked off into nothingness. That's what I want to do."

He laughed, jumped to his feet, flung his arms up over his head and cut a caper on the carpet. The lamplight shining on his head seemed to Amanda to make a sort of halo round it, and a radiance poured from his face. She caught her breath, felt her eyelids quiver as if in too bright a light, and began inwardly to scold herself. "Go on, now," she said to herself, "he's a good boy, but he's always

getting into scrapes and making a mess of things, and you know it."

"Sam Bottle wanted me to build him the highest building in the world, the highest, mind you, he said, to put that poor boob Woolworth in the shade. It was to be a great big beautiful advertisement for Sam Bottle's hooks and eyes! Lord forgive us our innocent vanities. Well, I said I could do it, but I told him I was sick of building one skyscraper at a time. Give me a chance, I said, and I'll show you. This town's running away with itself. It needs taking down a peg. Why, all those cheap buildings going up just anyhow are like a lot of blamed weeds. The place needs a gardener. You let me take a pick and shovel and clear away a few streets full of little brick houses and dirty newspapers, and I'll show you how to carve a skyline. I'll build you a cathedral to your machine-gods that'll make Chartres and Bourges and Peterborough look like toys." He stopped for breath.

"Well, and what did he say?" asked Amanda.

"Oh, he got the idea. I talked him into it all right, just as I talked the others. The Middle Western Railway was going to do one thing and the Consolidated Rubber Company another thing, and the American Eagle was going to build on Xth Street, so I hustled round and told them they were a lot of blamed fools not to get together and do something big in the way of building, and they ended by tumbling to it. We only need Ikey Daw now, and then we're set, but gee! I did have to hustle this summer."

"You're pretty small, Peter, aren't you, to do all that?" said An.anda, smiling. He looked at her quickly. He seemed bewildered for a moment. Was she, too, going to doubt him, he asked himself, but her eyes were candid and kind, so he laughed again.

"Small?" he said, "small? I'm a Cyclops. I throw stones through the air that weigh a hundred tons as if they were tennis-balls. I can jump a mile high. I've got seven-league boots and wings like a giant American Eagle. I tell you what it is, Amanda Campbell, you don't really see me. You only see my fingers and toes, and only hear my squeaking voice gassing away here, but what about my machine arms, my derricks, my dynamos, what about the way I roar and blast away the rock by just whispering down a tube? Ain't I more than a puny worm with a stomach-bag and a wind-pipe?"

"Mebbe you are, Pete, and mebbe you're not."

"You don't like it, is that it? You don't like to think of me cutting up mountains and standing with one foot in Chicago and the other in San Francisco while I talk across the Atlantic?"

"It scares me, Peter."

"But why, dear? But why? Yesterday I talked on the telephone to a man in London. 'Hullo!' he said. 'Hullo!' I said. 'What sort of weather are you having this afternoon in New York? It's raining in London.' 'You go to hell,' I said. 'It's morning here and the sun is shining.' His voice was quite ordinary. He was in the next room. The Atlantic Ocean had dried up, and with it Time; all the clocks were wrong, just as Chris says. There was a thin partition between us that we couldn't see through, that was all. Soon we'll see through it. We'll have conquered space, then what?"

Amanda observed—threading her needle she had taken up her darning again, for she wasn't really comfortable with her hands idle—that he was talking of physical space, there were of course several other kinds, and that it was beginning to appear reasonable to suppose that the physical universe was not after all infinite, but finite, and that if this

were the case the physicists would soon have exhausted its possibilities.

"Well then, perhaps by that time we shall find out where we come in, between the stars and the atoms, you and I. Maybe we're going to be wiped out. It looks that way, but I don't believe it. Maybe we are just an accident, maybe we're dying now, the whole lot of us. Well, suppose I am. I suppose I'm dying all right, but I don't like it, and I'm for having a good shot at immortality before I do. I'd like to kick up an almighty row in the ether before that time comes, and find out what it's all about, whether it makes sense. You and I may be worms, Amanda, but we have incredible dreams, and it's darn queer, when you come to think of it, that we should have. Anyhow, I'd like to laugh some more and shout and make a loud noise and love, darling, love and live. Life, life, more time to live!" He walked up and down excitedly. "I don't want much, do I? I only want to dip my hand into the bowl of eternity and grab by their wriggling bodies the prime forces, the ageless ones, the great strong invisible ones, and have a good look at them and find out what they amount to, and whether there is any connection between us, between you and me and them, and whether this blamed curiosity of ours is a part of the show or just a trick, a mean, silly trick of our own conceit. How far can we go, do you think, into the unknown? Can't we go on and on, penetrating the beyond as we have done, throwing bridges into the void, and crossing on them? What's to stop us? The will of God, they say, the pious ones. God will get jealous, get scared when He sees us finding our way about out there in the dark, lighting candles in it."

"There's no call to blaspheme, Peter."

"Blaspheme, darling? Then you do think there's a

God out there in the Universe? I should have supposed you thought there wasn't much room for God in such a small neat affair?"

She gave a little jerk of her head. "The discoveries of science give us no excuse for being frivolous," she said sharply.

He looked at her very intently. Her face was flushed. Her lips were compressed. There was a troubled, honest look in her eyes, that made him wince, that hurt him profoundly, filling him with pity for her, and admiration.

"Tell me," he urged her gently, "tell me, do you or do you not believe that there is a God? Not the old man with a beard of the Sunday School books, but an active, calculating creative intelligence."

She seemed to him to go pale and catch her breath. He was sure that her hands holding her sewing trembled a little.

"Tell me," he pressed her. "Be honest. Tell me what you really think."

"I don't know, Peter. I'm not sure. How can I be sure?"

"But you are sure of some things?"

She smiled. "Well, I guess we can be certain of a few simple mathematical propositions, and that's about all."

"Then you're not certain about God or no God in the cosmos?" he challenged. "Yet you've thought, you have reasoned, you have lived. You must have come to some conclusion."

His questioning appeared to annoy her. Her eyes flashed angrily, and her voice when she spoke was very decided.

"My conclusion is, Peter, that whether a God exists

or not, is no great matter. The moral obligation's the same."

He was silent. He stood looking down at her. He was thinking of the courage she had needed to stick to the truth of her reverent unbelief, and of how the people of Campbelltown blamed her for it, thought of her as a Godless woman, prayed for her, some of them, as if she were a sinner—she, the one spotless and upright woman that he knew.

"I'm an old woman, Peter," she was saying, "and I keep quiet about what I think because I've got enough sense to know that what I think don't amount to a row of pins; but I can't tell lies, even when I'm scared of telling the truth. Even if I thought it was good for you, I don't think I could lie to you, but maybe I'm wrong. Sometimes I think I've been all wrong about everything. Sometimes I think it would have been better if I'd lied to myself and said God loved us, you and Chris and all of us, and just believed, just prayed. There've been heaps of times when I've lain awake nights wanting to pray, Peter, and it might have been better for you if I had." Her voice quavered.

"And you don't call that praying," he muttered, deeply moved. He stood looking down on her narrow shoulders round which she had thrown a shawl, on her worn, knotted hands. How old her hands were, and how feeble! She was trying again to thread her needle, and couldn't because they trembled so.

And suddenly he saw her sitting there in the lamplight surrounded by darkness. The walls of the room dissolved. The night flooded in. The immense darkness of all space spread round her. He saw her alone in it, in her stiff, high-backed chair, dressed in her best grey silk dress that she had put on for his benefit, alone in the

everlasting night that was closing round her, staring out into it and trying to control the shaking of her poor hands. An awful, agonising feeling of hopeless rebellion swept over him, and he broke out violently:

"By heaven, what a farce! What a joke! Man's unrequited love for a God whose name is electricity. There's a story for you! Why doesn't somebody write it, the story of the guilty, broken, sick heart of the world? It's in the Bible, they say—well, why doesn't someone rewrite the Bible in the light of modern science? It's all there, the whole gorgeous drama. The Tree of Knowledge, and Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jehovah the Jealous God, and Jezebel, and the whole fornicating pack of human beings, wanting to love God and impelled to sin, and gentle loving Jesus of Nazareth crucified. It only needs to be told over again, but no one dares. No one has ever dared point out the one important fact of the Crucifixion, that the Man on the Cross was abandoned of God, that he died for a lie, an illusion, and that he found it out at the last minute while he writhed there, with nails through his hands and feet. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Wasn't that what he said? Wasn't that his cry? Hasn't it the ring of truth!"

"Don't, Peter, don't!"

"But why not?" he half shouted. "Why not? Isn't it all a mess, this earth with life crawling on it? Of course we're all sinners. Of course we're rotten, sick, heart-broken, vicious, lazy, shiftless— But why are we? That's the question. Who started the show, and what for? It's an accident, that's all, and God or no God we've been tricked, hoodwinked, fooled, that's all; into thinking it was something more, something wonderful and endless, with a meaning—but all that's nonsense. Well, why should we accept it? Why should we consent to die?"

Why should we lie down to it? Why shouldn't men revolt? By golly, they do. I am a rebel, and you too, Amanda Campbell, are a rebel, and we're not alone. The history of the human race, what is it, but the story of Man's revolt against the powers of darkness, in and outside himself, and against the God, the Edict, that condemns him to die? The aim of human progress is omniscience, Amanda Campbell, and don't you forget it. And by heaven we're succeeding, I tell you. Man is no puny, bandy-legged creature now. He's a centipede, with a hundred eyes that can see a million miles, or discern an object one-ten-millionth the size of a pin's head, and he's a cunning, tenacious devil. Having gathered his forces together, chained and enslaved the heat, the cold, the wind, lightning, sun and rain, invaded the air and discovered the way of sending his thought and his will through the ether, he is combating those other enemies, disease, weariness, fear, lassitude. Soon he will have discovered how to prolong the youth of individual men, but that's no great matter, for he is taking notes all the time, and handing them on, leaving them for the use of those who come after, and every generation of men that is born begins by knowing more than those that went before. So why despair, Amanda, when we can revolt, rebel? It's silly. It's—blaa—It makes me tired!"

He flung himself across the room.

"Why do I like to build and build and build? And why these monstrous buildings that have no excuse in utility or commodity or economy? Pay? Of course they don't pay. There's no sense in them, not a doggone grain, but there's a marvellous inspiring nonsense, and they are beautiful, but again why? Because they, too, are a protest, my dear, mine! I want to build them just

to show what men can do, just to give the laws of dynamics something to worry them, just to give probability and the laws of gravitation a slap in the face. Every time I see my builders starting to construct a wall from the top down, I yell with laughter inside me, and think of the old days when men had to pile one brick on top of the other.

"And Jim Baker, he's after the secret of life, and who knows, he may find it, he himself, and if he doesn't some other James Baker who is coming, maybe not his son, or his son's son, maybe not till a thousand Jim Bakers and John Smiths have tried and failed and left the careful patient records of their failures behind them, but some time he will surely come—that Jim Baker who will defy death." He paused, breathing heavily.

"There's no sense in making a fuss, Peter," she said quietly, "and getting all het up."

"Oh, I know there's no sense in it." He went to the window, parted the curtains and looked out, standing with his back to her as Christopher had done. He knew that he had been cruel. He was ashamed of himself. He admired her more than any woman, or man, on earth, and he wanted to say something comforting to her, or something funny to make her laugh, but he could think of nothing to say. One of his dark moods was coming on him. He felt it coming, and struggled against it. Why did it follow him into this house, invading the one safe place that he knew on earth?

God, how he hated everything about himself, how sick he was of it all. Life, what was his life? It was a stomach-ache and a headache and a bitter taste in his mouth. He had a sharp premonition of failure, a new overwhelming sense of his own futility. He talked big, but his soul and his body were sick. He wanted to vomit, to throw up his life and be rid of it, with all its greedy

ambitions, its riotous fancies, its unclean lusts and its tantalising dreams. There was a feeling of intolerable pressure inside his head.

But he did not want her to know how he felt, or to be aware of the darkness that was flooding him in the still, lamplit room. He shuddered to think of the effect on her if ever in some such moment of weakness as this he blurted it all out, the turbulent disgusting confession, the muddled story of Carolina Sal and all the rest of them. In her virginal presence they appeared ugly. What did she know of that sort of thing? Nothing. She was immaculate. It was her purity, he reflected, that had made it possible for her to love so desperately such an inferior creature as his father, and remain intact at the end of her life with him. She was a chaste woman, completely ignorant of evil; and so at last, in order to hide from her what he was thinking, he said:

"I can see the stars through the branches. Funny to think that if we could get far enough away out there, and could sit on some planet with the right kind of telescope, we could see now, to-night, at this minute, Julius Caesar's armies marching through Gaul, or little Galileo dropping his weights from the Tower of Pisa."

But she said, as if she were answering him, "I had a letter from Adelaide."

He turned sharply round. "What did she say?"

"I don't know. I didn't read it."

"You didn't read it?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I guess I don't want to get my news of you from your wife, Peter."

He flushed crimson. For a moment he looked at her dumbly, while his eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, you darling!" he whispered, and then, after a minute, turned away from her again, showing her his back that looked somehow pathetic and ashamed and very young, perhaps because he was hanging his head and looking down at the floor.

She sat very still, very erect, very alert, like a frightened bird. She was so very quiet that she scarcely seemed to breathe. Her eyes had in them that look of vigilant tenderness which she had turned on Christopher earlier in the evening.

There was a jug of sweet cider and a plate of gingerbread on the table. He crossed to it, moving heavily as if suddenly very tired.

"Will you have some, Mother?"

"No, thank you."

He helped himself. "The gingerbread's fine. Did you make it?"

"I did."

"I knew you did."

She thought: "He will tell me what he wants me to know. I mustn't ask him anything."

He sat down by the table near the lamp, his glass of cider in his hands. For some moments he ate and drank in silence. Then he said:

"Adelaide wants a divorce."

She gave a scarcely perceptible start, and stiffened.

"Does she? Why?"

"I've been drinking again. She says she can't stand it any longer."

"Oh, Peter!" The soft desperate cry escaped her before she could smother it. Such a small sound. Scarcely louder than a whisper, a sigh, but all her muffled terror for him, and her long stifled memories, and the dreadful intimate understanding of her passionate love

for him that was twisting her heart, were compressed into it. He heard the echoes of these things in her thin voice. They came out of her strong, small, compressed being towards him. He felt with a sense of intolerable humiliation the painful throbbing of her silent heart, as if their common blood were pumping between them from his side to hers through two sets of soft pulsating valves. He squirmed with the unbearable sense of it.

"She calls it drinking," he brought out violently, "but I don't drink. I got drunk once last week. It's the only time since I saw you. I hate the stuff. I get drunk when I'm desperate, when the pressure's too great. She can't understand. I got drunk last Tuesday, not at home, she didn't see me, so what has she got to grouse about? I didn't come home."

"Where then?"

"Oh, in a place."

Silence fell on that pitiable phrase and spread over them, immense, impalpable and heavy.

She imagined him reeling through the streets under pyramids of monstrous, dizzy, revolving, red and blue and yellow lights, or falling flat on the floor, in a tipsy crowd of strangers, who laughed at him like obscene animals; she saw him lying huddled in a gutter, in the dark, mud on his face;—but her imagination failed her, she couldn't follow him. She didn't know where he would go. She realised that she was totally ignorant of the world he lived in. She had heard of night clubs—

She thought, "He is a man. I am only an old woman. We can't understand or know each other. Even I who love him so can't help"; and she clasped her hands tight together on her knees as if she were being urged to lift them in a gesture of supplication.

She was thinking that it was no good reminding him

of his father, for he knew all that. He already knew everything that she could tell him, and what she knew that he didn't it was impossible to pass on to him. There was no way. Her experience could not profit him because it was her own, uniquely fastened to her, inseparable, incommunicable, untransferable. She remembered a certain scene. Her husband had come reeling into the room one night where she sat reading to her four little boys. She saw again with excruciating vividness the staggering figure, the loose, idiotic smile, and the frightened faces of the children gathered round her. The hiccuping voice sounded again in her ears. Christopher had been four years old then. He had cowered on the floor, hiding his head. Peter, on his knees, had flung himself face down on her lap. Peter remembered too. She knew that he had never forgotten. Well, if that wasn't enough? She held her breath in an agony of suspense. What was there, what power could stop him, if not that knowledge? Could God, if there was a God? If she had prayed every night of her life to an unknown implacable creator, to the unfathomable, unknowable source of all mystery, to the relentless, immovable centre of the whirling universe, that controlled the movements of a thousand million stars, and around which revolved the interminable cycles of life and death, would that have helped? Would she, Amanda Campbell, an old woman on her knees, have been able to deflect from its incalculable purpose the will of that incomprehensible being? She knew that she could not. She could only have tricked herself into some false sense of comfort, have drugged herself with a lying self-induced sense of power, of relief, of help, when there was no help, no relief, no power outside them, on earth or in heaven, for men and women who had to look after themselves.

"But I must do something, think of something," she said to herself. "There are doctors who cure drunkards by hypnotism. I must find out."

"But I am not a drunkard, Mother," she heard him say. "I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. You needn't be frightened, I tell you, you needn't. Do you think I don't know? Do you think——" He hesitated, fumbling for words with which to reassure her, behind which he could hide from her, words that would be an escape from her fear and his own. "Why, I'd never drink at all—if——" He stopped.

"If what, Peter?"

"Oh, if things were different."

"Isn't Adelaide fond of you?"

"Fond of me?" he echoed stupidly.

"Doesn't your wife love you, Peter?"

"I don't know," he muttered.

"What do you mean, Peter?" she asked sharply.

"Well, I guess she does, but there are lots of ways of loving, aren't there?"

She seemed for a moment not to take this in. Then she shook her head. "I'm not asking you what kind of a person she is," she said, "but whether she is true to you."

He gazed at her in amazement. He almost laughed.

"Sure she is," he answered.

"Well then, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? What, am I to do about it? Would you have me fight the divorce? I tell you, Mother, you don't understand. You—if you knew——" he stammered, broke off—"God! It's terrible sometimes. It's like suffocation."

Amanda Campbell detested her daughter-in-law, but she never discussed her with Peter. The subject was

taboo between them. In the beginning, when Peter had broken the news to her that he had fallen in love with the daughter of one of the richest men in America, she had contented herself with a sniff and the remark, "Don't you touch a penny of her money, whatever you do"; but she had hated the whole thing, and had not been successful in disguising her animosity. It had been impossible for Peter, in the circumstances, to complain, or explain, or confide in her on any aspect of his marriage, and he couldn't do it now. A sense of decency, and the fear that she might think, though he knew she wouldn't say it, "I told you so," kept him dumb; and she was dumb too, because she did detest his wife.

She thought jealously, "He loves that girl," and he thought, "She hates the idea of divorce, that's darn funny, but it is so"; and they were both right, but only half right. She knew perfectly well that Adelaide was no companion for Peter. Her instinct told her that such a woman was bound to do him harm, but she dared not trust her instinct; and though she could have reasoned out the problem easily enough and found the correct answer had the matter been one which did not touch her, her reasoning power now broke down and she became completely illogical. She came too, it should be remembered, of stern, Spartan, New England stock. She was a fighter and a stoic, and a fiery objector to the loose light habits of her age; and this interminable, frivolous breaking of promises and undoing of marriages that were no less solemn for not being made in heaven, made her heart sick; for what she meant when she said, "The moral obligation is the same whether there's a God or not," was that life was no less serious because it was short, and that man deprived of an outside judge must act as his own judge, exacting from himself a nobility of conduct

that could only have merit if it claimed no consolation or reward after death. She had at times a grim vision of the human race adrift like a lot of passengers on a sinking ship, and saw the problem of conduct as a chance to behave well, to keep calm and to be kind, in the face of the imminent end; and it seemed to her that the issue was magnified, not lessened, and that man himself was dignified, by the fact of his helplessness. To keep one's head erect with despair in one's heart appeared to her a task very well worth while.

The difficulty was that she was naturally tender and gay. Her heart was sensitive and warm, at the least provocation it sang.

Peter knew these things, and now in her presence he saw himself as ugly and weak and unclean, the sort of man Adelaide had every right to despise. The wonder was, he told himself, that his wife still cared for him. After all, why should she? He was a rotten husband—and suddenly, inconsequently, because his mother was there beside him, he remembered his wife who wasn't there, as she had appeared to him when he first knew her, and as she sometimes still did appear when she was pleased. And he said to himself, "I get on her nerves. She's not well. I've been a doggone brute."

And he said aloud, mumbling bitterly through his teeth, "I've been rotten to Adelaide."

But Amanda rebelled at that. She didn't believe him. His saying it put her at once on the alert again.

"How rotten?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't go round with her. I don't do what she wants. I don't ride or play polo or dance. I can't stand her friends, and, say so. I—oh, well, hang it—I'm no good, don't you see? I don't make her happy, and so I guess she's got sick of it, and I s'pose the best

thing is to quit, to let her do as she likes. What do you say, Mother?"

What she wanted to say was, "Yes, yes, let her go! Your marriage is impossible. Get away from her. Get away quick, before she does you any more harm." But something stopped her, her distrust of her own opinion perhaps, or some obscure compulsion of her stern American conscience, that went counter to her love and her reason. In any case she said nothing, even when he went on to suggest that if Adelaide did divorce him he and she could live together.

"You would come to New York with me, wouldn't you?" he asked, but she did not answer. "We could have a grand time," he added timidly, and waited. But she said nothing. She was thinking, her heart fluttering with doubt and excitement, that she would only be in his way in the city, that she couldn't possibly take Chris to live in New York, but that if only he would come to Campbelltown they could all live in the white house under the hill, and banish its ghosts.

He did not understand her silence, and she dared not speak. How could she be sure of what was good for him? She loved him too much to dare interfere in his life.

His face grew heavy. He shaded his eyes with his hand, his elbows on the table. She could only see now the lower half of his face, the part that was heavy and passionate. Her gaze dwelt with a kind of terror on the full sensual curve of his mouth. How sombre his face was when the laughter and animation went out of it! An obscure violence seemed to be moving under its softness. He seemed to be sinking as he sat there, sinking out of her sight, out of her reach, into a dark, miserable dream.

She thought—"If we could be together, if he would

live here with us, he'd be all right, he'd be safe"; but immediately on that she said to herself—"He couldn't stand it. He'd get tired of me. He'd miss his work. He mustn't give up his work. That's impossible." And so she said nothing and made no movement. Her arms strained to reach out to him, she felt them pulling in their sockets; but she was a shy, undemonstrative woman, and she remained aloof, she let him alone.

Undoubtedly she made a mistake. She was to tell herself so over and over again through the inconsolable years that were bearing down on her now as she sat there, passionate, proud, scrupulous and dumb.

And so her opportunity passed, if it was one, if he and she had a chance to escape. How can one tell? Had she plunged, had she grabbed him and held him tight, perhaps she might have dragged him free of the net that was winding round him, mesh upon mesh, as the clock ticked out the minutes. She might have given the necessary push to those immense but delicately balanced forces that were meeting under his feet, lifting him up under her eyes and carrying him away. Who can say? There's no knowing, for she did nothing, respecting his weakness, believing in him and distrusting herself.

He had a feeling of immense weariness, and of great loneliness. He wanted to cry out—"Speak to me, Mother. Tell me something. Tell me the word, the word that will be powerful against life"; but he thought, "There is no word. She can't say it. She would if she could"; and he wanted to throw himself on his knees beside her and bury his face in her lap, as he had done when he was a small boy, but he was ashamed of the impulse; and so they sat separate, these two, as if waiting, as if listening. They sat like that, silent, for a long time, and while they sat there Adelaide was signing

a letter to Peter which was to reach him next day, telling him that she took back everything she had said, that she was sorry, that she loved him with all her heart and wanted him to be happy, and so had decided to do what she knew he would like better than anything and come to Campbelltown, opening the house for the autumn. They would have a beautiful time. He could come down for week-ends. "So please tell your mother, Peter, to give Miss Brown the keys. She will do everything, and the house will be all ready for you when you get back from Chicago. I've asked some people down to hunt. They are wild to come, and I do hope you will be pleased, Peter darling, and I'm sure that if we are both a little more patient and unselfish we can be happy."

Peter was to show this letter to his mother in the morning in a great hurry before going off to catch his train, and he was to say to himself; "Poor kid. I've misjudged her. I always do"; and on his way through the village he was going to send his wife a wire saying; "All right, go ahead," and he was going to be remorseful about Adelaide, and ashamed of himself for not being pleased at the plan she had devised just to please him. He wouldn't understand his own depression. He would never understand Adelaide. He would always be gentle with her, and loth to hurt such a soft, pretty, silly thing.

But this evening, alone with his mother, in her shabby room that was his refuge, he was unaware of the letter that was coming to him, and of all the consequences it would bring in its train. He did not know that he would never again sleep in that house, in the room that still held his school-books, his trophies from Groton and Harvard, framed photographs of lanky boys in choke collars, portfolios of his first sketches. He had merely a sense of loneliness and a vague premonition of danger, of failure,

of incalculable events coming towards him, of something immense and complicated and silent happening beyond the walls of the little room, where the fire flickered, and his mother sat lost in thought, her hands folded in her lap.

And at last she heard him say, "How old was I when we left that village in Cornwall?"

"About five years old."

"Was there a beautiful garden near by with flowering vines tumbling down the cliffs to the sea?"

"Yes, there was a big place with a garden."

"And there was a pond, wasn't there, a sort of lake, back in the park, where there were flamingoes?"

"I don't remember that. I shouldn't think there could have been flamingoes."

"Perhaps they were in a cage, somewhere on the place?"

"Perhaps—I doubt it."

"I'm sure there were flamingoes. I can see the child standing with her arms round one of them. She had a very pale face and dark hair. Don't say there was no child there?"

"Yes, there was a long-legged little girl you used to play with. She was a wild little thing. You used to climb about the rocks together."

"We hunted crabs. What was her name?"

"Let me see—Frances—Fanny, I think it was. I can't quite remember. Why?"

"She was my friend," he said. "I remember her. I wonder what's become of her now."

"I don't know. I heard from her mother, Lady St. Edmunds, once or twice after we came back to Campbelltown, but that was more than thirty years ago."

"It's a long time to remember the freckles on her nose, isn't it?"

"I don't remember that, but I do remember your getting lost together once. They sent out a search party from the Castle. You had been cut off by the tide. They found you sitting out on the top of a rock, with your arms round each other. You had to be fetched back in a boat."

"Yes, I remember. We watched the water creeping up the sides of the rock over the seaweed. She was braver than me."

"She was two years older."

"She was braver, anyhow," he said.

It was long past midnight when he bolted the shutters and followed his mother up the narrow stairs to the dingy little landing where a lonesome-looking gas-jet was blowing in the draught from Christopher's door. He kissed her good-night in the hall, and then stood a moment alone listening to the faint creakings and murmurings of the old house, and to the sound of Chris's voice mumbling his own name in his sleep. "No, no, Peter, don't go, don't go," he was repeating miserably, but you could tell by the blurred sound of his voice that he was dreaming. His clock stood, loudly ticking, on Peter's mantelpiece. Its hands pointed to eight o'clock and were moving backwards, minute by minute. Outside in the night the wind was sighing and rustling the dry leaves of the trees. A branch was tapping against the window-pane.

And Peter lay awake a long time, listening to the wind, the dry, scurrying leaves, the branch tapping, tapping, and the murmurings of the old house which held so many of his memories, and whose familiar spirit seemed to be breathing through his own breast with a melancholy kindness. He had been happy there, and safe and young and full of hope, and he had gone away to achieve great things. Would he fail? Would he come back beaten? And even if he succeeded, what then? What was the

good of it all? What was the use of building great buildings if one were all the time merely a small, lonely man who had failed to find happiness on the earth and was no longer innocent? He was aware of his mother near by, asleep, maybe, by now, but perhaps awake too and thinking of him; and a sort of chant sounded in his mind, something he had read in a book once, "I have been evil, I have been unkind, I have lied. Oh, oh, oh! I have been unfaithful. I have been greedy and ambitious and lustful. Oh, oh, oh! My heart has been wicked, my flesh is unclean. I have soiled and wearied my heart, and yet I have hoped. I have tried to be kind and to keep my heart pure. I have wanted to be good and have waited and waited, for what? For a vain and impossible dream."

He opened his eyes with a start. That beautiful, ridiculous, crazy bird, the flamingo, seemed to be perched on the footboard of his bed, on one long pink leg, staring at him. The room was dark, but he could see the shimmer of its feathers and its black eye fixed on him.

He struck a match, and of course there was no flamingo there any more, only the familiar furniture and the walls of his room with their faded photographs and dingy mementoes, and Chris's clock that said it was only six o'clock now. Oh, God! oh, God! what did it all mean? This whirling circle of time, this bubble of life? In another instant he would be an old man, and his life would be over. He must not go to Chicago. He must go to England. England was quiet and green. He must find his unknown friend and say to her what he had wanted to say to Amanda Campbell. "Speak to me," he called silently into the dark, "you, wherever you are. Tell me the word that will be powerful against life." But listening he could hear nothing except the rushing rustle of the wind that sounded like the beating of wings.

PART III

CHAPTER I

FROM now on this story becomes very confused. It is going to be very difficult to keep track of these people once the *Aquitania* is tied up to the Cunard pier in the West river. It is going to be like a game of hide-and-seek, a sort of treasure-hunt on switchbacks, in a crowd, in the dark, that jangles and jiggles, in a great confusion of noises; and it will be impossible to keep my eye on the clock and tell a straight narrative of how one thing happened after another, for it wasn't like that. All sorts of things happened at once, and things that should have happened first happened last, and some things that ought to have happened never happened at all.

The Joyces have only three weeks in America, and a programme is made out for them before their arrival which accounts for almost every hour of the twenty-one days; but the interesting things that happened, the events that left their mark are not on the programme. They wedge themselves in between. They run along underneath the current of Victor's official receptions, his banquets, his speeches, his visits to the Senate, the White House, and the Abraham Lincoln Memorial. "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation." The fine poetic periods of that rough American woodsman who stepped out of his log cabin

to free the grandfathers and grandmothers of Big Joe and Sal and all the others who now pour like a dark flood through the lighted blazing underground caverns of New York, making it resound and echo to their savage syncopated chant under the smooth pavements where the motors whizz and the trams jangle—that voice is inaudible now in the confusion.

There is a noise of hammering going on in the air, and of derricks groaning and hoisting. Steel skeletons are stretching and straining, lifting their incredible agonized limbs to the sky, and red hot nails are flying through the air like arrows, and there is a sizzling and spluttering of boiling iron in aerial cauldrons. Whistles are screaming, and escaping steam hissing up there overhead on scaffoldings where little men dangle in swinging buckets or balance on steel tight ropes. Their short, sharp shouts sound faint and queer down below; not in the least like human voices.

In such a place it is very difficult to keep one's wits about one. It inspires a breathless feeling of exultancy and terror; one wants to shout, to jump, to laugh, and at the same time there is a kind of horror about it that makes one shiver, feel helpless, distracted, amazed.

I would like to stay with Amanda Campbell in Campbelltown with the scarlet leaves of the maple-trees showing outside the windows of her dark, little house. I would like to sit with her by her lamp in the frosty evenings and do sums with her, and work out some clear, definite problem of mathematics whose solution will leave no hurting doubt in my mind. When she was bothered, she got out her old school-books, soiled fingered volumes her father had given her at Harvard. If she and I put it down together, as if it were algebra, for instance, a simple equation: Victor and a political career and grave civic responsibilities on one side, Peter Campbell, a few sky-

scrapers, a flamingo, a dream, on the other, and Frederika, the unknown quantity; let Frederika's life be x , and so forth—couldn't one work it out? But it is too easy, the schoolmaster would say, the impatient, didactic, intolerant professor who knows what is right and wrong, good and bad and all the rest of it; the one who holds the chair of Morals in the great university of human ethics. There is no problem. Two and two make four, and Frederika belongs to Victor; let's have no more of this nonsense. He married her twenty years ago, and her place is beside him. Besides, she is useful to him and used to him, and he is useful to England. He has a great part to play in the history of his country. He will be one of those who will keep the British Empire together, and he needs Frederika. Frederika must behave herself, she has no business to jeopardise his career. If he is bothered about her, he won't be as useful to the Conservative Party as he ought to be, and Frederika will be all right, you'll see; she will slip back into harness. This experience that you make such a fuss about will seem to her quite soon to be nothing but a dream. She will scarcely remember anything about it in time.

In any case I cannot stay with Amanda Campbell; New York is calling. "Hullo, Campbelltown, come on over, you're wanted. Things are happening here. Haven't you seen the newspapers? Say, what's the matter with you? Didn't you see that article about Victor Joyce's confidential mission to the President? He is going to repudiate England's debt. They say England is going to refuse to pay what she owes us. Well, you'd better get a move on and come right up by the first train. There's going to be a hot time, a hell of a row." It wasn't true of course, it was only Ikey's joke. He had got busy on the wireless from the ship. Victor Joyce

had had, needless to say, no such instructions from his Government and Ikey Daw knew it, but what had facts to do with it? Ikey Daw was no respecter of facts. Facts of that kind didn't interest him. He preferred fiction. He was an artist in his way, and it amused him to put an idea across the continent of America. And again, even if I ignored him and stayed with Amanda, we should not be undisturbed, for Mrs. Jamieson's efficient housekeeper, a graduate from Brinmaur, with bobbed hair and eyeglasses, is going to arrive from New York and ask Amanda for the keys of the Campbell house, and she will put a staff of servants into it, to get it ready for Adelaide's house-parties. The beautiful prim drawing-rooms are going to be turned out, beds will be aired, the furniture rearranged, new curtains put up at the windows, and all the tradesmen in Campbelltown will rattle up to the kitchen door with iceboxes and brooms and coal and wood and flour and sugar and tea, and Mrs. Jamieson's bootlegger will send down cases of champagne in motor trucks, and Amanda, shouldered out of the way, will watch all this, with her lips compressed and her head quivering. She will shut herself up in her house down the street with Christopher, who doesn't understand what is going on. She won't explain to him, she won't say anything; she couldn't explain to him if she wanted to that Peter, when he next comes to Campbelltown, won't sleep in his own room, but will be up there in the big house with a lot of gay people from the city. He wouldn't believe her. He has not seen the house awake and filled with people since he was five years old. He only knows it with its green shutters closed and the humming birds undisturbed poised in the drowsy air by the trumpet creepers and honeysuckle, or with a snow-drift smooth as a counterpane spread over the shallow

front steps, or with the dry scarlet leaves drifting and rustling on the pillared porch as they do now. He will be distressed and irritated by the presence of all those strangers, and of that sharp creature called Adelaide who has some hold on Peter and who makes him want to scream and squirm as if she were sticking pins into him with her eyes. Her eyes are like hurting needles sticking into him. He wants to make faces at her when he sees her. He has a temptation which he knows he must control, to stick out his tongue at her. He will be terribly shocked and wickedly excited when he discovers her living in that house where he remembers being a child with Peter; and Archie and Zeb who are gone and never come back any more. He will feel a sense of outrage, and he will suddenly want to protect his mother, to avenge her, sensing in some way an insult to her and a hurt, for hasn't she always looked after the house? Hasn't he followed her up there again and again and gone into the quiet rooms and seen her stand silently with such a queer expression in her eyes looking at the face of a man over the mantelpiece whom she says is his father? His father is just a man in a frame hung on a white panelled wall. He has a hand and two arms but no legs. He doesn't move or speak. He never goes away or changes his position. He sits so still with his head resting on his hand that Christopher is lost in admiration and wonder. How can he sit so still, week after week, year after year? He must be a very wonderful man.

But they are going to take him down and put him away in the attic. It is the housekeeper's idea. She thinks young Mrs. Campbell wouldn't care to have such a very bad painting hanging in the drawing-room, and she is going to be very much annoyed when she sees Christopher's pale narrow face staring at her through the door,

with his mouth working, and his eyes starting out of his head. She has no patience with Mrs. Campbell's sickly brother-in-law, and briskly turns him out of the house, giving him to undersand that he is to keep off the premises. It wouldn't do for the servants to know that he was a connection of the family's.

In the meantime the *Aquitania* is nearing Sandy Hook, and everything is working up for trouble. It began—when did it begin? With Zeb Campbell and his lions, maybe, or with Victor's great-grandfather. Victor would never have been a Cabinet Minister if his father and grandfather hadn't shown him how it was done. These things run in families in England, and are handed down like a taste for alcohol. Peter got the taste for drink and something the matter with his glands, while Victor got a Cabinet appointment and a thick skin. But there is no beginning. One could go back and back, to the monkey, the frog, the amœba, and yet none of these people did what one would expect, that is, none of them in the end, obeyed the will of Mother Nature, who wanted Peter to live with Bridget for a bit and then with Frederika, while Victor took Adelaide in exchange, producing for Nature's prolific lap a whole crop of little artists and statesmen. They rebelled, they refused, they were not obedient animals. They all seemed to be trying to get at something which had nothing to do with the purposes of nature. And each one appeared to be controlled in the last instance by an idea, a determination to grasp, and to hold to, something that appeared, to each one, unattainable and admirable. It was because of this that they got into a tangle, and because of a capacity for understanding just a little, not much, but a little of each other's needs, claims, rights.

In any case the trouble began long before the *Aquitania*

reached New York. It was already well started when Adelaide and her mother drove together down Fifth Avenue and planned to open the Campbell house for the autumn. Certain events were already approaching then, beyond the high stone walls of that shining street. I can see them coming up over the horizon, and casting their shadows ahead of them. They spread out and up over the Atlantic, New York City, and Jordan Valley tucked away among the Chippewah Hills. And the *Aquitania* forged on her way with those helpless people on board her. No power on earth could have made her turn round in mid-Atlantic. Suppose Victor had had a premonition, and asked the Captain to do this. The Captain would have sent him about his business very quickly! That ship was bound to land those people on the dock on Tuesday night at the end of October, and Bridget Prime was already, when she landed, involved with Ikey Daw, who thought he had some claim on her because she had got slightly tipsy on his champagne. Heaven help Bridget, if all the men with whom she drank champagne thought they had a claim on her! They didn't. Not in Europe anyhow. But Ikey was different. Bridget ought to have known that you had to be careful with a man like Ikey Daw who was born over a pawnshop. He was bound to revenge himself on Peter, who so markedly took Bridget's fancy. One touch of Ikey's long, brown hand and down it crashed, that block skyscraper of Peter's, like a matchbox. You can blame Ikey if you like, or Bridget. You can say that it is her fault for being so beautiful that Peter, like every other man, was bound to fall for her; or you can say that it was Frederika's fault for being so sceptical, and for so immediately quelling her sudden instinctive recognition when she did at last see Peter in that cellar in Harlem

sitting with the negro girl Sal. She was startled then, but she told herself that it was all nonsense, even though she had heard enough about him by that time to be very much interested, even though she had seen the house on Long Island. She couldn't believe that he hadn't copied it from photographs, though there came a moment when she had a sudden desperate sense of this being something so extraordinary and so strange that it was worth almost anything. But it was too strange. At the sight of his small, pallid face in that blazing place among all those black men, the jazz drumming, she had turned suddenly and said; "Who is that man?" "Why that's Peter Campbell," Biddy had answered, and she had been on the point of saying, "Go and bring him here to me," but she hadn't. Why hadn't she? Because he was with the black girl? Nonsense. What did she care? What was that to her? Because of Biddy then? Perhaps. In any case she got up and left the place abruptly, taking Perky with her. The truth was that she was startled and rather angry, at least she told herself that she was annoyed. How could anyone believe that things came to one like that in dreams; houses, rooms, whole backgrounds, someone else's life. Her's? No one could believe such a thing, and she didn't want to, she told herself. It was merely very annoying, an odd sort of impertinence, and the man was in love with Biddy, anyhow.

All the same, his face had startled her, seen through that haze with all those black men dancing and shouting. She had seemed to know it intimately. She had said to herself: "But I know him," and felt a sort of stab in her side; for his face had recalled to her quite suddenly all her childhood, all her youth, all her fresh wonderful sense of the beautiful adventure of life—which she had allowed to go stale.

As for Peter, it is so easy to blame him that it seems scarcely worth while. He fell for Bridget at once, the minute he saw her, just because she was so beautiful. And what sort of excuse is it to say that he hadn't yet seen Frederika then? How, if it were true about his remembering Frederika's face all those years, and thinking about her with such intensity that he had actually, without knowing it, got in touch with her, as it were in his sleep, by some means that he could not explain, finding his way to her through space, through the dark, through all the turmoil and noise of the earth, as if his soul were a small, silent invisible bird winging its way across the Atlantic to the house in England where she lived—how, if there was anything in all that but just a fluke, could he fall for Bridget, and why did he not know that Frederika was there, at last, close to him, and what was the good of his going as white as death when he at last caught sight of her as she rose to leave that Harlem night club?

It was too late then.

Perhaps had they been left in peace—but they were not. New York had got them. They were sent whizzing round and round, and as they whirled they kept missing each other, and when at last they did meet, what could he say and why should she listen? The roar of New York drowned his voice. What he finally said to her and what she answered is almost inaudible.

Poor Peter, he had been living for a long time with the conviction that there was someone somewhere on the earth whom he could not get to, or identify in the everyday sense, but whom he knew better than anyone; and he believed that some day he would meet her, in the street maybe, or in the train, or in a crowded hotel lobby, and that then they would never be separated again. He did not know that it was Frederika, the woman whose face he

remembered as if he had created it himself, nor that she was the little long-legged girl in Cornwall. Only his subconscious self knew that, or, putting it differently, he only knew it when he was asleep. When he was awake he was puzzled, and didn't know what to do about that bird, the flamingo. He couldn't for the life of him explain what the flamingo had to do with it; he never found out whether there had really been flamingoes in that garden in Cornwall or not; and of course no one ever told him that Frederika used to sit in the evenings opposite the flamingo screen that had belonged to Victor's naughty exquisite great-grandmother. She is sitting there now, perhaps, as I write this story or as you read it, now that it is all over and done. The soft English rain is pattering against the windows, the fire flutters, Victor is immersed in his papers. She sits shading her eyes with her hand. Perky will come in presently, smiling, saying something cheerful, and she will look up, a little startled, with a sort of shiver, as if she were throwing off some haunting dream, and smile uncertainly, a little timidly, not quite as she used to do; but she will never know whether or not she was really responsible for what happened—and gradually she will get tired of asking herself the question, and will merely feel that she has missed something; and that the night beyond the windows is deep and silent and rather fearful, somehow, in spite of the pleasant pattering of the rain.

It is exasperating. I could have written such a romantic love story about them, had they given me half a chance. The way they behaved is maddening. Helpless? Of course they were helpless. I know that. Weak? Certainly Peter was weak, immoral, half a drunkard, anything you will—what has that got to do with it? Or rather, isn't that just the point? Frederika was a strong woman. She was strong enough for the two of

them. She was manly and he was effeminate, God help him, he knew it well enough. Hadn't Adelaide thrown it in his teeth? Frederika wouldn't have. She would have been gentle with him and understanding. She had a fund of passionate tenderness locked in her deep chest, on which Victor had never made any demands; for Victor was strong too, and he would have preferred her to be weak. He resented her strength. It annoyed him. He was always curbing her energy, keeping her down, shoving her under a weight of unnecessary responsibilities, inventing things to keep her quiet. Two strong people locked together in a dumb half-conscious struggle for supremacy one over the other—their marriage and their life together had been, for all its courtesy, something very like that, until Frederika stopped struggling, gave in to Victor, chose to become passive, an admirable wife to an eminent statesman.

Well, Victor knew what he wanted and Frederika didn't. He was stronger then, you may say, than any of them, and it is right that the strong man should win. Certainly it is right, and this is, if you like, merely a very conventional story of how a strong man hung on to his wife. She was his, and it was inconceivable that a raw little Yankee should take her away from him. I agree. It couldn't be done, and this being so, my story is spoilt. Victor spoilt it, Bidy spoilt it, Ikey Daw spoilt it. Everybody spoilt it. They all behaved extremely badly from the story-teller's point of view.

All the same, it very nearly didn't go wrong, my story, and that love affair, the real one, of Peter and Frederika. Had Peter not gone to Chicago the very day the *Aquitania* came into New York Harbour, had Frederika not left New York for Washington the day he got back, had they not kept missing each other as if they were doing it on purpose,

sometimes by five minutes, one of them going down one street while the other went up another, one going in at one entrance to a building while the other was coming out of the opposite one, and so on and so on; or had Bidy been a little less beautiful, or Ikey Daw a little less savage, or Perky a little less intelligent, it might have turned out quite differently. I am not certain that those two ever talked to each other—really talked, I mean; at any rate I do not know what they said. I seem to hear their voices rising for a moment faintly, above the grinding, pounding roar and whirr of the city's life, but I am not certain. That little sound is so thin, so frail, is it a lover's voice, a man's voice? It is like the sound of a violin in a factory. It rises an instant, high and clear and faint, then is drowned again in the crash, the clang, the shriek of dynamos, the screaming of whistles, the whirr of innumerable wheels.

What does New York care for any of these people, or for any pair of lovers? Peter is a flea on his hindlegs, beating the air. Frederika is a lady flea, two in a swarm of eight million or so, and they have only an instant to live, anyhow. There is a great clock ticking out the centuries, an aeon of time passes with the swing of the long, smooth pendulum. While I write, maybe as I finish this sentence, a world is passing, another world, in another space countless minute lives dropping away, dead flies. One hesitates, feels bewildered, lost—where was I?

Ah, yes, the Victor Joyces are about to land in New York. They are to spend three weeks in America.

The *Aquitania* is going to dock at ten o'clock on Tuesday night, and Victor and Frederika and Bridget Prime and our friend Perky, blinking through his spectacles, are going to be met by a crowd of important people, Mayors and Presidents of Chambers of Commerce, and Under-Secretaries of State from Washington, and the

British Ambassador and the British Consul, and the Head of Tammany Hall, and Heaven knows who all the other people are, but they will keep on shaking hands and saying they hope Mr. Joyce had a nice trip. And there are a dozen newspaper reporters who are going to want just a word if Mr. Joyce could give them as a great favour his first impression of their city, something for the "New York Times" and the "Herald" and the "Tribune" and the "Brooklyn Eagle" and the "Sun" and the "World" and the "Jupiter", all the planets will seem to clamour for poor Victor's sensations before the wretched man has got over that feeling of things going round and up and down. It will seem to him that the great gloomy cavern of the dock, with all those shouting, scrambling, clamouring people on it, yelling round him in strange tongues, and the boxes rattling down steep gangways out of holes in the sides of the ship and banging on the floor and bursting open with lace petticoats spilling out under the immense roof, it will seem to him that it is all rising and falling and swaying slowly and gently; anyhow it is going to be very confusing to Victor Joyce. The German passport officials will be obsequious to him in strong German accents, the Irish customs officials will wave away his luggage with a rich, cordial brogue, a gang of ruffians, who are evidently straight off farms in Poland and speak in no known language of the Western hemisphere, will seize his trunks and his bags and rush off with them and fling them on to a tobaggan-slide down which they will shoot into the arms of black giants with rolling eyes and flashing teeth. It is all going to be terrible for poor Victor. He will feel utterly disgusted and desperately homesick for Victoria station with a nice soothing English fog drifting through it. But he and his party are going to be whisked into waiting motors and whirled away through the lighted

streets, and we shall lose them. They are going to get lost in all that crowd of Jews and Irish and Italians and Scandinavians and negroes and Slavs. They will go whirling up and down like packages in pneumatic tubes. Elevators will shoot them up into the air and shoot them down. There is going to be a crowd eddying round them wherever they go. The minute Victor steps out of an elevator or a motor or his bath, he will find himself in a crowd. The same with Frederika. Their rooms at the hotel are waiting for them full of roses and lilies and orchids and violets as if for a funeral, with the steam heat belching out of radiators and disseminating a smell of burning in the hot scented air. But Frederika, crossing to the window of the sitting-room that is on the sixteenth floor, is going to look out and say, "Oh!" very sharply, and stand transfixed.

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They are laying the foundations of a new building next to the Hotel. It is like looking down into the Inferno. There is a great gaping hole down there in the rock. Arc lights are trained on to it so that the work can go on at night. It is a huge cavity in the jaw of Manhattan. It aches and throbs. There is the sound of a great saw buzzing and of machines boring, and against the white glare the small black figures of men can be seen bending and reaching and lifting and tugging, while above the blazing hole the shadowy forms of ghostly buildings rise up and up, spectral, towering, perpendicular masses of masonry that seem evanescent as if made of smoke. But their outlines are sharp, and lights shine in them, row upon row, placed symmetrically against the soft deep blue of the heavens. They look like tiny square holes puncturing the night and letting the light of another world through. All these clear, sharp, shadowy masses

and smooth planes of light and great round pockets of light are very strange. Light streams up from below against smooth walls whose summits are lost in shadow. It is as if the source of the light of the world were down there in the bowels of the earth. One divines the lighted streets at an immense depth, rivers of light pouring past invisibly at that deep distance but shining up, reflected up, casting an upward glow. And beyond the sharp dark wall that rises suddenly like a cliff in the foreground, one catches a glimpse between other walls of crimson and blue wheels of light whirling, Christmas-tree trimmings suspended in the night, gay toys for the giant children of the strange mammoth gods who built this city.

You can hear them breathing, you can feel their pulses beating, there is an immense muffled throbbing and murmuring going on somewhere, somewhere near, right here, round us, in the air, but in another sphere, in another kind of space. They are present, the great gods, the Titans, they are close, on top of us, crouching over us, their huge limbs arched against the sky, ready to crush us, to gather up armfuls of buildings and crunch them, crumple them up like so much paper, like so many cardboard boxes. Or perhaps they are preparing some game; they will tear up, maybe, those long erect shadowy buildings by the roots and throw them at each other, hurling the cement blocks through the sky, aiming their skyscraper spears at the moon, Venus, Jupiter, the Great Bear, the Milky Way. There will be a great splintering and shivering then among the stars in the heavens.

It is some such vision as this that Frederika will have, standing in her high window on her first night in New York. She will stand, motionless, in her hat and coat, staring. Her eyes will open wide like a child's, and a

childish smile will part her lips. Her face will change. It will go soft and avid and entranced, and she will say, looking across the dark massed pillars of stone standing in a sea of light that swirls round their bases, to the white shining tower of Peter's Radio Building, that shoots up into the sky like an icicle,—“Look, Victor, look!”

But Victor does not want to look. He is in trouble already. His head is splitting. The radiators in the room are spitting and sizzling. All round him roses and lilies are exuding poison, and in the corridor outside there is a crowd of jealous newspaper reporters waiting. It seems that he has given a confidential interview to someone on board that ship, that he has divulged the supposed secret purpose of his visit to America, and that the whole of the United States is agog with it. It seems that he told someone he was going to hand the goods straight to the President and tell him to take it or leave it. It seems that the “Earth” and the “Star” and half-a-dozen other newspapers have already printed in large type and scattered broadcast everything that he is supposed to have had to say to the President. There it is in large black letters, the glaring, mischievous lie. Perky holds the sheet under his disgusted nose. “We have reason to believe that the Right Honourable Victor Joyce will repudiate Britain's sacred obligations.” Poor Victor, he is so horrified, so disgusted, that he is inanimate, he has turned to stone.

“We'd better deny this at once,” murmurs Perky. Victor doesn't answer. His face is fixed in a grimace of unutterable loathing.

“Shall I make a statement?” asks Perky, getting a little worried. “Will you have a whisky and soda?”

Victor nods imperceptibly, but alas, there is no whisky to be had. The country has gone dry.

And so while Perky gathers together the ravaging

wolves of the newspaper pack outside and feeds them with neat bits of phrases and short denials, Victor sinks miserably into a chair, with a great bush of American Beauty roses rising up over his aching head; and all this time Frederika is standing with her back to him staring out of the window.

"Do look, Victor. It's too amazing." Her voice is hoarse and excited. "It's the future, the world of the future. I'm looking at it. It's here, already, in outline, a sort of forecast, a sort of sketch in stone and light of what the world is going to be in a hundred years or a thousand. You can see, you can see. It's all there. It's visible, the New World, the new awful era. Come and look at it!"

But Victor doesn't hear her. He is not there. He is in London, talking with his colleagues, explaining to the Prime Minister and the others how it happened that his Mission to America was abortive. He doesn't understand, but he is trying all the same to explain. The newspapers, the yellow journals, German influences, propaganda, vested interests, some power working, inimical to Great Britain, something to do with international loans, finance. Some fella, some Jew, that man Daw—. Suddenly it comes to him.

"By Jove, I wonder." He closes his eyes, seems to go to sleep. His face relaxes. He doesn't do anything, he doesn't move. There is no expression on his face, but when Perky comes in he says briefly:

"That fellow Daw's at the bottom of this. It's a ramp."

And in the meantime Frederika is staring at a distant white building that looks as if it were made of ice, a tower, like an icicle shooting upward. The vertical white planes rising high in the air are faintly outlined in blue, they are like immense, fluted columns of ribbed ice. The light

floating up from beneath the building makes it appear translucent, magical. The sky behind it is soft and dark blue and spangled with tiny stars.

Victor won't look. He and Perky pay no attention to her. They are already absorbed in their papers, cipher cables for London, messages to the press, and the speech that Victor was to have made to-morrow to the Chamber of Commerce must be changed to meet the occasion. It is already midnight. They will be at it until three in the morning.

"You had better have something to eat, Victor. Shall I order something?" Frederika stands looking at them. Her face is white, she looks very tired. Her eyes have circles under them.

"Do, my dear."

"What will you have?"

"Beer and cheese."

"I'm afraid you can't have beer."

"Why not? Damnation, I forgot. Well, coffee then."

But someone had sent them a case of whisky and six bottles of port. They were discovered in Victor's bathroom. Perky giggled as he brought in the card that was attached to the gift. "Mrs. Peter Campbell."

"Who's she?" asked Victor.

"I haven't an idea," said Frederika. "We must have met her in London."

"Well, it's very decent and thoughtful of her, I'm sure."

And presently Frederika left them to their work with a bottle of whisky and two bottles of Apollinaris water and some chicken sandwiches beside them.

"Good-night, Victor."

"Good-night, my dear."

"Good-night, Perky."

"Good-night."

From her bedroom window she looked out again at the amazing spectacle of the city. She stayed a long time by the window. Her brain was working furiously. "This is what I worship," she thought. "This monstrous terrific energy, this thing called life, this huge unquenchable impulse that erupts first in one place then another, that will not be downed, cannot die, that has broken through here, cracking the earth's crust, pushing up through the rock. These buildings are a sign. It is enough. It is an assurance, a guarantee. Never mind what it's for, what it's aiming at. It's of no consequence where it's going, what it's doing, all that doesn't matter. It is grand, it is wonderful, it will do."

"And some one, some man, built that stark, magic tower of ice, that beautiful naked thing of terror—I wonder what kind of man?"

But Peter is on board the "Twentieth Century", bound for Chicago. He is rushing away from her across the continent of America at the rate of a mile a minute. Why didn't his instinct, that he prized so much, give him warning? Here she was at last within reach. Why didn't his little psychic wireless machine work? There was its chance, but it failed him. Something went wrong with the machinery, and off he went to Chicago to see those men who wanted a building like the one Frederika was looking at. It is true that he felt horribly restless on the train, at least he said afterwards that he almost got off at Cleveland and took the next train back. Something, he insisted, was pulling him back while the train rushed on through the night across the plains of Ohio, pulling and tugging while he tossed and turned in his stuffy berth behind the stifling green serge curtains of the sleeping-car. But still, he did not get off, and

that, after all, is the point. His partners would have kicked him out had he turned up the next day in New York. What explanation could he have given? An impulse, a premonition? They would have put him in an asylum. The Chicago people were planning a ten million dollar building. It was up to him to secure the contract. And besides, he himself didn't know why he wanted so much to get off and come back. He knew that it was for something more important than a ten million dollar contract, but he didn't know what, so of course he didn't trust the exasperating, nagging urge, and poking about in his mind found other explanations of his nervousness. He thought it might be the fear of missing Ikey Daw if he had to stay a week in Chicago, or a bad conscience about Adelaide, that was bothering him. He even thought that something might have happened to his mother, and calling the porter in the middle of the night, he sent her a wire from the train asking her if she were all right. Afterwards he produced this fact of the telegram as a proof of his knowing that his going to Chicago was all wrong. Had he come back, he would have dined with his mother-in-law on Wednesday and seen Frederika there—would have seen her, as he put it, in time.

It was because he hadn't had faith, he said, because he hadn't trusted the still, small voice of his spirit, the all-knowing, infallible and infinitely wise part of him that was the keeper of his soul. It was doing its best. It was trying to tell him, to give him the tip, to warn him. It was keeping him awake and doing its damndest to get him out of his bunk and on to the platform at Cleveland. And it succeeded in rousing him to such a pitch of nervous tension that the screaming of locomotives in the railway station of that city, and the rattle and bang and roar of a

lot of other trains shunting, pushing, rushing past, with the flashing flicker of scudding lighted windows, shooting into his bed pocket, did sound like so many yelling summonses to action; but all the same he didn't obey. That was his crime, he said. He wasn't innocent enough any more to trust what he knew was true.

He missed Frederika because he had got thick-souled, he said. His soul had gone to fat. His soul was fatty, and the God-damned world had done it. He was too busy, too ambitious, too greedy. He read too much, talked too much, drank too much, ate too much, did too much, and there was too much noise going on. He couldn't even think any more, because he had got the habit of handing out his thoughts to anybody that happened along as so much small change of conversation; and when he did that he lost his mind. A part of it went out of him, and his thoughts got shoddy, man-handled, disreputable, and he was obliged to disown them. It was the same sort of thing that happened to him in his work. He had become a machine for turning out ideas. He handed them over to draughtsmen, engineers, builders, submitted them to clients, to his partners. They were grabbed out of his hands half finished. They were discussed, criticised, passed from one to the other, twisted, soiled, adapted, cut down, mutilated until they became unrecognisable. And then, when their beauty was obliterated, some contractor turned them into brick or stone, and he got a wad of dollars in exchange. He had made a factory of his genius and prostitutes of his creative conceptions. His mind was a harlot, he insisted, in the pay of New York, the mother of harlots, so how could he know Frederika Joyce was coming? He wasn't fit to receive her. He had been married for ten years to Adelaide Jamieson, and for ten years had been Mrs.

J. J. Jamieson's son-in-law. That in itself was explanation enough, and the fact that it was just because he was making one of his periodic desperate futile efforts to shake off the dragon's clutches that he missed Frederika, only added a final exquisite irony to his pitiable muddle.

Certainly it is a muddle, and whether or not there is anything in Peter's idea, all these people did get into trouble and did behave unlike reasonable beings. New York gave them each a push and sent them with more or less violence heading in directions opposite to their habitual directions. They felt nervous, irritable or strangely excited, according as each reacted to the feverish contact of this strange city. They began to talk differently and move their arms and legs differently and began to be aware of themselves in a new way. Victor Joyce dug his toes in, of course, and protested, but he overdid it and his wooden expression only half masked a carved grimace of agony. Everything about New York was detestable and incomprehensible to Victor except Adelaide Campbell's baby face. He felt as miserable and nearly as dizzy as he did on the *Aquitania* until he noticed, much to his wife's surprise, a pretty young woman who complained to him of her awful country. Indeed he felt slightly seasick a good deal of the time, as if the high buildings in which he breakfasted or slept and dined were swaying gently. He understood nothing that anyone said to him until Adelaide began to chatter to him and to echo back to him his own sentiments. He was so fascinated with horror by the signs plastered in the heavens, telling him to smoke this and eat that and work with the other thing, telling him to try one, a camel, "They satisfy", or a kiss-proof lipstick, "It doesn't come off", or a bust-protector "It's nice to hug", that he couldn't take his eyes off them, couldn't focus his gaze

even with his eyeglass stuck in his eye, on the pretty women of New York, until Mrs. Peter Campbell said softly, "Poor Mr. Joyce, I do so feel for you. You must find it all quite horrid." Their voices rang, shrill and meaningless in his ears, their pink-nailed hands waved before him as if he were a rabbit they are going to take out of a hat. He sat tight, he sat stolid, suffering in silence, making no sign, and he was angry with Frederika for enjoying herself. How could she? He simply didn't understand her, but the last and final blow was dealt him by Perky, for Perky too was amused. He too enjoyed himself; and went round with a perfectly idiotic grin on his face chuckling, drinking ice-cream sodas in drug stores, chewing Wrigley's chewing-gum and humming songs with beastly jiggling tunes. It was incomprehensible. He turned in desperation to Mrs. Peter Campbell, whose understanding flattery and contempt for her own people soothed his nerves.

Poor Victor! He was going to Washington to talk to the President, but he was reputed already to have said so much and had been so busy contradicting what he hadn't said, that his will was hardening into a decision to say absolutely nothing when he got there. This conversation was to have settled certain international questions of the very highest importance. Victor Joyce had come prepared to treat the President like a man of his own race, like an Englishman. He had intended that ultimate and final compliment. Unfortunately the newspapers had interfered. He had been so disgusted by the newspapers that he now regarded the President of the United States as no more akin to himself than a Chinaman. The American newspapers had conveyed to him an impression of a race suffering from something like softening of the brain.

How can one communicate serious ideas to the symbolic head of a country where the only sport of the leisured class is that of breaking the law, where there are no quiet country gentlemen, only busy, harassed millionaires, where there are no quiet people of any sort, where the answer to every question is a cocktail or a high ball, where there is nothing shabby, nothing old, nothing intimate and stuffy and dark, where it never rains, and one never rings a door-bell and never scrapes one's feet on a door-mat because there is no door-bell and no door-mat, only a revolving glass thing refracting a flashing sunlight, and an immense immaculate hall like a hospital entrance, and a lift to shoot one up to the glittering sky?

Victor hated it. Biddy, of course, left him and Frederika to their fate, their boring round of official engagements, and went off with Martha Hedding and Gussy Green to amuse herself. Broadway and Harlem took her fancy. Frederika only saw her at odd moments after that first dinner at the Jamiesons. Biddy knew what she wanted. She wanted to run wild on Broadway, and to dance, dance, dance for ever to those nigger bands in the cellars of Harlem. She left Frederika behind with Victor, who washed his hands of her and wouldn't stand any more nonsense from that woman.

But before all this happened, on the first night while Peter rushed away across the plains of Ohio and Illinois, Frederika lay awake in New York in her room on the sixteenth floor of the hotel. She had pulled up the blind, drawn back the curtains, and could look out from her shadowy bed. Her pulse beat quickly. She was wide awake, more so than she had been for many years. She felt that she never wanted to go to sleep again.

All round her the great buildings rose up in the night,

like monsters with a thousand eyes. The current of life was so strong in this place that it seemed to throb in the walls of her room, to be lifting the lid of the city, as if it were boiling underneath. The city was a boiling cauldron, a geyser erupting from the centre of the earth. She would not have been surprised to feel the shock of an earthquake, to see the walls of her room sway suddenly and hear the hotel crack open.

She had a feeling of intense suspense and expectancy. Something was going to happen, was happening now, something immense and significant. She felt stark, new, helpless, minute and alone. Her old life had slipped from her like a worn-out dress. It lay crumpled, with her clothes, on the floor. Victor's tired voice murmuring in the next room was inaudible to her. She heard instead the hum of the City, the sound of engines throbbing, of a great saw buzzing.

Sprawling London, heavy, loose-minded, earthy, huge, tolerant and wise, with its thousands of huddled houses rooted like village houses in the soil, was incredibly remote, in another world where the old laws held. Here, some force was at work greater than gravitation; and as if to prove it, there was that white tower leaping skyward like a pillar of frozen light, with the little stars of heaven clustering coyly round it; a single jet of naked energy, tense, terrible and defiant, a monument to a God as yet unnamed by man.

CHAPTER II

NEW YORK made a great fuss over the Joyces, but it did not like them, even that small part of New York called Society. It was ready to be antagonized. People like Mrs. Jamieson who adored everything English had come

to be considered since the war old-fashioned and unpatriotic. It was the mode now to be pro-American for a change. America was, it appeared, good enough for Americans. New York was tired of English visitors, English plays, English books, and even the English language.

Frederika was not admired. The women said her feet and hands were too long, that she had very bad manners, and what were those brown spots on her face—freckles? She was too old to attract the men; the brilliant light made her look haggard. They found her very difficult to talk to. Accustomed to being roused from their exhaustion at the end of the long exciting business day by young pink and white beauties, who chattered and babbled, teased and flattered, they didn't know what to make of this pale monosyllabic woman who waited for them to speak, and didn't move either her hands, or the features of her face. In a community where vivacity is the *sine qua non* of social success, and much laughter the sign that one is having a good time, Mrs. Joyce stood out as strange. But her strangeness did not interest, unless one could say Mr. J. J. Jamieson was interested or Jim Baker, but he was different. The tired millionaires who were asked to meet her at dinner were not sufficiently attracted to women to be curious about one who made no effort to please. Her silence merely made them uncomfortable, or more tired and sleepy. They could respond to the advances of some very animated creature who caused them for a moment to forget their passionate preoccupations, but that was about all they were good for. They had to be waked up and amused, otherwise they were no use at all. And their women knew this. They seemed to realise that if they let go and stopped flirting for one minute the men would fall asleep on their hands.

In a set where Adelaide Campbell was queen it was impossible that Mrs. Joyce should be a success.

So the men fell asleep at her side ; not, of course, quite asleep. They struggled bravely. They did their best. Every one did his best. Society laid itself out to please the difficult, stiff, important English couple, and the more it disliked the Joyces, the more effusively gracious it became: especially the feminine element. It was noticeable that the voices of the women became sweeter as they grew more and more critical. The ruder they considered the Englishwoman to be, the more polite they themselves were. It was almost as if they wanted to give her a lesson in manners, or perhaps they were really delighted to find so much fault with her. To her brief remarks they replied with an increasing volume of flattery. The cooing, caressing sing-song of their conversation sounded almost as if they were reciting poetry, and when they were quite convinced in their own minds that she was ugly, and that the men thought so too, their amiability knew no bounds. Their chorus grew into an ode of rapture.

They preferred Mr. Joyce to his wife. He was, after all, a celebrity, a very famous statesman, and the one person in New York every one wanted to meet. Besides, he was a man, a new man. They said he was stiff, but very handsome. They were impressed by his manner. When he came stalking high and solemn into a room, they fluttered round him. His wooden gravity was a challenge. They vied with each other to make him laugh. That they didn't like him made no difference in their wanting him to like them. It would be a feather in one's cap to attract his attention. He became the object of a hunt. Although he did not know it, a dozen pretty women were after his scalp. Adelaide Campbell was of the number.

But she threw herself into the game with more fervour than the others. The Joyces had arrived at a very opportune moment for Adelaide. Her vanity was hurt. She had been badly frightened. She had begun for the first time to doubt her husband's love. And her reasoning was very simple, her mode of action as old as the world.

If Peter were really drifting away from her, she would bring him back by making him jealous. She would show him that other men, even very great men, appreciated the woman he despised. She would flirt with Mr. Joyce just enough to show Peter how really fascinating his wife was. Her mortified pride demanded and would receive consolation.

She set about the business of fascinating Victor Joyce at once, at her mother's dinner-party given in his honour the day after his arrival.

Frederika ignored the attitude of New York toward herself. She didn't bother about it. It didn't occur to her that she was making a bad impression. She had never in her life laid herself out to please. It hadn't been necessary. In England, one saw one's friends as much as one could, and put up with a good many bores for various reasons, often political—that was all there was to it. She would have been astounded had anyone told her that she ought to try and placate New York.

As a matter of fact she was, under her calm exterior, in a turmoil. She had been very angry when she read those newspaper articles. The people who dared attack Victor in that underhand way disgusted and enraged her. She had sensed even more quickly and deeply than he the general antagonism to England, and had vowed that if that Jew, Mr. Daw, were at the bottom of this, she would make him smart for it. The other sort of thing, the impertinent personal flattery with a veiled malice in it,

that appeared in the social columns, didn't help matters. It might have amused her in other circumstances: as it was it made her quiver with disgust. "Mrs. Joyce is a pale beauty of a Spanish type. She wore a brown squash hat, one of those smart London hats that have no shape, large pearl earrings and a woollen muffler. Her reluctant smile is scornfully ravishing. She seemed rather hoarse."

"Oh God! Victor."

He and Perky had had to soothe her.

The worst of it was that the city enthralled her. She had awakened in a strange state of excitement at six o'clock that first morning, and had seen the sun rise over the East river.

Flinging up the window she had leaned out. It made her slightly dizzy, slightly sick. There were no lights any more down below or in the high buildings rising round her. The city had gone dead. It was a petrified jungle, cold and silent, filled with curious slaty-blue shadows. High steel bridges spanned the pink sky to the east. The stark buildings stuck up naked and terrible into the dawn. They looked very ancient. They looked like the abandoned monuments of some bygone age when a race long extinct had peopled the earth. The white building that had shone like an icicle in the night was now a clear-cut tower of white stone, the walls smooth as milk. Suddenly the first rays of the sun struck sparks from its windows.

She had held her breath. The place was unbelievable, monstrous, terrible. She was as excited as if she had fallen in love.

Quickly she had got into her clothes and gone out. Victor's special private detective appearing in the corridor had seemed to disapprove. She had swept past him with a nod. When she came back two hours later Victor and Perky were breakfasting in their high hotel sitting-room,

surrounded by roses and newspapers more voluminous than any newspapers or roses in the world.

"Where on earth have you been, Frederika? Page 28, did you say, Perky—I can't find it. I've been very worried indeed, Frederika; your maid told me you were gone when she knocked at eight."

"I went for a walk."

"For a walk?"

"Yes. They're building in the next lot. I watched for a bit. I've had breakfast, thank you."

"Where?"

"In a place called a *cafetière*. I happened on it. It's so odd. It's quite extraordinary; all shiny and white like a dispensary. Your coffee and rolls and eggs come out at you from behind little windows in the wall, all by themselves."

Perky was amused, but Victor said crossly: "Why should coffee and eggs slide about of their own accord?"

"It's to save labour—I asked the man—the man at the door. He explained the whole thing to me. You get an enormous breakfast for twenty-five cents."

Victor groaned. "I can't get my boots polished. Perky says I've got to go to a Shoe-shine Parlour downstairs, in the basement. He says if I put my boots outside the door they'll be stolen. I don't understand you, Frederika. You look very odd this morning. You seem to have enjoyed your walk."

"I did. It's quite different from underneath."

"What!"

"The city is quite different from the street. The walls shoot up over your head. It's rather mad really. I wonder they don't go mad—these people."

"No doubt they do."

"I want to find out how skyscrapers are built," she

went on. "How can I? Do you think we're likely to meet any architects? Can you find me one, Perky? And I want to drive round in one of those charabancs and see the town. A man shouts through a megaphone."

"This is too much. You really cannot——"

"But why, Victor——?" Her foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"My dear—it seems to me——" He looked at her very puzzled over his bacon and eggs. "What is the matter with you, Frederika?"

"But it's terrific, Victor. It's amazing. Can't you see? Can't you understand how I feel? It's so extraordinary—so very beautiful."

He couldn't believe his ears. He stared at her in exasperation. There was something in her expression that reminded him unpleasantly of her young days when she had been a worry to him. The idea that she might be going to like America shocked him. He was very much annoyed.

"Read those," he said, and gave her a sheaf of newspaper cuttings. Then of course she had blazed: "What disgusting rot!" she had said. He had felt reassured when he saw that she was angry; but she didn't understand that he wanted her to hate everything about this country because he did. She said to herself, "Well—there must be some nice human beings in this place who'll tell me what I want to know. There must be some interesting men. This couldn't grow of itself. If only we could get away from these beastly politics!"

She wasn't quite herself.

She found it difficult to be civil to the large party of women Mrs. Jamieson had asked to meet her at luncheon that day. She was impatient to get away from them again, into the streets. Mrs. Jamieson, it seemed, was

going to run her, and she did not very much care for Mrs. Jamieson, whom she had met in London, and she did not like being run. She was absent-minded, and chafed at the bit. She was afraid Victor was going to have a bad time of it. He had gone off with the Ambassador and Perky to make his speech to the Chamber of Commerce, and she was afraid he would get his notes mixed up and forget what he had to say. He never did speak well when he was fussed, and he had been very fussed. The telephone had never stopped all morning. A hundred voices had clamoured apologies over it. A hundred unidentified people had disclaimed any part in the press blunder. What on earth did it matter who they were, or what they thought? They had merely given Perky a headache. She had meant to stick to Victor, and was prepared for any number of banquets and public luncheons, but apparently she was not going to be allowed to do this. She was going to other luncheons of women, to concerts, to bridge parties, to receptions of women with Mrs. Jamieson. Mrs. Jamieson had taken her in hand. Society in New York was, it appeared, split in two. There was a man's world and a woman's world. She belonged to the women's world. It would be for her a novel and not altogether amusing experience. Not that these women who lived in it weren't very nice to her. On the contrary, they were almost too nice; too cordial, too gracious, too pretty and too beautifully dressed to be true. It all seemed rather oriental somehow, rather exotic and stifling and not quite real. And yet it was all very much like Paris or London in some ways—too much so—but she did not feel like analysing. She was too excited. She felt slightly delirious. It must be something in the air.

If she couldn't go about with Victor, why shouldn't she with Biddy? Why couldn't they explore together?

Biddy had called her up on the 'phone. She had said—"Can't you get away—to-night—after dinner, Frederika? We are going to do the negro dance-clubs; no, it wouldn't be at all Victor's kind of a night. It's Gussy Green's party." And Frederika had said of course that she couldn't. Victor was too worried, too wretched. She couldn't possible add to his worries by going out on the town with Biddy and Gussy Green and her lot. But probably the interesting people, the real live ones, the raw, young natives of this country belonged to that lot, the men who had built the place and who kept it going, the young men who gave the hum to it and the urge; the ones who had had the vision of this barbaric splendour, who had conceived it in their dreams and were giving their lives for it, spilling them out extravagantly, recklessly, with laughter, with shouts; flinging themselves into the maelstrom of the coming century, the great greedy monstrous future whose projection rose up here already, stark, stiff, undeniable, for all those to see who would see. She saw. She felt that she did anyhow. She felt that she was all eyes, one wide, greedy, avid stare.

Mrs. Jamieson's dinner-party was not so bad in spite of Mr. Daw being there. Although everything glittered and shone with an effect of exaggeration and of footlights turned on, it was so much like a London dinner-party that Victor relaxed a little. She noticed this with relief. There were a number of people present whom he already knew, people, that is, whom one was always running across in London or Paris, and who seemed now suddenly like very old intimate friends. How small the world was! And then of course there was the Ambassador, who had come up to be in New York with Victor, and with whom he had been closeted for two hours before dinner, so that it wasn't half so boring for Victor as it might have been,

and he seemed quite to like that very pretty Mrs. Campbell. He even laughed out loud twice during dinner at something she said to him. She wasn't, of course, as lovely as Biddy. No one was as lovely as Biddy, but really these American women were very decorative. When you saw a lot of them together, it was like a gay hot-house full of exotic flowers, with a brilliant sunlight pouring down on them through a glass roof.

As for herself she had had five minutes' talk with Biddy which had not been comfortable. Biddy had arrived late at the Jamiesons. She had said hurriedly:

"Freddie, do come with us to-night. It's cruel that you shouldn't have any fun. We meet at Ikey Daw's at one, and go to a place called the Crib."

"I can't possibly, Biddy!"

"Why, darling?"

"Victor would think I was having my throat cut somewhere—and I don't like Mr. Daw."

"Neither do I, but——"

"Victor thinks he's at the bottom of all this business."

"What business?"

"This anti-British propaganda in the press."

"I haven't seen the papers—were they horrid? What brutes—but why should Ikey Daw have anything to do with it?"

"He owns them."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure he owns those rags that have been black-guarding Victor."

"What a bore! He's a great friend of Gussy's. And Gussy is so very amusing. Why must Victor be such a stick and go and spoil everything? We could have no end of fun. It's all so odd—it would amuse you awfully. These people—Gussy's crowd—they're quite different

from anybody. Do come, darling, just once. What on earth can be the harm? It would do you all the good in the world."

They had been interrupted at this point. Mr. Jamieson had given her his arm, and that horrid Jew had borne off Biddy. Frederika had been troubled. She hated squabbling with Biddy. Had they squabbled? she asked herself, looking down the table, but Biddy was hidden from her by flowers and crystal. The nasty Jew was of course madly in love with her. It was really too bad of Biddy, after that awful night on the boat. She wished—but what was the good of wishing? Biddy was cut off from her for the time being; she wouldn't turn up till something awful happened to her. It occurred to her that she didn't know where Martha Hedding lived, hadn't even got her telephone number.

She had not had another chance to speak to Biddy alone. There had been music after dinner. A lot of people had come in. In the middle of it Biddy had disappeared with Mr. Daw.

Frederika had been bothered, but she had rather liked her shy host with his kind tired eyes and long grey drooping moustache, who didn't know what to say to her. He was probably very bored by his wife's dinner-parties, and disliked strangers as much as Victor. She wondered vaguely what he did like, not food certainly; he dined on a cup of something thick and white, arrowroot tea perhaps; nor drink, he drank hot water; nor the society of women, he never once looked round the table at all those gay, sparkling modish faces; but she didn't try to find out. It didn't occur to her to make any effort to get at the man; she merely felt that he was somehow tired and kindly, and very separate from all this glitter round him, and from her too; so after they had men-

tioned the weather and the crossing and the hotel, she asked him, after a pause, if he could tell her how skyscrapers were built.

"Well—I can't—not much—but you must meet Peter, my son-in-law. He's an architect."

She had surprised a wistful gleam in his eyes and had said, "I should love to. Is he here? I should like to know more about these things. There's a building going up next door to the hotel."

"Peter is in Chicago," he said. "He had to go on business. He will tell you everything when he comes back. He'll take you round."

"But perhaps you can tell me who built the white shining building that looks at night like an icicle?"

"Oh," he had answered quickly, with a sudden amusing look of pride that appealed to her rather. "That's Pete's Radio Building. Pretty fine, isn't it? Pete's a great boy—" and then looking at her for the first time straight in the eyes with a kind of shrewd, quizzical expression of appraisal, as if he had been sizing her up without her knowing it, he had added—"You'd like him"—and she had felt that this was meant as a great compliment.

She was to go on hearing about Peter Campbell, after this, from various people. It was going to seem to her as if all sorts of people were talking about him, and especially to her, as if there were some sort of connection between them.

She had met after dinner a tall thin man in eye-glasses, called Professor Baker, who worked at the Jamieson Institute, and who had interested her very much indeed. He had told her about his research work, and about his experiments in regard to the secret of life, and she arranged with him to go to his laboratory the

next morning. Victor, for some reason, made rather a fuss about that. He hadn't noticed Professor Baker, hadn't set eyes on him. Who was the fellow? A doctor? She had had to explain, to stick to her point, to insist. Victor's mood had lent the proposed visit an undue importance, had made it somehow dramatic, a kind of defiance of his wishes, which was really quite silly.

"But he's after the secret of life, Victor. He has a hen in a bottle——"

"My dear Frederika, are you going to lose your wits in this place?"

She had tried to get him to go with her, to laugh him out of his mood, but he refused to be interested. It was impossible to get him to admit that the discoveries these Yankees were making hadn't been made long ago in London. "Do you suggest that these doctor chaps are doing anything different from what's being done all over the world?"

"I don't know, Victor. I think it's possible. They have so much money!"

"Well, my dear, you'll find there's nothing in it, not a thing. It's purely spectacular. The secret of life indeed! It's all talk, I have always held that the real progress of science— Now if they would discover a cure for cancer——"

The fact was that Mr. Daw had got on his nerves after dinner. Victor had wanted awfully to be rude to him, but had refrained; and the prospect of meeting Mr. Daw every day and being obliged to be polite to him was almost more than he could bear. He had fumed about Bidly too. Frederika had gone to her rendezvous feeling nervous, almost guilty.

It had been worth it. The vast shining rooms of that superlatively luxurious laboratory of research, suspended

in the sky, and flooded with sunlight, had stirred in her again the old quick thrilling interests of her youth. All sorts of miracles seemed suddenly possible in such a place. She half expected a crowd of genii to jump out of the rows of beautiful shining bottles and explain to her the secrets not only of life, but of happiness and eternal youth.

"I suppose they are doing the same sort of thing in London," she had said to herself,—“only one doesn't hear about it—I never meet such people now. But these Americans are so full of faith in the impossible that they insist on being heard.” And she thought with a pang of envy of the dreary London Hospital she worked for, that was always in debt; and then, while she was leaning over Professor Baker's immortal hen in its bottle, she heard him say, in his nice, dry, impersonal voice,

“A great friend of mine, Peter Campbell, has described you to me. I recognised you at once last night from his description.”

She was puzzled. She was even slightly startled.

“Peter Campbell? You must be mistaken. I know his wife, of course, but I've never met him. He's out of town.”

Professor Baker said yes, he had gone to Chicago. He would be back on Monday.

“We go to Washington on Monday.”

“That's a pity.”

“Why?”

“He will be disappointed.”

Frederika was trying to remember something. Suddenly it came to her. “Peter Campbell—Peter Campbell. But he was the little American boy who came to Cornwall, wasn't he?”

Professor Baker said he didn't know. It wasn't as a

child that his friend Peter had described her, but as she was now.

"But I haven't seen him since, and that was more than thirty years ago."

"He must have seen you," the thoughtful, impersonal man said briefly.

They hadn't talked any more of Peter; but she found herself wondering about him several times during the day, and wishing that she could see him again, since he had built that beautiful, beautiful building. Doubtless, she said to herself, he would be very ordinary. Artists nearly always were, but she would like to tell him what she felt about that building. It was a debt that she would be glad to pay him. And really it was very odd, discovering him in this way, seeing the building first, and then finding out that he was her small sunburnt playmate of thirty odd years ago. "I'm going to be a great builder. You see if I don't." He had stood with his short, fat legs apart, his hands in his pockets, a shock of straw-coloured hair in his eyes. The memory of that day came back to her, fresh and keen, the smell of the sea and the seaweed; the drenching salt savour and hot sunlight, and the curious smell of rotten fish that tickled one's nostrils. She could see the small boy quite distinctly. A wave of tenderness swept through her. He couldn't have been much more than five years old when she knew him. They had made an engine out of scraps of old iron. It had looked like a prehistoric machine, very grotesque. She had always liked small boys. Her memory of him was rather delicious.

What was he like now, she wondered, and what had that man meant by saying that he had described her? Where could he have seen her, and how could he have described her as she was now? She was certain that she

had not met him. It was really rather curious. Well—he was a very great architect anyhow, and Victor liked his wife, so she supposed they would meet. Perhaps he would be at his mother-in-law's week-end party on Long Island to which they were all going, with the Secretary of State and a lot of important people from Washington. No, he wouldn't be back till Monday, and they left on Monday for ten days. When they came back then. They would have another week in New York before they sailed.

The week-end, as it turned out was ghastly. She only realised how ghastly afterwards. At the time she stiffened automatically, gathered herself together into a stubborn knot, and refused to admit to herself that she was moved, or disturbed—by anything. As to the house, it seemed to her, looking back, incredible that they should not have been warned. It appeared an impossible freak of circumstance that no one of all the people who had ever stayed at Wellowburn should not also have stayed with Mrs. J. J. Jamieson on Long Island. But apparently it was so. No one had ever spoken to Mrs. Jamieson of any resemblance, and so they, Victor and she, had not been cautioned. Who indeed would have warned them, even if he had stayed in both houses? It was Sir Evelyn's first visit to the Jamiesons', but what would he have said had it not been: "You know Mrs. Jamieson's house reminds one rather of Wellowburn." Something of that sort. And why should he? Why should anyone? She tried to be reasonable. Only to those who knew Wellowburn intimately, would the resemblance have seemed dramatic, and of course Wellowburn was not a show place. Though she and Victor had lots of people down, they were, when you came to think of it, always pretty much the same ones year after year. It had never been

Victor's habit to fill the house with riff-raff or casual acquaintances. It wasn't shown to tourists, and he had never let it be photographed by the press. It was that that made it all so extraordinary, so difficult to explain.

They had driven down in separate motors, Victor and Sir Evelyn had gone with Mrs. Campbell, and Frederika with Mrs. Jamieson. He had unfortunately arrived first. She had found him standing, petrified with horror, in the hall. It was, of course, very funny. The sight of Victor standing utterly bewildered in the middle of his own hall, but on Long Island instead of in Dorsetshire, had had a mad sort of humour about it, the quality of a very comic nightmare. Her first shock of surprise as she approached the house had not in the least prepared her for what she would find inside. After all, there were Georgian houses all over the world, and they were all much alike, so that the entrance hall with the pale marble floor, and Adam's own beautiful rounded arched niches holding marble busts, had deprived her too of speech. She and Victor had stared at each other and round them in a dazed silence. They must have looked very odd, for Mrs. Campbell had said laughing, "What is it? You look as if you had seen a ghost, Mr. Joyce—but there aren't any. This house was only built four years ago." And then Mrs. Jamieson had said in her airy, languid way, letting her furs drop into the arms of a footman, "Yes, my son-in-law built it, and I do so hope you will like it. It is very good Adam, he assures me—a quite faithful rendering of the great man's taste. The panelling took simply ages. He imported special workmen from England. He, my son-in-law, did the house completely, the whole of the interior, furniture and everything. I had nothing to do with it. I deserve none of the credit, do I, Addy? So that I can say quite frankly that it is considered a gem.

It is rather small, as you see, but I believe quite perfect—and in America where we go in for such big things and don't always bother about detail, that is to me rather a comfort. Come—I'll show you the drawing-rooms and we'll have tea."

They had followed her through the door past the stairs. Oh, she knew already, did Frederika, where the stairs would be, and there they were, sure enough. Victor had grown crimson during Mrs. Jamieson's little speech, and stalked after her with long, furious strides, but in the pale-blue drawing-room he went white again. The panelled walls and the painted ceiling were exactly the same as his own, a very good substitute for Vigée-Lebrun's ceiling was over his head, and the same formal hangings of apricot satin curtained the long clear windows. Frederika had a quite terrible double sensation. She felt for an instant something very much like a sensation of panic; and yet she felt convincingly, in a curiously matter-of-fact way that compelled to action, that she was at home and that this house belonged to her. She wanted to run, to bolt. She wanted, too, to pour out the tea and straighten the rug. She scarcely dared look round her. She had a vague impression of familiar objects; of Romney and Reynolds portraits in oval frames, of knick-knacks that she would in another minute instinctively and familiarly handle, and she even stopped herself just in time from automatically changing the position of a chair and giving a poke to a cushion. It was quite uncanny. It was really perfectly dreadful, horrible and yet fascinating. She thought, "In another second I shall burst into yells of laughter!" What brought her to her senses was Victor's face. His round eyes were wild and distracted. They rolled this way and that, but they seemed to avoid one wall, the south one. He turned suddenly with a jerk and

stood with his back to it. He looked in every direction but behind him, and all at once she knew why he was afraid to look there. He was afraid of seeing his great-grandmother's face staring back at him. At this discovery Frederika acted. She said quite clearly, and in a matter-of-fact voice, "It's not there, Victor. You needn't worry so. Look!"

At her words, of course, stupefaction seized the tea-party. Mrs. Jamieson, behind her silver tea-kettle, said sharply: "What isn't there? What's the matter?" Mrs. Campbell wailed merrily: "Dear Mrs. Joyce, what do you mean? Do please explain," and the half-dozen others stood gaping.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Jamieson," said Frederika, rather grandly—it was the best she could do for the moment—in a cold precise voice, "but my husband and I have had rather a shock. The fact is that this house is exactly like our own."

They didn't, naturally, take in all at once the meaning of her words.

"You mean that it reminds you of home?" asked Mrs. Jamieson, with something rather sour and sarcastic in her smile. That smile annoyed Frederika; she was already very nervous.

"Not at all," she answered abruptly. "I mean that it is an exact replica, even to the curtains and furniture, of our house in Dorsetshire."

She regretted her words immediately. Apart from being rather rude, they had created a perfectly impossible situation. She could have bitten her tongue out. She realised when it was too late that she and Victor should have kept their discovery a dead secret. He would have, she admitted ruefully—he would never in the world have let on to anyone—but could he have hidden his feelings?

Just possibly. At any rate he would have preferred no one to understand them. But what of Sir Evelyn and Perky? They too were by now perfectly aware of the dramatic coincidence. Perky had recognised the rooms instantly. He was positively sizzling. In any case the harm was done, and a furore of curiosity whirled round the tea-table. Mrs. Jamieson had flushed scarlet, and darted a very ugly look at Frederika. Mrs. Campbell had at once begun pouring out questions in a high, nervous, screaming voice.

“Do you mean that Peter copied your house? But he and I have never been there. You’ve never even met him. Do you mean to say that this room is exactly like your drawing-room? Are you annoyed about it? Are you angry, Mrs. Joyce? What is it? What does it mean? Are you accusing Peter of something—something he had no right to do?”

She was almost in tears.

“Hush, Addy, don’t be so silly.” Mrs. Jamieson was by now in a very bad temper. “Let Mr. and Mrs. Joyce have their tea quietly, and then you can show them all over the house from top to bottom, and let them see exactly how like it is to their own. If this room is a copy of yours, Mrs. Joyce, it can easily be changed. The fact is as annoying to me as to you, I assure you.” Mrs. Jamieson’s beautiful manners were breaking down badly.

Sir Evelyn, the diplomat, intervened: “But surely it is very interesting all this.” He rubbed his hands. “Most, most interesting. I too, Mrs. Jamieson, am struck, you know. It is not only a question of your son-in-law having reproduced so very faithfully one of Adam’s most beautiful houses, it is more than that. He has recreated the atmosphere. I have often had the pleasure of staying at Wellowburn myself, and I assure you it is quite wonderful.

I find myself here, on Long Island, one hour's drive from your amazing city of skyscrapers, back in England, back in the old world, and in one of its most charming and secluded spots. Your son-in-law is a genius, Mrs. Jamieson, and is to be congratulated, it seems to me, on a very wonderful artistic achievement. Don't you agree, Joyce?" He turned to Victor.

Poor Victor! He was still boiling with annoyance. He could only mutter, "Yes—yes, quite so," and leave the rest to Perky. And Perky, in his little high chirping voice, did create a very successful diversion. Frederika never knew whether he had done it as a social manoeuvre, or out of mischief, or merely because he suddenly was struck by the idea. You couldn't tell about Perky.

"It may be a sort of psychic phenomenon," he twittered, "like table-turning, you know." He chuckled gently. They had all stared at him then.

"You mean Peter may have seen the house in a dream?" asked Adelaide Campbell eagerly. "He does, you know—see things that way. Doesn't he, mummy?"

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear," snapped her mother, "how Peter sees things. I think it's much more likely he copied the house from photographs in 'Country Life'."

"But it's never been photographed for 'Country Life,' has it, Victor?" put in again that gentle and now suddenly, to Frederika, terrible young man Perky.

No, Victor admitted from this place on the hearthrug beside Sir Evelyn; that was so. He had got himself in hand, had Victor. He was quite calm now, quite stolid, perfectly bland.

"Oh, but how extraordinary it would be if it were true—a real case of telepathy, you know, or whatever you would call it. I must write to Peter at once and find

out. What a pity he isn't here to tell us. Sometimes, you know, he works in his sleep. Some of his best designs come out of his head in the morning, quite finished. It would be too strange, wouldn't it, Mr. Joyce, if my husband had seen your house in a dream?" She was on a low couch by the fire—"On my couch and in my place," Frederika was saying to herself—and she leant forward now and looked up into Victor's face with an arch smile. She had been on the verge of tears, and her big brown eyes were still suffused, moist, wistful, while her manner was sentimental, childishly coquettish, blatantly and foolishly flirtatious. Frederika, irritated, was dubbing her an intolerable little actress, when she saw to her amazement that Victor was smiling back into that pretty baby face with an expression of benevolent fondness.

"It would indeed," he said kindly, and that was so extraordinary that Frederika refused to think about it.

She spent the rest of the week-end in a wretched daze, a sort of dreamy fidget, refusing to think about anything. She danced, she played bridge, she drank cocktails. They were all taken to a terrible ball somewhere, on Saturday night. There was a partridge-shoot that day, and on Sunday fifty people sat down to luncheon. No one seemed to talk of anything but the curious affair of the house. Adelaide Campbell went on and on about it. She told every newcomer. The whole of Long Island was informed that her husband had, without knowing it, having probably seen it in his sleep, reproduced Mr. Joyce's famous house that had been built for his great-grandmother by Adam himself. By Sunday she seemed to have the whole history of Wellowburn at her fingertips. Frederika mused over the new surprising change in Victor's habit of reticence, for he must have given her

all this information. Mrs. Campbell would say; "But the dining-room chairs are different, you know, Mr. Joyce tells me, and I remember now Peter couldn't get the kind he wanted, and the flamingo room is quite Peter's own invention. There is no room of the kind at Wellowburn, is there, Mrs. Joyce? And no such wall-paper?"

The Flamingo or Garden Room was papered with a very lovely eighteenth-century Chinese paper. Pink flamingoes stood in shallow water among fragile bushes of bamboo. Frederika's heart had thumped painfully when she saw it. She hadn't known why, but she had been looking for something that was missing in the drawing-room, something important, she didn't know what; but when she went into the garden room, she knew. It was her flamingo screen between the drawing-room chimney-piece and the door that she had missed. For the strange thing was that although there weren't really, when you counted them up, so very many things in the house that were like the things at Wellowburn, the house itself conveyed more and more as one stayed in it the same, the identical spirit and personality, and it was even more what her own home ought to be, and probably had been in the old days when Victor's great-grandmother had floated through it in white satin and curls, than what Wellowburn, lived in and owned by Victor, had now become. This house was new, but it was right. The architect had preserved the stiff elegance and the cool air of cynical intolerance that was the special stamp of Adam's idea. Not only were there Reynolds and Romney portraits, and wedgwood in the spindly cabinets, in addition there were other things which Wellowburn did not but might have contained: The bedrooms, of course, were done up quite differently, and yet the house was so really like the one she had now lived in for twenty years that in a

few hours the differences had come to seem to her more surprising and significant than the resemblance. The bedrooms, as a matter of fact, were much prettier. They were quite exquisite. They were done exactly as she would have liked to do the rooms at Wellowburn herself, had Victor let her have her way, only she couldn't, she admitted, have done them so well. A very sure taste had reigned in that house; a taste whose cool, daring delicacy was utterly satisfying. The room that had been allotted to her—it didn't correspond to her own room at Wellowburn, that was Mrs. Jamieson's, of course; it was at the head of the stairs, and she had not been asked into it—but anyhow the room she slept in was so lovely that all her nervous tension relaxed when she escaped to it and shut herself in. The walls were panelled and painted a curious shade of greyish-green; she fancied the green was put on over silver; the furniture was creamy lacquer. There were gay cushions of taffeta silk of various shades of pink and blue, on a couch before the lovely black and white marble chimney-piece. The ceiling was tinted a robin's egg blue. The curtains were plain ivory glazed chintz with a small cotton fringe. The room was clean, spacious, uncrowded. The lamps had pale parchment shades. There were white fur rugs on the polished floor.

What it all amounted to, she said to herself, was that the house was Wellowburn, only better. It was the same house, but done as Adam would perhaps have done it now. Peter Campbell had got the atmosphere and kept the best of Wellowburn, and where he had been unable to find what he wanted, he had found something nicer. It was all very, very, strange. But she refused to think of how he had come to do it. Her mind shied off. She felt a curious reluctance to admit into it the fact that she was half frightened, and she told herself

that she was annoyed. He must have gone down to Wellowburn incognito, she remarked to herself, and taken voluminous notes. That was undoubtedly the explanation, and a curiously unpleasant one. But she only half believed it, and a conversation that she had late on Sunday night after dinner with Mr. Jamieson did nothing whatever to confirm it, and much to add to her uncomfortable sense of some mystery about the house that concerned not Victor but herself, though they did all keep talking about Victor's house. Of course it was Victor's house, but still—but supposing—but no, it was too strange; one couldn't admit such things.

Mr. Jamieson said shyly, "I guess you and your husband have been rather upset, Mrs. Joyce, and I know Pete will be awfully sorry when he hears. I guess it will upset him even more than you. He always had a queer feeling about this house. He didn't say anything exactly, but I could see. He seemed kind of restless about it and bothered in his mind more than usual while he was doing it. Lord! how that boy did fuss. Every detail had to be perfect, and he had to buy every stick of furniture himself; yet he wasn't happy when it was done, and he don't like to come down here. When he comes he's not himself at all, but it isn't because he has a bad conscience: that I know. Pete never stole an idea from anyone in his life, you take it from me, ma'am, and if he's stolen your house it's without knowing it. Pete's a queer boy, but there's nothing underhand about him, and he'll be all in when he hears about this." He had looked at her a minute, then in his shrewd yet wistful way, with a puzzled question in his eyes; "I'd like you to meet Pete," he had said, "I think it would be a good thing if you could talk to him and tell him maybe that you don't mind, that is, if it's true. Pete's a funny little cuss, these artists are,

ain't they? I get real worried about him sometimes. My wife doesn't understand him." He hesitated, seemed about to speak again, sighed, and said no more.

It was Perky who put the finishing touch to her sense of discomfort, when he said good-night to her on Sunday night.

"Don't you feel like staying behind with Victor by the fire and sending the others to bed?" he asked with his small soft explosive chuckle. "You have your girl guides in the morning, you know."

She had stiffened. "Don't be silly, Perky dear."

"Oh—oh!" he had murmured deprecatingly. "Do you mean that you don't like the compliment?"

"Compliment?" She had pretended a vagueness that she did not in the least feel. What she had felt was the desire to slap him.

"The compliment of the house, my dear. The most extraordinary compliment that a man has ever paid a woman since the days of Troy. Think of the trouble he must have taken, think of the intense pains he must have gone to, to get together all these little things that make up *your* atmosphere."

"Not mine."

"Yes, yours."

She saw now that he was speaking seriously, that he too was excited and moved. They stared at each other a moment.

"Where did you meet Peter Campbell, Frederika?" he asked at last, quite gravely.

"I have never met him."

His eyes seemed to widen behind his spectacles. A curious little smile trembled on his lips. "So it is after all an affair of dreams and ghosts," he murmured, and she heard him let out a soft whistle as she fled up the stairs.

CHAPTER III

GUSSY GREEN lived as it were, upside-down, and her shoddy luxurious apartment on 91st Street, full of gim-crack furniture, sofas with soiled covers, flaring cushions with stains on them, cheap knick-knacks and toys, golliwogs, rag dolls, bonbon boxes ruffed with pleated silk and so on, often looked as if it had turned round on a pivot dropping the furniture, cushions and toys pell-mell from the ceiling which was now on top, to the floor which had been. The clocks appeared to go backwards there. Breakfasts of bacon and eggs and coffee appeared when the stars were in the sky, and during the hours when the sun wheeled past her high windows darkness shrouded her rooms, wrapping in shadow the long drawing-room, the low divans, the overturned chairs, and an indistinct figure or two slumbering heavily on the rug. Only faint rays of light could find their way in through the drawn curtains, to gleam on the black body of the piano, on trays of glasses and bottles, on what seemed to be puddles here and there on the floor, and on a white shirt bosom or a patent leather shoe. Augusta Green's guests could not always go home when the party was over. They had a way of falling asleep where they dropped towards 4 o'clock in the morning, and she would leave them there. What else could she do? And why should she mind? They were her friends, and in any case she was usually sleepy enough herself by that time not to care who went and who stayed. As a rule they would be gone by the time she came out of her bedroom. This was a fluffy place, all lace and pink ribbon. Her gilt bed had white lace curtains over pink silk, and was decorated with large pink bows. Gussy liked bows of ribbon. They

were her way of decorating a room. She would pin one to a tablecloth, a window-curtain or a cushion, and say: "My, isn't that cute?" She was in some ways a childish creature. When she emerged from her bower she would look with a vague good-natured disgust at the living-room, shake her hair out of her eyes, say "Gawd, what a mess!" turn on the gramophone, and yell through the pantry door to her Japanese boy for her coffee. She drank a pint of it, black, to the latest Charleston, while the Jap mopped up the floor, and was then ready for work. She was a hard worker. Her living upside-down did not interfere with that. Nothing was allowed to interfere with that. In any case, how could the confusion interfere when it was a part of it, the necessary stimulus, itch, irritation, the right electric medium for her temperament? She lived in disorder because she liked it, because she always had lived like that. It was natural to her to be untidy, and she was a perfectly natural woman. Things all neat and set made her nervous. Solid food, wholesome to most people, didn't agree with her. Sunshine and green fields depressed her, made her restless. Silence and solitude drove her out of her mind. The necessities of life to her were sugar, alcohol, coffee, electric light, plenty of company, and noise, particularly syncopated noise.

She breakfasted, took her bath, and dressed, to the sound of jazz, humming, whistling or singing an accompaniment to the music machine which she carried about with her from bedroom, to dressing-room, from bathroom to living-room. Her shrill, ear-splitting whistle would sound high and gay through the apartment as she splashed about in her marble basin. The Jap boy would cock his head to one side in the pantry, jigging gently as he polished the tumblers, and the big fat Italian woman in the kitchen would swing about clumsily, rocking her enormous hips,

a jovial elephant with jazz in its huge feet. Only Gussy's maid, Eliza Smith, remained mournful in the confusion, and even her groans and sighs as she picked up torn stockings and ruined shreds of chiffon and lace seemed to be affected by the nervous rhythm that jiggled the air. She was cross in a jerky, syncopated way. She would say, "Now there, Miss Gussy, look at that," and wave a tattered garment like a flag, mournfully, her face like a funeral, and Gussy would yell, gaily: "Throw it away, Eliza! Throw it away! I didn't ask you to mend it, did I?" but Eliza did not throw it away. She had more sense about such things than Miss Gussy. She was a nagging protest against Miss Gussy's extravagance and untidiness. She considered herself the one solid anchor that saved that young woman from drifting to ruin and falling to pieces.

Gussy was always in too much of a hurry to dress properly. "Wait a minute, Miss Gussy—stand still, can't you—you're not fastened up—your chemise is showing."

Gussy, in spite of Eliza, never looked neat. She would appear at some grand house with a safety-pin showing, or a piece of lace trailing from her skirt. Bright colours and cheap finery had an irresistible fascination for her. She hung herself all over with bangles till she jingled like a chandelier, and she never took the time to make up her face properly. The paint and powder were slapped on anyhow. Her snub nose was often shiny, the back of her neck not always clean, and she drenched herself in a pungent perfume that made one sneeze. All this made her a very striking figure in the smart society of New York. Had she done it on purpose, she couldn't have succeeded better in imposing herself as a redoubtable personality among all those pale, exquisitely gowned women, but she did not do it on purpose. She never did anything for

effect, and she didn't care what the four hundred thought of her. Nor had she any intention of drifting to ruin. She didn't drift. She knew perfectly well where she was going and what she was about. She would throw away silk stockings and money because they didn't matter, they were cheap. She had been quite as happy without them, happier. And she would drink up to a point, because she liked it, because the sensation of being slightly tipsy was pleasant, because it was natural and inevitable to drink, because—oh, hell!—just because there was always drink about and it didn't really give her much of a headache; but she wasn't going to throw herself away, or her success. What she wanted wasn't money, but independence, the power and the right to go to hell in her own way if she wanted to; and her success was precious to her because it provided her with an almost complete liberty to do this.

She was a shrewd business woman and a hard worker. All those tricks of hers, that ravished the public, had been learned grimly, practised laboriously, with the sweat dripping off her hard, elastic body. Her dancing looked easy. The incredible speed of it seemed a startling but natural phenomenon. It wasn't. She had been getting up that speed for fifteen years. Year after year, month after month, she had been teaching her feet to go faster and faster. Every day of her life she went at it to the gramophone in a suit of tights, turning somersaults, cartwheels, standing on her head, lying on her back and doing things with her legs, and dancing, dancing, making a flashing, intricate pattern of swiftly changing figures over the polished floor of an empty room kept for the purpose. She became a spinning-top, a whirling-wheel, a jumping-jack, a bird flying, a disjointed toy worked by a complicated network of jerking strings, a limp rag animated by

a ghostly demon of mischief. Her bones could be nervous and brittle. They could go soft, go to nothing. She could die like Pavlova's swan, sinking down beautifully with fluttering wings, or leap through the air like Nijinski, or pant like a dog, or climb like a monkey. It was all the same to her. The one trick she could not do well, that is, for long, was the sentimental. Everything she touched or imitated, every mood, every emotion, became at a given moment funny, turned with a wink and a spasm of merriment to burlesque. And yet she didn't find the world such a very funny place; and though she made a thousand men and women laugh every night of her life, she didn't see anything much to laugh at in the spectacle they presented.

Life was a grim business to Gussy Green, and her own life had a logic that was not at first sight visible. It was a battle for success that never let up. You might suppose that having conquered Broadway, she could rest on her laurels: she knew better. To make a hit is one thing, to keep the public's attention is another. Gussy knew her New York better than most people. She had her eyes peeled and her little sharp ears tuned and quivering to the voice of that fickle, greedy, cruel monster the American public, that always wanted something new, something different, that was at once raw and satiated, ignorant and blasé, nervous and callous, young and tired, hungry and overfed. The competition in her profession was, as she put it, something fierce! Younger and prettier actresses sprouted up round her like weeds. She didn't fear or resent this. She merely coped with it; kept on the job, kept herself fit, was always on the watch for new songs, new tricks, new dance-steps, was on good terms with writers of jazz and sentimental ditties, often discovered them and gave them a leg up, advancing them money to

keep from starving, or locking them up and depriving them of drink while they turned out tunes for her.

For the most part she despised the young women who swarmed up and down Broadway, trying to flirt and ogle their way to success, offering themselves, their silly pretty faces and legs, to any bloke who was going to put a show on, selling themselves for twenty-five dollars a week and a chance to make a hit. Now and then, one of them did make a hit, one out of the ten thousand who came to nothing, who didn't catch on, were never noticed by the papers, and drifted away through the swarm, were sucked down into it out of sight, or went on the road maybe with some one-horse stock company and grew old out there in the dust of small towns, and got soiled and man-handled and dog-tired, and so disappeared. Gussy was sorry for them, but she despised them for being such easy money, for thinking success could be got by throwing your arms round a man's neck. She hated futility and sloppy emotions. When she saw talent she was ready to help it along, but the only kind of girl she had any use for in the profession was a hard worker.

It made her sick sometimes to see rows of women sitting in the outside office of some one of Schuman's fifty theatres, waiting all day for a chance to interview one of the gang. She wanted sometimes to burst out at them and yell at them to go home to their farms, their home towns in the west, the north, the south, their main streets, their backyards, their Pas and Mas, their dough-nuts and apple-sauce. "You won't do any good—you—" she wanted to say, shaking her fist at them. "Not one of you's got the guts. Cut it out. Cheese it. Make a get away, now, quick. They're only bluffing you. It's all a big bluff this Broadway show, anyhow, I know. You take it from me." She did know.

The friendship between this woman, New York's favourite vaudeville actress, and the great financier, Ikey Daw, was a thing of many years' standing. He was supposed in some circles to have picked her out of the gutter and placed her behind the footlights. People said he kept her. None of this was true. No man on earth had the power to keep a star behind the footlights of Broadway. Augusta Green kept herself, she paid her own rent and her own bills, and she had made herself, struggling and fighting and kicking her way to the top of the theatrical world. No one had helped her. She had been kicked, cuffed, shouted at, elbowed out of the way, knocked down and knocked out, until she was as hard and elastic as a steel spring. And she had always bounded up again with clenched fists and a wild burst of defiant laughter that might have been mistaken sometimes for a sob of rage had her little grinning, snub-nosed Irish Mick's face been less comic. She had called their bluff, and fought her way, watching for her chance, using her wits, fastening on with her teeth like a bristly bull-terrier to a job when she got one; and through it all she had hung on to her independence for dear life. No doggone Jew was going to put anything across on her. She would do as she pleased, love if she wanted to, starve if she had to, but she wasn't going to belong to anyone but herself. The idea of being the property of any man made her see red. She would sell herself to the public, all of herself that it wanted, she wasn't squeamish; she would hire out her pretty legs, her ugly face, her contagious laughter, her rough voice that stirred up men's hearts and stomachs like a churn, and she would drive a hard bargain over these properties but give a mere man a first call on them? No thank you! She had bared her teeth when Ikey made some such suggestion. "What do you take me for?" she had snarled, "a clinging

vine or a jack-ass? God! What fools men are!" She had screamed with laughter in his face and then showed him her heels. They had, however, come in the end to an understanding, some sort of alliance was agreed to between them; she consented to profit by the publicity of his newspapers, and gave him in exchange a certain amount of her time, together with the public signs of her favour. They were to be seen together lunching at the Colony when he was in town, and his motor often waited at the stage door of her theatre, but not by any means every day or every night. Gussy was very jealous of her freedom. When Ikey became exacting she told him to go to hell, and there would follow an interval of weeks or months during which they did not meet; but he always came back. Why she let him, she didn't quite know—because it was good for business perhaps, or because she was good-natured and sorry for him. He didn't at all dazzle her or take her in. She knew that he was cruel, dishonest financially in his own great way and low in his tastes; but then she was low, too, and there was something about him that commanded her admiration. It may have been merely that he was always sober. This made him peculiar, for most of her men friends were most of the time tight. At any rate, she seldom saw them when they weren't.

They were a very heterogeneous crowd, but they had this characteristic in common, that the earth was unsteady under their feet and the panorama of the lighted city a blurr before their eyes.' To them the skyscrapers often appeared to slant in a crazy fashion, and the long lines of lamp-posts to writhe like snakes. They had a common difficulty in keeping their motors clear of these, and often a similar difficulty in saying what they wanted to say. Sometimes they would repeat it over and over again, to

make sure they had said it. Gussy was used to their ways. She knew how to talk to them, dance with them, and manage them generally. She was so used to them that she had evolved an elaborate technique in handling them. She could tell at a glance just how far gone they were, and what they were good for. When they were all in, she took them home, or if they were under her roof, put pillows under their heads and left them. Often when she went on a spree with one of them, she would bundle him in the early morning into the back of his car, drive him to his door, support him through the hall, hold him up in the elevator, ring his bell, deliver him over to his servants, and drive herself to his garage, leaving his car there and going home in a taxi. There was nothing upsetting or particularly annoying to her in all this. She didn't wonder about it, or curse, she simply accepted it. Sometimes she got angry, not often. It didn't occur to her to blame them or to moralise. She hated that sort of stuff. She would have said, honestly believing it, that she had no morals, no standards of conduct, not even a colour prejudice. She maintained that the blacks were the same as anybody else, and that a man running wild with liquor in him was exactly like every other man, whatever the colour of his skin. Some of her friends were black or brown or yellow. She didn't mix these much with her swells who belonged to the Racquet Club and played polo, but she took a certain defiant pleasure in parading them. She had come back to rehearse in a show called "Sugar Cane" in which she was the only white member of the cast, and she did not hesitate to go with her leading man to a joint on 42nd Street where you could get good coffee and hot waffles at any hour of the night after rehearsal. This sort of conduct had given even Broadway something to talk about. Her manager had protested, some of the High

Moguls, Directors of Schuman, had protested. She had told them to mind their own business. She said that line o' talk made her sick. She said she'd live with a nigger if she wanted to, and if they didn't shut up they'd drive her to it. She'd marry one just to teach them—she'd a good mind to do it just to prove what New York would swallow. "Who are you, anyhow?" she asked them, standing in her Manager's office, her arms akimbo. "A lot o' doggone Jews and half-breeds who'd sell your souls to the devil if there was enough money in it. Half-wits, that's what you are, a lot o' gasbags, a lot o' sharks, a lot of bluffers. Every one of you's trying to do in the other one, all bluffing and bragging and saying what good fellas you are and what good friends you are and waiting for a chance to knife each other, and Sam there who thinks himself a great man at putting on shows, what does he know about shows? He can't sing in tune, or talk English, or tell red from blue. He's one big almighty bluff like all the rest of you. And so what has he got on the yellow girl Sal now, or her pal Joe? Sal can sing, can't she? Can Joe beat the piano or can't he? And who are you anyhow to tell me where to get off? Christ!—I'd rather go back to Harlem with my old washerwoman and drink soapsuds than be told by you fellas how to behave like a lady."

All this was perhaps a sign of her having after all some kind of colour feeling. Her talk was exaggerated. It wasn't quite natural. The fact was that she never would have lived with a negro. She couldn't have. There was something—something physical, a sharp antagonism in her wild Irish blood, but she wouldn't have admitted it. Her old darkie laundress had been kind to her. She never forgot that, never would; and besides, she liked these niggers, they were pals and she liked going to their

dance clubs and she worked with them, and she would have scorned working with them on any but the most even footing. The one thing she could stand less than people who felt superior were those that showed they felt inferior. She was a democrat. When she said the darkies were as good as she was and maybe a darn sight better and no different, she meant it. "And by God," she once said to Peter, "when I come away from a party at your mother-in-law's, I wish sometimes that the whole of Harlem would run amok in Park Avenue and rape every white woman in the street. They need it, believe me. It would do them a lot of good. It might make them almost human."

Peter was a very special pal of hers. Just how special even she herself did not know. Somehow she never asked herself the question. She shied off it, but he was the one man in New York she refused to drink with. When she was out with Peter, she was on the waggon, and once, only once, had Peter slept where he dropped on the floor in her drawing-room, and then not on the floor. She had picked him up and put him on the sofa, had undone his collar, and tucked the pink satin quilt from her bed round him. Then she had sat down beside him in the disorderly room with broken glasses on the floor, and had cried. No one knew this, least of all Peter himself, and why she had bawled like that, she didn't know, but it had been terrible. It had given her the most awful pain, like a bad stomach-ache, to see him there.

"It's impossible," she had said to him, furiously, the next time they met. "I tell you, Pete, it's impossible."

What she meant was that it was impossible that Peter's life should be ruined by drink; for somehow his life seemed, among all the other lives that spun round her, very important.

Sometimes when she had spent an evening with Peter (he would call for her after the show, and they would go to an all-night lunch-counter and drink coffee, or to Joe's maybe and dance), she would come home and sit for quite ten minutes motionless and alone in her room without even lighting a cigarette. "My God," she would say to herself, "what a world—nothing but low-down Jews and fairies and silly muts getting drunk and chasing dollars. What's it all about, anyhow?" But she wasn't much given to thinking about things that couldn't be helped, and didn't indulge in fits of the blues; and she was always in high spirits and very matter-of-fact when she was with Peter. Never in her life had any man seen Gussy sentimental. Her manner of loving was wild, hilarious, a kind of nervous delirium, or joyous madness, a harsh ecstasy of slang and laughter—jazz love; but between Peter and herself there had never been any love-making. They were pals, she would say fiercely if anyone like Ike objected. "He's a pal o' mine—don't make any mistake about it, and keep your hands off my affairs, *if you please.*"

They were like a couple of kids together, a couple of little micks. Sometimes they went roller-skating or to Coney Island, or if it was summer, motored down to some place on the seashore and had a fish dinner. Once or twice he had taken her to a prize fight in Madison Square Gardens, and sometimes, if she could get off in the afternoon, they would go to Baseball Games. Gussy could talk baseball with a professional twang that made Peter yell with laughter.

They both liked life in the raw: she because the mob was her natural element, he because it wasn't. He came to her for relief from his work, or from some painful nerve-racking scene with Adelaide, whose feelings he had

hurt for the hundredth time, and plunged with her into the roaring crowd, the teeming, jangling streets, the low, vulgar, warm-blooded, uproarious herd, where no one was complicated, no one on his or her dignity, where no one put on side or talked art, or pretended to understand anything; and he got from it what he wanted. He liked Gussy because she was ignorant, because she was coarse and sharp and absurd, because she gave him electric shocks and offended his taste, and never hurt him, because figuratively speaking she knocked him about, blew his dreams to atoms, burst his bubble of conceit, was rough and slap-dash and untidy, and had not one grain of artistic sense, and didn't want to have any. He adored her ludicrous, gimcrack apartment, all satin bows and bronze gates made of cardboard that crumpled under you when you leaned on them. He found her awful rooms, with their dreadful knick-knacks, restful, and vowed she was a living proof that everything he was working at was bunk. Even her face, he said, was a proof that beauty was a swindle. Her face made him laugh, it delighted him. He said he'd rather look at her than at Helen of Troy. Helen would have broken his heart, he said, whereas she mended it, and by Jove, yes, he would build her a little pink plaster palace at Palm-beach all trimmed with sugar like a birthday cake. But what he most admired about her was that she was a free woman. Her mode of life, lawless, lonely, defiant, promiscuous, and completely devoid of sentiment, commanded his respect. He recognised her loneliness, understood the emptiness of her hilarious, crowded solitude, and respected her for being hard, grim, determined and gay. She seemed to him a tragic clown, or to put it otherwise, a grotesquely comic heroine of tragedy. Indeed, she appeared to him at times behind

the footlights, when he went to see her in some play, as enormous and terrible, an immense significant figure, a sort of symbol of her time—and when he thought of her trailing triumphant and shoddy through the streets of New York, with her drunken escort of boisterous men, he adored her with a convulsive feeling of admiration and pity.

“You’re sublime, Gussy,” he would tell her. “You’re a miracle.” She asked nothing more of him than he gave her. When she caught sight of him in the stalls of her theatre, she gave no sign of the funny spasm she felt inside her. She kept on dancing, grinning, wagging her knees, slapping her thighs, playing the same old low-down game, making an exhibition of herself, feeding herself to the public that smacked its big loose lips over her, and made her suddenly sick. God, how she loathed it, all of a sudden, unexpectedly.

But, “Hello, Pete,” she’d call out, in her high, harsh rasping voice, across the footlights, and what she was really saying to herself no one ever knew, least of all Peter himself. He was a little pal of hers, and that was that.

They had all sorts of night friends whose society they frequented together.

Sometimes at the Crib, the four of them, Joe and Carolina, Sal and Peter and herself, would sit over bottles of ginger ale together. Peter had a lot of friends among the coons. He seemed to like better to be with them than with anyone, was happier in a way, but sort of haunted, fascinated like a rabbit by a snake, Gussy thought. This puzzled her a little. She felt obscurely, but did not understand what it was, the thing that drew him to this dark, uprooted fragment of a race that was rotting away in the draughty basement of her terrible American city. She herself took the darkies for granted and felt they would never make good, that they were just

a lot of big black children without the guts to stand it, to last out, win through in the harsh, gritty soil of American towns; and when one of them made his mark, an actor or a writer or a singer, attracting the attention of the great white world, she would applaud generously, but think "what's one in ten millions?" The negroes of the night world were no good to her mind. They had no guts and no sense, and they died off like flies in these cellars of theirs where, with blizzards raging overhead in the streets, they lived out their hot, languid exotic lives underground, in a dream of jazz, dope and drink.

But Peter had answered once when she said something of the sort, "Sure, Gussy, of course they're hopeless, but they're a great, big black picture of us—of you and me—of the whole human race, all the same. Understand what they're after? understand a single blame thing about life, America, New York even? Certainly not—but do you, do I? Aren't we all muzzed and doped and dizzy? Do any of us belong, feel at home here, or anywhere on the Earth? Well—I don't, and I tell you, Gussy, those coons are you and me, with no frills on, and magnified into great big black giants. They're a close-up of ourselves. They're the bare savage incarnation of our own poor little damned white souls."

Joe would come rolling over the floor to their table and give them the news. There was always plenty of news in Harlem. Somebody'd moved on or been done in, or got nabbed by the police. Maybe some literary guy had come snoopin' round. "Wants to put me in a book, Pete, me an' Sal. What d'yo think of that—ain't that fine? Made me tell him all about Alabama. Oh, I tole him—I tole him such a story as never was heard of, this side de Mason and Dixie line. Sal she's dopin' somethin' dreadful," he'd say, breaking off suddenly.

"Dat gal's goin' all to pieces," this, staring at her handsome, bronze face with a worried expression. "Her Ma's jes' about crazy, an' gits the passon up dere at her place nearly ebbery odder day. Don't she, Sal? Her Ma's got religion somethin' awful. Always a hollerin' an' yellin' about hell fire and being saved, an' Sal she don' like it, do you, chile? I guess she'll run away one o' dese days—an' go to Paris like Lulu Bell. Say, Pete, dat dere show's havin' a mos' serious effect on de imaginations ob some ob dese coloured gals. Dey's all set on goin' to Paris. You git dat idea out of her head, Pete, can't yo? I'd be powerful sorry to lose Sal—an' I don't think much o' dat Paris trash, anyhow—" and he would go rolling wistfully back to his piano, to draw from it the incredible rhythms that throbbed in his huge, black fingers and that were so complicated that no one could write them down. Gussy would then give Sal a piece of her mind.

"You want to go to Paris, do you?"

"I guess I'd jes' love it," Sal would smile, slowly, with a blinding flash of white teeth.

"Well, you won't get there, so stop guessing. You're too lazy. Florence Mills has got more go in her little finger than you've got in your whole body. You might just as well make up your mind right now to stick to Joe who's fond of you, because you'll never do any good anywhere else. Didn't I get you a part in my last show? How long did you keep it? Three weeks—too lazy to stick to it. Couldn't get out o' bed in time for a matinée. No, Sal—it's no use dreaming about Paris, because you'll never see Paris if you live to be a hundred."

"Mebbe you're right and mebbe you're wrong, Miss Green. Mebbe I'll find some rich young fella like Pete heah," and she would laugh her low guttural gurgle that rumbled and echoed in her deep chest.

"You make me tired. Aren't you fond o' Joe?"

"I sure am."

"Then stick to him. If you had any gumption it might be different, but you haven't."

"I git kind o' restless."

"So does everybody else. Pete here—he gets restless too, don't you Pete? Everybody in New York's restless. The whole town's restless—what's that got to do with it? You marry Joe and settle down and have babies. That's the best thing you can do"; but when Sal swam away into one of her dances, Gussy would cock her crooked head to one side, screw up her little green eyes, and say after a few minutes of cold appraisal; "That girl's an artist—if she weren't so lazy I could make something out of her." Gussy never showed any interest in Peter's relations with Sal, whatever they might be. If anyone had cornered her on the subject, she would probably have said that the yellow girl was a better friend to him than his wife; and if it gave her a queer kind of sinking sick feeling to think of him with that big, bronze animal, she never let on about that either. Sometimes she scolded him, but never about any woman except Mrs. Jamieson and her sort. "You're getting to be a regular society man, Pete, and that's bad. Your work won't stand it. When you're not working you ought to be happy, you ought to be playing round and getting a kick out o' something—anything, anything real, I mean. That gang isn't real. It's imitation, and a bad one, too. Sitting in a box at the opera and holding somebody's fan while somebody powders her nose—no, Pete, it's no good." He agreed with her; he knew she was right. He was surprised at her acumen. Somehow, in spite of her atrocious taste, she seemed to understand about his work.

"You've gotta keep young, Pete, and fresh like me.

Keen—so you can see things. You've gotta keep yourself skinned and your eyes peeled so everything 'll hit you on the raw and make you jump. Where do you get your inspiration from, anyway? Don't you get it from the muck and the dirt and the noise? This town's awful, but it's got you, so you hug it tight, Pete. You look it in the face and make love to the tenements, and don't go to sleep in the arms of Park Avenue, or get drunk any more either. When you're blind you can't see, can you? You're a great artist, Pete, and you don't give yourself a chance. What with drink and your mother-in-law, you'll be dead before you're forty." She hated Adelaide, too, but she kept off that subject, and Pete never mentioned her.

Gussy's idea was to help him if and when she got a chance, and, as she put it, to "keep off the grass"—his grass. She couldn't stand people interfering with her, and she wasn't going to interfere with Peter. His marriage and his love affairs were none of her business.

It was really her doing that Ikey Daw had gone on the Board of Directors of the Manhattan Development Company. At first he had refused. When she got wind of it, she had gone for him. "Don't take much interest in New York, do you, Ikey? Well, you're making a mistake. You'll get in wrong if you don't take some trouble about being a good citizen. If you don't care what happens to this town, pretend to care. There's too much of the Jew speculator about you, Ikey. Take it from me—these men have got a big idea and they're sentimental about it—just like they were about the war—and believe me, when New Yorkers get sentimental, they go pretty far. You'd better be in with them than outside. They're all ready to call you an outsider, anyhow."

He had seen the point of her argument and had joined

the Board, and the fact that Mr. Jamieson was one of the other directors stimulated him to a more active interest in the proceedings of the Company than he would otherwise have felt. It always interested him to find himself up against old Jamieson, to appear to agree with the man and secretly oppose him; and now that Peter Campbell had come on the scene with a bid for a block skyscraper, his interest increased still further. He imagined that old Jamieson was backing his son-in-law, but he was not certain. He had heard rumours of a divorce in the Campbell family. The old man was a secretive devil—you couldn't tell. He never showed any sign of feeling one way or the other when Peter Campbell's name was introduced at a Board meeting. On the other hand, Gussy was mad about that boy. Ikey hadn't made up his mind on which side to throw his influence as to Peter's claim. Gussy would make things unpleasant if he spoiled it. He would have to be careful.

Gussy knew that Ikey didn't like Peter, but she was used to handling Ikey, and so, in order that Peter should have a chance to see him right away, it was arranged that they should both have supper with her after her rehearsal on Monday, the night Peter got back from Chicago. Unfortunately, they had a date with Bridget Prime that night, so she asked Bridget too, and then realised that if there were only four of them Ikey would pay no attention to anyone but Bridget, and Peter wouldn't have a look in. She had of course sized up pretty accurately the Ikey-Bridget situation. She knew that Ikey was far gone, and that Bridget was already finding him 'a nuisance. She liked Bridget. On the whole she thought her a better sort than Ikey, but what could she do about it, one way or the other? Everything of that kind was always a hopeless mess, anyway. Ikey was going to have a bad

time of it. Bridget Prime was not for him. She wouldn't look at him. She was only using him, and soon she would get too tired of him to do even that. Gussy didn't blame her—why shouldn't Bridget, who was the most beautiful thing on earth, use Ikey, if Ikey was enough of a fool to be used? And what could she do to help him out? Nothing. She couldn't tell him the truth. He wouldn't believe her. He would think that she was jealous of Bridget. That made Gussy laugh out loud as she brushed her teeth, and the sound of her own laughter made her stand tooth-brush in hand with her eyebrows knit, and stare, as if she had discovered a spider on the wall. Well, that much was settled, anyhow. She and Ikey were through, whatever happened. She heaved a sigh of relief, and began to whistle in an ear-splitting way she had when she was thinking hard. "Never again—never again," she repeated to herself. "Well, she's done me a good turn, that English girl. I might have gone on for years." She was perfectly satisfied. She told herself, once a thing was finished it was finished. She was ashamed of having taken Ikey back once or twice before, but that had been different. It had been because he insisted. Now he wanted to go—so good-bye. She waved her hand towards the bathroom window. That was all right; but there was Peter to be considered. The evening that she had planned for him would be a wash-out. The best thing he could do now was to make another date with Ikey himself when they met at supper. They'd better lunch together down town some day soon. In the meantime, she would ask some more people to supper on Monday: to make it more cheerful. She didn't see much fun in a four-cornered supper with the Bridget and Ikey drama going on under her nose. So she told Martha Hedding to come along and bring a man and she asked

various other men she ran across and a number of theatrical people, and the first thing she knew her supper had grown into a full-sized party.

It was some party. Peter arrived when it was in full swing. He had had a hard time getting there. He had gone straight from the train to his office to tell his partners that the Chicago business had fallen through, because they wanted to build a ten-million-dollar building for seven million dollars, and had an idea they could take a few risks without getting into trouble. His partners had been none too pleased. They had said various things about his not being a contractor and his job being to get his design accepted. The Chicago people would change it afterwards, anyhow, wouldn't they? Once the deal was through, Peter could get someone to watch them. Doggone it, if they had to watch every concern— But Peter had said their contractor struck him as crooked, and he didn't want a building of his to crash and kill a couple of thousand people, so he'd thrown the thing over. They could take it or leave it, and him with it. When he left them he no longer considered himself a member of the firm, and this made him pretty miserable, because he was fond of Brown and Johnson. He had gone home to Adelaide wanting to tell her about all this, and had been received by a cool silvery-voiced stranger, a woman of the great world, who could talk of nothing but a British Cabinet Minister, and accused him in a calm detached manner of having copied the Cabinet Minister's famous house in England. He had pricked up his ears at that and felt for a second a queer sort of breathless suspense; but he was very tired and worried—too worri-d to be interested. He had found a note from Gussy on arrival telling him to come to her supper without fail, as Ikey Daw would be there. Since the row with his firm, that

other scheme was more important than ever. If he could get that through, he wouldn't so much mind Brown and Johnson kicking him out, and probably they wouldn't. He only half listened to what Adelaide was saying. "But I never saw the damned house." Would Ikey help? Would he?

"Don't tell lies, Peter darling."

"Lies?"

She had decided that she didn't believe in that dream suggestion. Why should Peter dream of Victor Joyce's house? She wasn't sure that she believed in any of that business of Peter's dreaming things. It was probably a pose. Victor Joyce was such a real person. He thought all that sort of thing was nonsense. He was convinced that Peter had seen the house, but he wasn't angry any longer. What it amounted to was that he forgave Peter for the sake of Peter's very pretty wife. Adelaide was delighted with herself. She had begun her flirtation with Mr. Joyce in order to make Peter jealous, but now she could not help drawing comparisons between the two men. Victor Joyce was so much handsomer, so much bigger than Peter, besides he was a great statesman. He would some day be Prime Minister of England. Adelaide saw herself settling down more or less permanently in London, the Egeria of Great Britain's Prime Minister. Peter didn't fit into this picture. Peter would be left at home. She would come back to him of course. She would go back and forth romantically between her husband and her wonderful famous platonic adorer. Adelaide's imagination, once it got going, didn't know where to stop.

She said to Peter: "He has really been very nice about it. He was cross at first, but I smoothed him down. We are such good friends. They are coming to Campbelltown for a week-end. He has quite got over the shock of

the house. You've no idea how attractive he is. I don't care for his wife. She's a dull woman."

Peter was bewildered. They were dining somewhere, and going somewhere else afterwards. He said that he must leave her at twelve to meet Ikey Daw.

Meet Ikey Daw at twelve o'clock at night, the very first night he got back?

"Yes, dear. He'll be at Gussy's. It's very important. I'll only stay an hour. I've got to see him."

"Oh—I see—at Gussy's." She smiled in a peculiarly maddening way. He would have preferred her making a scene. He had wanted to take her in his arms; he had meant to be very gentle and affectionate, and tell her he was sorry he'd been unkind. All the week in Chicago he had thought of her very tenderly. Now, she was withdrawn behind that cutting, evil little smile that made the whole room hideous. He left her, hurt, bewildered and discouraged, to find Bridget Prime doing a *pas seul* in the middle of Gussy's floor. He stood in the doorway, blinking.

"Hello, Pete!" they shouted, they were all clapping their hands in time to the piano. "Hello—Come on in."

And Bridget, panting and flushed, laughed a welcome to him. She was in one of her wild moods that night—and it was, of course, all up with Peter.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was a song going up and down New York that winter, called "The Birth of the Blues", a sort of folk-song of the Southland that had got itself rigged up in jazz clothes to promenade the music halls. Carolina Sal sang it at the Crib in Harlem, Gussy sang it on Broadway,

every one sang it; all the bands played it. In every nightclub it got itself sung, got itself mauled, man-handled, soiled. But the negroes were kind to it. They loved it. Wherever big black hands beat out those desperate jazz rhythms and black masks split open to let out the syncopated howl of the young delirious twentieth century, it could be heard crying its wild lonesome heart out. It went winging its way up and down, swooping in and out of dance-halls, ballrooms, theatres and lighted cellars, like a strange wailing weary bird from the South that had got lost in New York, and was battering its soiled wings against the skyscrapers, trying to find its way back to Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas or Tennessee. It was a cheap common song, a raw child's song, the song of the black people, sung by a darkie troubadour, who had been a slave maybe, or in prison. It had a swaying swooping swing to it, a dipping cadence that dropped something with a thud into your stomach, and a rough shouting crescendo. A couple of white men who had their ears tuned to such melodies had caught it on the wing, trapped it and put it behind bars of music printed on a piece of paper, then let it loose again on the night world of New York.

And Bridget Prime fell in love with Peter to the tune of that song.

She wrote to Frederika who was in Washington:

"Darling—I'm in love. It's too extraordinary! He's an architect, and the husband of that tiresome Mrs. Campbell. I met him at Gussy's last Monday, the day you left. You know how things happen sometimes. He's very much the raw American, quite small, not as tall as I am; with the Yankee nasal drawl and so on—not at all my kind of man. A sort of comical angel with a funny ridiculous face, the top part beautiful, and ugly at

the bottom. He talks shop to me a great deal, and I'm not bored. He goes on by the hour about magic and wireless and electricity. Not at all in my line—as you see. Isn't it odd? He's incredibly young about things. We wander about like the babes in the wood in a howling mob of niggers, hooligans and rough-necks—unscathed, like a couple of little charmed cherubs. I'm in a bad way. It's all mixed up with the coons and their music. It's really quite extraordinary. It's like being in love in a jungle, with the tigers and elephants and gorillas dancing round you, very sympathetically strumming banjoes and cutting capers. But I feel like a Holy Madonna all the time—or like some ecstatic saint in love with a little suffering Christ. He makes me feel like that. Though it's all rather depraved in a way, too, the atmosphere—the curious excitement—the jazz and what he calls the psychic dope. I am doped—anyhow.

“We spend our nights with the coons. It's a kind of mania that gets hold of you.

“It seems to be the fashion among the highbrows, Martha Hedding and her lot, to make out that the negroes are just as good and just the same as white men. Peter Campbell says that's all nonsense, that thank God they're different. He quoted Keiserling's book to me, the travel diary you liked so much, what he says about the black continent having the greatest creative power on earth—do you remember? I think he, Peter, really feels they're better than we are, the negroes, much more alive as animals are, and with a special gift for happiness. He says every darkie has a song in his heart, that his blood sings and that even in the depraved ones who dope all the time there's a sort of innocence which our race has lost for ever. He has it, but he doesn't know that. He declares that the negro race wasn't involved in the Adam

and Eve affair with the snake, and that they missed out on the apple, and so escaped that particular curse. He says they are life-giving, and this is what attracts us to them, all of us, only some call it repulsion, but it's the same thing, and some, the lily-livered ones among us, are frightened. They feel, not the negroes' mental inferiority which doesn't worry them at all, or matter in the least, but their own white-blood inferiority, and can't bear this, and so hate them. The white race has, he insists, brains to burn but not enough life-juice, and he says that the slave-traders performed a greater service to America than even George the Fourth and all his dumbbell ministers.

"There's a coon called Joe who plays the piano in a dance club called the Crib, and is about the size of the big elephant in the Zoo, who told me that Peter had set him up in this dance club when he was down and out. He says he owes everything to Peter. There's a girl too called Carolina Sal, a gorgeous African. She plasters her face with mauve powder that goes into cracks when she's hot. She is Joe's girl but she loves Pete, and now I've taken her fancy. It's all very odd and muddled and dreadful, I suppose, but it doesn't seem so. She sings a song called 'The Birth of the Blues' in a ghastly hoarse voice that does something to you, as Gussy says. It's about whippoorwills, they're quite ordinary American birds, who fly along hedgerows gurgling and whistling like saxophones, and about a frail, that's a girl, crying in a jail, but I can't explain. It's all so different, indescribable, a sort of delirium, but the funny thing is that although this sort of thing, the Hoodoo music and all that, affects us, the whites, like a madness, it's natural child's play to the coons. They're not in the least rowdy. They rollick like children, or move very slowly as if in

a sort of dream, quite quietly. But to us, it's like being in hell, and liking it because one has suddenly become so depraved that one can't suffer in hell; can't want anything else. The devil must get the same kick out of hell, Peter says, that he gets out of Harlem—at least I think he said that, but perhaps it was somebody else. I've had so little sleep that I don't know who said what. But I do feel like a Madonna.

"Please come back. Can't you chuck Victor and all those Senators and come back ahead? I want you to come and hear that song, and see this queer Negro World, and meet Peter Campbell. You will like him. I woke up this morning thinking about you and Peter Campbell, thinking that you were alike somehow. Why should I have such thoughts? I ask you. No two people could be less alike, of course, but well—please come—I feel that you ought to. I don't know why, but I have a sort of conviction that you ought to be here with me. I must be getting nerves, but it's not nerves.—Yours,

"BIDDY.

"P.S.—That man 'Daw' is being very tiresome."

The Crib was crowded every night, mostly with black people. Soft-voiced, huge, rollicking and gentle, they came tumbling and laughing down the narrow stairs, the soles of their feet pulsating, beginning to jig softly the minute they stepped on to the floor. The dance hall was long and narrow. The great ape faces of the musicians on the raised platforms gleamed with sweat under the steaming light, like clumsily carved lumps of black quartz. Their white tusks flashed, their white eyeballs rolled and their great bodies swayed and jerked and trembled to the infinitely complex rhythms of their music. The genius of the place was in a frenzy. A frenzied whisper, a frenzied pulse seemed to be travelling through the rooms

—but the crowd of darkies were lazy, like children playing a well-known game. Only the drum beating, beating like a tom-tom and the brass instruments and the saxophone and the piano, were running wild, were unloosed, were hysterical as if possessed by demons. The darkies danced slowly, languidly, not moving much across the floor, merely letting the rhythm tremble in their knees, ankles, toes, elbows and shoulders. There was something impressive about the quiet way they moved through that hot quivering sensual madness. One felt an immense physical power in them. The coloured girls were pretty. Many of them had straight bobbed hair and wore frocks copied from Paris models. Some were rather Japanese or Chinese looking. Some of the coloured men wore correct dinner-jackets. Their manners were elaborately courteous. Their voices were sentimental, and many of the words they used were rather formal and old-fashioned. But the place was ablaze, it shivered and throbbed. The walls, ceiling and floor were sounding-boards echoing, and the waiters, balancing great trays on their brown palms, jazzed down the floor, and the man in a white jacket standing in the open pantry with all the ginger-ale bottles on shelves round him, jazzed gently, ceaselessly, where he stood.

Bridget and Peter wedged in among the negroes against the wall of Joe's cellar, listened to Sal singing the song of the Blues. Every night now they could be seen sitting there among the coons, Bridget leaning her head back against the wall, and Peter bending forward, his head on his hand, staring at her face. Her face was startling among all those black faces. It was very white. It appeared transparent, and it shone faintly as if lighted by moonlight. It was so beautiful that it was terrible to him to look at. It was disturbing too, perhaps, to all

those black men, but they gave no sign. They kept their eyes off her.

"She looks," Peter thought, "as if she had a little moon all to herself suspended in the sky over her head. The air round her is blackish-red, but she is in a blinding glare of whiteness, her own, all her own—Oh God, child," he whispered, "how terribly beautiful you are!"

The song wailed out from Sal's hoarse throat through the heat haze that swirled round them. It was as if they were in a whirlpool of heat, being sucked down into a furnace. But Bridget was shivering a little as if she were cold, and there was a humming and strumming, a soft whimpering panting going on under the rough howling voice that sounded like the voice of an animal, reminding one a little of a jackal, or of some condemned woman in prison for murdering her man, maybe, and in the distance the throb of muffled pulsing drums, and of choked gurgling sweet bird-whistles calling; a flock of whippoorwills were laughing through the saxophone, that was it, and faint distant horns were blaring, slightly cracked, but why? The earth seemed to be trembling a little as she sang, the walls and floor and far distant hills and valleys were jazzing gently. Out over the cotton-fields you could hear the wind sighing, and the stars were jazzing up in Heaven.

" They say some darkies long ago—(*bang, jig, jig*)
Were searching for a different tune
One that they could croon,
As only they can—"

The great lips gaped, remained wide open while the defiant sound came straight from Sal's chest as if shot out of a gun. She held it there, nailed it in the air, then let it go with a sigh.

“ They only had the rhythm so—(*bang, bang*)
They started swaying to and fro—(*bang*)
They didn't know just what to use
That is how the Blues
Really began.”

Her great head lolled backward, her brown eyelids drooped. A stupor crept over her, and from behind her brown mask, her closed purple lips, there was the sound of bees humming :

“ They heard the breeze
In the trees
Singing sweet melodies
And they made that into the Blues—”

The wide mouth twisted suddenly into a snarl, and let out a thin desperate nasal sound, twanging, harsh, bitter as aloes :

“ And from a jail
Came the wail
Of a downhearted frail
And they played that as part of the Blues—”

For an instant there was a crack in the voice, the menace of a break, a convulsed sob; but the voice was tired, it went drowsy and sweet:

“ From a whippoorwill
Out on a hill
They took a new note—”

She drew a deep breath:

“ Pushed it through a horn
Till it was born
Into a blue note—”

Ha, ha! Suddenly she laughed, shouted; her voice rose to a yell of triumph:

“And then they nursed it
Rehearsed it
And gave out the news
That the Southland gave birth to the Blues—”

“Make her sing it again, Peter,” Bridget said hoarsely, “make her go on singing it.”

“All right. When the crowd goes, when we have the place to ourselves. It’ll thin out about five. It’s only four now. Here she comes. Hello, Sal!”

The great negress swayed towards them, loomed over them.

“Hello, Pete. Good-evening,” she added primly, with a huge simper towards Bridget.

“Sit down,” commanded Bridget sweetly, making room for her, “and have a drink.”

“Oh, thank you,” Sal giggled, and sank lazily into a chair drooping over the table, her bronze arms folded on it, her heavy head hanging forward, and she, too, stared at Bridget sideways, from under the black crisp bush of her hair. They would sit there like that, the very white woman and the big negro girl, opposite Peter, drinking gin or whisky, while the band cracked and splintered the air, and the floor strained and groaned under the thudding feet of the dancers.

Black masks grinned round them, huge laughter was bursting, shooting up, rockets of it, huge paws slapped huge thighs, gorillas, roaring with joy; and Biddy would go on drinking and seeming to grow whiter and whiter, and Sal’s darkness would ooze up through the pores of her skin under the cracking mauve powder she was smeared with, and Peter would stare, fascinated, his eyes going to little pin points of light and would say, maybe—

"Christ, but you two look terrible next to each other. What's heaven and hell got in reserve now, I wonder! Holy Smoke, how wonderful!" or something extravagant of that sort, and Sal would smile drowsily or giggle, and edge a little closer to Bridget, who didn't seem to mind. But they didn't talk much. Most of the time they couldn't hear each other speak, Joe and his band did the talking.

Jiggity jig jig bang—jiggity jig jig boom!

Joe was troubled in his mind. He was in a savage frenzy, much more of a frenzy than usual these days. The piano said so. All those rattling ivory keys gave him away. They were frantic. He martyred them. The little high notes jiggled under his black fingers in a sort of death dance, and the big dark bass notes were like a lot of animals growling and roaring and grinding their teeth. Poor Joe! He did terrible things to that piano of his. He beat it and bullied it and tickled it and teased it and tore it to pieces. The way he teased it was excruciating, and all the time that his dark hands were pawing it, so savagely, so cunningly, his face was as expressionless as a lump of coal. For when Joe was sad his face could express nothing of what he felt. His great bulbous nose and huge lips and white rolling eyes made that impossible. He was a black clown with a grotesque mask fastened on him for ever. Sometimes Peter imagined that he had another face behind it, a real one, sensitive and small and gentle, a child's face. It was dreadful to Peter, to suspect that other face there, but the mask hid it. It could only scowl or grin or become an utterly ridiculous caricature of grief; and so when at last Joe lumbered over on his great flat feet with his black swallow-tail coat rumpled and his white collar wilting against the dark elephant hide of his bull neck, to join Peter and Bridget and Sal at their table, he would grin,

but he had a bad heartache, awful bad. All the time, he would be saying that to himself.

"Hello, Pete."

"Hello, Joe."

"Evening, ma'am!"

"Good-evening, Joe. Sit down and have a drink."

Bridget liked Joe, she thought him absurd.

"No, thank you, ma'am, I'm goin' back directly."

Sal never looked at him. She would go on staring and staring at Bridget, and every once in a while she'd say, just what Peter had said; "My Gawd, child, but you are beautiful." But Joe said nothing of this kind to Bridget, he didn't even look at her. He would sit there staring in front of him or down at the messy table with its whisky-glasses for a few moments, and then get up heavily and go back to his piano, and the noise would begin again. And Joe would keep saying to himself softly, wistfully, while he banged and tore at the piano, "I got a bad heartache, awful bad. I sho' do feel awful bad. I guess I gwine to murder dat Sal one of dese days."

Sometimes Martha Hedding and her lot, or Gussy Green and other celebrities of the theatre and music hall and cinema world, would join Peter and Bridget. They would go on then in a crowd from one place to another, but usually Bridget and Peter ended up alone at the Crib and finished the night there; and of course they were noticed. It was impossible for them to pass unobserved even through the labyrinth of thronged cellars under the black wintry pavements of the immense city. The flat roof of the streets, swept by icy November winds, did not hide them. News of their doings crept up and out, into the upper strata of the city's life. Peter, alone, had passed unnoticed by Society through the negro haunts of Harlem, but as Bridget Prime's constant companion he

too became an object of attention. Her famous face bobbing up in the midst of night clubs like a silvery incandescent balloon was spotted wherever it appeared and signalled to the newspapers: "England's famous beauty spends her nights in Harlem": paragraphs in the press were not needed to make Society chatter. Bridget and Peter were seen not only at night clubs, but lunching and dining together every day.

By the end of the week their affair had set a lot of tongues wagging, and these tongues put upon it the most obvious interpretation.

Bridget didn't care. She had always been talked about. It didn't occur to her to conceal her movements. She knew nothing about New York Society and cared less. Peter fascinated her. The things about him that would ordinarily have put her off, his smallness, his sensitiveness and his childish enthusiasm, were the very things that now, against this huge rough riotous background of America, appealed to her. He was so in love with this place and so lost in it. He would boast blatantly of the wonders of his city, with a puzzled pained look in his eyes.

"In fifty years sixteen million people will be living in New York's metropolitan area. The New York Edison Company's new power plant, now building on the East river, will be the largest generating station for electric power in the world. It will take 900,000 gallons of water a minute to work it. The turbines will be a million horse-power. There are two sixty-thousand kilowatt turbine generators in the first unit of the station. The whole will light three million six hundred thousand homes," and his eyes would go dark with excitement while he laughed. "What do you think o' that—some machine, isn't it?"

What she thought was, that she would never have believed it possible to listen to such talk as that without mockery, without being bored to death. But she wasn't bored. She was moved, for some reason, to a pity that hurt her, and she wished Frederika, who really was rather a crank in her way, were there to talk to him. It really was a pity, she thought, that Frederika couldn't come along when he took her to the "Times" building, for instance, to see the newspaper turned out of the printing-presses. Frederika would have been fascinated. "Electricity's the secret," said Peter, glowing, and expecting her to glow with him. "It's all done by electric buttons. Push a button, and you start and control the presses. Push another button, you adjust the feeding of paper from the rolls, another directs the delivery of the completed newspaper. These electric sending-machines address, fold and wrap up copies to be sent by mail and pop them into their proper bags. Electricity does the work of a couple of regiments of men. There are eighty miles of electric wires in this building."

She didn't understand in the least or care what those machines did, and when he talked about problems of building she was quite lost. What she liked was the sound of his voice, and while he told her that arc-welding was going to revolutionise architecture, she watched his face. He was apparently very much absorbed in the question of arc-welding. It had something to do with an arc light, she gathered. Steel girders could be welded together by means of light. This would, he declared, reduce building costs because arc-welding was a one man job, whereas four men were needed for riveting, a riveter, a backer up, a heater-boy and a passer. But the great thing was that with arc-welding the structural engineer could obtain continuous steel beams of any

length, and it reduced the necessity for the wind-bracing of tall structures, whatever that was. "So you see," he ended up, "we can build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. This town will shoot up like a sky-rocket, and all because of arc-welding. Gosh! It's a grand time to be alive."

This was the kind of talk he treated her to in the daytime when he rushed away from his office to join her for luncheon, but their nights were different. They provided a contrast. He turned into a poet at night, rather pitiful somehow, although when the night world received them into its hot bosom, they would both of them go slightly mad. It was this that she liked best—to be with him in the black blazing underworld where the air was sick with excitement, where strange African women, smeared with powder and soaked with cheap perfume, breathed out the fumes of opium and gin, and where she experienced with Peter the thrill of some curious, dangerous depravity.

It didn't occur to her to hesitate. She wanted to be with him in that jabbering turmoil, and she always went straight for what she wanted. If she noticed the strained drawn look about his eyes and his pinched nose and whitening lips, she also noticed his growing absorption in herself, and because he laughed and made love to her, she assumed that he was enjoying himself. She knew nothing about his work except what he told her. She had never heard of the Manhattan Development Company. She knew nothing about his row with his partners, and how there was to be a meeting in a few days to decide on his design for a block scraper, and how as far as his partners were concerned it would be the final test, because if he failed this time they were through with him for good. In fact, she knew nothing at all about Peter Campbell's life except that he was out of tune with it, and seemed to

be in love with herself in a peculiarly provoking, reluctant and poetic sort of way. She gathered that he was very busy and rather harassed because he found it difficult to get away to meet her during the day, but she did not ask him what he was worried about. It didn't seem to her to be any of her business. She simply wanted to be with him every day and every night, and although she felt in him a certain dumb fumbling resistance to the emotion that was engulfing them both, she was rather pleased by this than otherwise, and when he said to her desperately; "Christ, what have you done to me?" she felt triumphant. But she did not mean to be cruel, and she respected what she called to herself his shyness. It seemed to her rather touching that he could be so intensely drawn to her and yet not want to go all the way. She would have done so, and she foresaw the time when surely they would. But it would be his surrender, not hers. He would give in, be swept off his feet and delivered up to her mercy. It would be like that because he was like that, with a woman's sensitiveness in him; but for the time being she let him be, feeling a sort of compassion for him and allowing him to make love to her in his own way. And it was really his peculiar, innocent sensitiveness to her beauty that intoxicated her, satiated as she was by admiration. His was different. It was so far removed from the usual vulgar thing that it seemed at times as if he were almost inhuman about her; but at others he would stare at her with a desperate hungry avid stare that made his face go quite stupid, almost senseless, his mouth and nose and all his face blurring, softening and straining out towards her as if by some suction exerted outside him by her face. And again at other times he had a crucified look, as if he were being tortured by the sight of her. Such flattery was

terrible, but enthralling. The look in his eyes at such moments made her feel rather faint. It was as if no one before had ever noticed her face, or ever seen it. "And no one ever has, the way he has, or seen in it what he sees," she would say to herself, trembling a little.

All the same, she knew at moments, in the back of her mind somewhere, that it was all wrong, and there were moments when she felt terribly sorry for him; but why? She did not know why. Certainly not because of his wife or anything silly of that sort. His wife didn't exist for Bridget. She was, he had mentioned, out of town, had gone to Washington. "To be with your friends the Joyces," he had added. And she had made no comment. They had been in a taxi whirling uptown. The thought of Frederika and Victor in Washington and of Peter's wife there with them had flitted through her mind too quickly to formulate itself into a remark. It struck her for an instant as rather odd, but she said nothing, and she did not at any time talk to Peter about Frederika, beyond saying that he must meet her when she got back. What talking there was between them at night, he did, and it was mostly about herself. He told her and kept on telling her in his shy but extravagant American way, and yet in a way that touched her, that she stimulated his imagination wildly. He would go on and on telling her of all the beautiful things she made him think of, and he would say, "Just let me look at you. Let me look at you enough, until I've had enough, that's all. The world will benefit. I shall create beauty and go on creating beauty for years, for all the world to see, out of the sight of your face."

And if they were alone, in her hotel sitting-room, for she moved from Martha Hedding's on Wednesday to the

hotel to be more independent, and was given the rooms Frederika had vacated, he would pass his hand over her head, feeling very gently the shape of it, as if it gave him through his finger tips an exquisite pleasure, or perhaps he would take her head in both hands and close his eyes, and his fingers would touch her ears delicately as a blind man's might touch something infinitely precious—and she for the first time in her life became passive, hypnotised as if under a spell. "You mustn't mind," he would whisper; "Please don't mind—it's your beauty—your wonderful beauty. Be sorry for me."

Gradually she realised that he was very unhappy even when he was with her. It was as if he were haunted, had an *idée fixe* of some kind, and she felt this strangely enough most keenly when he was most deeply moved, when he clung to her silently, in a desperate intensity, very still but as if he were drowning.

And she had moments of *vertige*, of a sort of voluptuous terror, when they were shut in together in those high small rooms of hers, above the city, the immense shadowy towers looming beyond the windows, a far distant murmuring roar coming up from below, and she would have again the sense of danger which she liked.

Once he said; "This sort of thing is much overrated—love, they call it in story books. We are all lonely beings, always."

And once when they were standing at the window staring out—the wind was howling that night, there were silver-streaked clouds scudding under the moon behind the tower of his Radio Building that stood out uncannily clear and steady in the white glow of its own light—he said suddenly:

"There's a flamingo perched on that tower. Can you see it? It has a wicked eye and it's cursing me.

God help us both, for I've sinned against that bird," and he had given a convulsive laugh.

And in the meantime their affair had become the talk of the town.

Gussy had known from the first night, when they met at her party. She had understood at once and had kept her mouth shut. Martha Hedding had caught on when Bridget left her house, and had vented her pique by predicting trouble. Mrs. Jamieson got wind of what was going on by Sunday, and Adelaide Campbell, who was attending all the parties given for the Joyces in Washington, received a note on Monday from one of her dearest friends advising her to come back and look after her husband, who was drinking and making a fool of himself over Mrs. Prime.

"Darling, I hate to, but I feel I must tell you, you ought to know. I saw them both tight at the Crib in Harlem, at a table with a lot of niggers."

That was not true. Peter had not been drunk. He had drunk almost nothing all that week. He wasn't so foolish as to spoil the sight of Bridget's face by getting fuddled. He had remained intensely sober.

But too many people knew of his weakness to credit him with such constraint, besides what difference did it make? If he were sober, then the way he was behaving was even worse. New York Society remembered suddenly its puritan ancestors. Peter's reputation for immorality, taken only half seriously up to now, was all at once sealed with an ugly seal which made him an outcast. A lot of women who had been indulgent were now outraged, disgusted and furious. It was his having chosen Bridget Prime that constituted his crime. Had he made one of their own set conspicuous, her friends, at least, would have made excuses for him, but Bridget had no

friends among these women. She was a stranger, and all the young New York matrons became at once her enemies, to say nothing of the older ones. America is militant. When it is displeased or shocked it feels called upon to stand up for its principles, to do something, to make a row. All round these spoiled daughters and wives of millionaires were throngs of God-fearing people who took the ten commandments seriously as the basis of morality, shouting Hallelujah in innumerable Evangelical churches, praying earnestly for the heathen, believing absolutely in a hell of fire and brimstone, giving hundreds of thousand of dollars to send missionaries out to China, India and Japan to save souls. Even Mrs. Jamieson believed that it was the duty of American Christianity to proselytise the globe and convert to its crude beliefs the followers of Buddha and Mahomet. She went to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church every Sunday morning, put a ten dollar bill in the plate, and was a large contributor to the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army, and innumerable other institutions designed to save men from sin; and although she had her private bootlegger she had always subscribed largely to Temperance Societies. She had in her childhood belonged to the Baptist Church of a small Western town, and had been immersed in the river by her parson. Under all those layers of sophistication she was really the daughter of a Baptist farmer who feared the wrath of God, and of a militant stalwart idealist mother, an innocent country woman who believed that men, like women, were damned if they did not remain chaste. There were hundreds of thousands of women in America who held firmly to this ideal of chastity, a like chastity for men and women, as a practical realisable principle of conduct, and a stern obligation. It was being preached, taught and drilled into small boys from the Pacific to the

Atlantic, in every Sunday School and in thousands of nurseries. It had been born in the log cabin among the first settlers, when women were scarce in the wilderness of America, and now it survived in the welter of luxury, in the turmoil of building and stock-yards and factories. Austere, uncompromising and incongruous, it existed now as an impossible reality, an incontrovertible condemnation, to make men ashamed and women unkind. Mrs. Jamieson was one of those who had been brought up on it. Her worldliness was only skin-deep, and she hated the negroes with fear and loathing. So now with a sudden sense of outrage she threw overboard all her tolerant worldly wisdom in regard to Peter, and went to her husband in a white heat of righteous anger.

"Your son-in-law is disgracing us. This has got to end. Adelaide must come home to us—now, right away. I shall go to Washington and bring her back to this house to-morrow. It is intolerable. It is disgusting. The man must be mad, and when I think of all that I've done for those English people——"

Mr. Jamieson had been bewildered.

"Why, Adèle, what's up—what's the boy done?"

"What has he done?" she shrieked. "What hasn't he done? Ever since they were married he's been impossible. I've put up with it. I've done my best, but now—this is too much."

"Come, come, dearie—it can't be so bad."

"Bad! I tell you that woman, Bridget Prime, has been seen drunk in public with Peter every night this week. She's a low, vulgar woman. They've been going about with negroes. They've been seen drinking with black people. It makes me sick, John. It makes me physically sick. Adelaide cannot, she must not come in

contact with it. It is filthy. You must protect her. She is your child."

Mr. Jamieson's face had grown very serious.

"I'll send for the boy. We'll see what he has to say for himself."

"No, John, that won't do. You're too weak. He'll get round you. He has always got round you. I can't undersand why you've always been so fond of him, but you have. Oh, you have, even when he was impossible, even when he made Adelaide most unhappy, and now, now, even now you're fond of him, though you know he's vicious and immoral and dissipated." And Mrs. Jamieson burst into tears.

"There, Adèle, there, there——" Mr. Jamieson was very miserable, but perhaps he was a little pleased too, to have his hard, brilliant wife cry like that against his shoulder. She seldom came so near.

It ended by Mrs. Jamieson agreeing to the suggestion that she should call up Adelaide on long distance instead of going to Washington, and that she should not frighten the child, but merely tell her that they both wanted to talk to her at once about something important; but when Mrs. Jamieson did this, she met with unexpected resistance on the part of her daughter. The faint, distant voice was obstinate. It said she couldn't possibly leave till Wednesday. There was a party on Tuesday. . . . "What! Hello! Are you there?—A party! But good gracious, my child——" "I can't hear you, Mother." And then other voices were heard, small, but quite near, someone in Pittsburg maybe, or Chicago, or Buffalo, somewhere, anywhere, some man, some woman without existence, headless, faceless, bodiless, but talking, getting in the way.

"Adelaide," shrieked Mrs. Jamieson, and "Don't yell

so," said Mr. Jamieson, walking up and down behind her in the library of the house on Fifth Avenue; and Adelaide in Washington, in her hotel bedroom, half dressed for a dinner at the Italian Embassy, one pink silk stocking on, exasperated—"No, I can't, I tell you, I'm not going to leave, not till Wednesday. I'm coming back with the Joyces, and by the way, Mother, they're coming down to Campbelltown on Friday for the week end, and is the house ready? What? I can't hear, Mother. I'll be late for dinner. Peter? What did you say? Peter's what?"

But Mr. Jamieson in New York said to his wife, who was going frantic at the telephone: "Hush, Adèle, ring off. She's having a good time. Let her have it. She'll be back on Wednesday—that'll be quite soon enough."

And actually at the same moment Frederika was saying to Biddy: "No, I'm afraid not. It's impossible. Yes—official things. Rather a nice town really—Victor? Oh, he's all right. Peter Campbell? Yes—I had your letter. His wife is here with us. Yes, all the time. Victor's taken rather a fancy to her. No. It's impossible, Biddy. I can't do it. Oh, that—that's all right. Victor's too wonderful. Quite impossible. Deaf and dumb. And it works. Rather funny, really—like Paris, you know, and the Peace Conference. We'll be back on Wednesday."

But Mr. Jamieson was thinking that it was true, that he did love Peter, even better than that chit of a girl who was his own daughter, and his heart was sore and angry. "Damnation take the boy," he was saying to himself. "He'll have to go now, the young idiot. I shall have to wash my hands of him."

He was very angry, and he was hurt. What Peter had done hit him below the belt. He couldn't understand how he could do this. He felt sick and ashamed, for he was a good man, very simple in his tastes, and with simple

rules of right and wrong to guide his conduct, log-cabin, Pilgrim-Father rules, taken straight from the New Testament, and he would have said drily to any modern questioner that he guessed they were good enough, he guessed they would do; so that he was baffled, bewildered, and very angry with Peter. Had the boy been younger and his own son, he would have given him a good thrashing. All the same, some instinct in him was prompting him to stick by his son-in-law, and to revolt against the tyranny of that brilliant woman his wife who had just wept against his shoulder and whom he dearly loved; and he caught himself mumbling to himself when she left him . . . "This world ain't only a woman's world. That boy's got a right to defend himself. It may be all nonsense, women's tittle-tattle. I guess he's not so bad as they make out, and that girl of mine don't understand him. I guess nobody understands him."

And Mr. Jamieson, grey and tired, sat gloomily pulling the ends of his moustache and thinking, "He looks just like a little scared kid sometimes. What he wants is somebody to be kind to him—instead of all this nagging business." And he thought, "He's set his heart on that building scheme. If they turn it down he'll take it mighty hard."

But Bridget and Peter, drifting along on the blazing river of the night world, in their dream that was somehow a nightmare to him, were unaware of all this. She, at any rate, ignored it, and had she been aware, it would have made no difference. She was naturally defiant. Besides, she was too much under the influence of her emotions to react to anything outside. Nothing mattered to her for the moment, but her adventure with Peter. Her will could not function for the time being. She could per-

ceive, for instance, that there was one person in New York who was dangerous, but she could not feel this strongly enough to do anything about it.

She had thrown over Ikey Daw for luncheon on Tuesday, had refused to dine with him on Wednesday, and had forgotten to go to his party, a party given especially for her, on Thursday night. She had received on Friday a note from him couched in terms so insulting that she had been speechless with astonishment, but she had not shown it to anyone. She had ignored it, and dismissed it from her mind. On Saturday she received another, so obsequious that it made her feel physically sick; but she was like a woman only half roused from sleep by these things. On Sunday she and Peter had motored into the country for the day. She did not mention Mr. Daw, and forgot about him; but when she got back she found a monstrous bunch of American beauties in her room with his card attached to it and the following message:

"If you don't drop your young man and consent to see me, he will pay for it."

This roused her unpleasantly. She tried to treat the threat as a joke in the worst possible taste, a mere piece of grotesque impertinence on the part of a low cad; but she began to feel rather nervous all the same, and called up Gussy Green on the telephone. Gussy was out, of course. Bridget didn't succeed in running her to ground till noon of the next day, and by that time she had almost got over her nervousness. This was on Monday, the day that Mrs. Jamieson called up Adelaide in Washington; and just after Bidy had talked to Frederika; for the telephone had stepped in and was taking an active part in the drama that was developing, bringing the scattered characters perilously close to each other, and yet dividing them, misleading them, playing tricks on them.

Biddy, speaking into her little funnel, said in a light airy tone, "That man Ikey Daw is too absurd," and her voice sounded silly to Gussy, who answered crossly:

"Well, what about it?"

"He's writing me threatening notes — quite too ridiculous."

"I don't know about that," came back flatly.

"But he's threatening to do in Peter Campbell if I don't drop him."

"Well——" There was something in that drawling word that struck Bridget as sinister. She sat up.

"What do you mean by 'well'?"

"You know your own business best," answered the voice.

"Do you mean that he could really do Peter harm?"

"Why, certainly."

"But how? I don't understand."

"Ask Peter—he knows well enough. Good-bye."

"But Gussy—hold on—I want your help."

"My dear, I can't help you—and anyway why should I? What are you to me?"

"But Peter——"

"Yes. There's Peter all right. It's a pity you didn't think of that before."

What a terribly rude woman, thought Bridget, but although in a temper by that time she asked again in a cold and very polite tone:

"You really think that Ikey Daw will do something?"

"Certainly I do," and Gussy clapped down her receiver.

Bridget, cut off, groaned: "My God, what a woman," and she thought, "How very unexpected and violent they all are! You can't tell what they'll do."

But she had no intention of kowtowing to that brute.

She would explain to Peter that Ikey Daw had turned nasty, but that was the most she could do. She was annoyed and rather worried, but she didn't take the matter very seriously. They were all melodramatic, these Americans, and Gussy was probably jealous. That was her trouble. Ikey Daw had been her great friend. Well—she, Bridget, didn't want him. She wished to God she'd never seen the man. What a beastly muddle and how uncontrolled these people were! For all she knew Ikey might go about with a revolver in his pocket. If only Frederika were here—but what could Frederika do? Victor would be furious. If Mr. Daw turned really nasty he might even involve Victor. That would be simply horrible. He had already been beastly enough; Frederika had told her that. She certainly had got into a mess. In any case she must tell Peter, and find out from him how much power to harm him Ikey Daw had; but at this point in her reflections Peter rang up to say that he couldn't get away for luncheon. He had to attend a very important meeting of the Mayor's Town-Planning Committee, and he had to work that night. He'd have to spend the night down town in his office. They were going to decide on some designs of his on Wednesday. He had to hand them in on Tuesday.

"Who are going to decide?" she asked.

"Oh, a Company you wouldn't know about, a concern called 'The Manhattan Development Company', Ikey Daw's on it."

"Ikey Daw?"

"Do you know him?" asked the voice quickly.

"I do—and Peter, I must see you to-day without fail."

"My child, I wish it were possible."

"You must make it possible."

"Why—what's up?"

"I can't explain over the telephone."

"But I simply can't come up town. I've no time——"

"Then I'll come to your office."

"That would be fine—but—you see—oh, hell! The truth is I've not got time to see you. I'm up against it. I've been rolling round night clubs when I should have been working. My design's all wrong. It's got to be done over completely, and I've only got twenty-four hours to finish the damn thing."

She realised suddenly that she was pestering him. This was an unpleasant thought. And besides, what good could she do by warning him now against Ikey Daw? She could tell by his voice that he wanted to be rid of her. So she let him go, and click, the little instrument cut her off from him. She fell back on her pillows and looked at the rain-streaked window. New York was obliterated by flapping curtains of rain. She was depressed. She thought moodily, "What made me have anything to do with that Jew? How on earth could I have found him attractive? He's a beastly cad." Her thoughts then became so unpleasant that she turned on the gramophone, and presently Sal's guttural yowl sounded out in the prim hotel bedroom—

"They say the darkies long ago——"

And not far off, across the sopping cañon of Park Avenue, where the wind swooped and yelled, a couple of hundred yards on a tight rope from Bridget's window, Gussy, with her gramophone whirring, was grimly practising variations on the "Black Bottom". Her ugly face set, her feet, legs and arms going like lightning, she resembled a marionette, worked by an incredibly clever machine. And all the time that she was wheeling, turning, bending and whirling, she was saying to herself

viciously; "Oh, hell, oh, hell—what's the good of anything? Pete's done for—she's done for him—damn her—and what's left of him when she's finished, Ike'll do in, trust Ike to be a swine."

She was furious because she was helpless. What she couldn't stand was having Peter in a fix, watching him heading straight for trouble, and being unable to do anything about it. She hadn't seen Ikey for a week, not since that blasted party, and she knew that she no longer had any influence with him. She would only make things worse by getting at him. Ike was in love with Bridget. Pete was in love with Bridget. "And what can you do about that?" she asked herself, snarling, while her feet flew about under her jerking body like mad things. "But he's not really. It's only her face. Her face has done something special to him because he's an artist, and don't you wish you had a face like that, wouldn't you give your soul for it in place of your ugly mug? You poor sick fool."

In the meantime a storm was tearing down from the north-west, over the Rocky Mountains. One of those American hurricanes was coming across the prairies of Idaho, Dakota, Minnesota, churning up the great lakes as if with an egg-beater, ripping the roofs off lonely little farm-houses, tearing up fences, trees, telegraph-poles, stampeding herds of cattle. The Mississippi was in flood. Towns were slipping into its brown swirling current. Houses and chicken-coops were bobbing along in the water down to New Orleans. The storm struck New York late on Monday night. It came with a slap up against that slim perpendicular city, and the lightning, flashing up under the angry scudding clouds, playing angrily upon all those tapering towers, showed them to be swaying, as it seemed perilously, in the ghastly glare.

High up in the steep side of one of them in the thirty-third row of the forty shelves of windows, at the ninth window from the left, it showed a small lighted square in the immense cube of small dark squares, and Peter might, if you had a pair of field-glasses, have been seen standing there watching the storm, with a white scared face. Without a spyglass he would have been of course invisible, an undistinguishable speck, no more noticeable than a white bread-crumbs stuck somehow to the inside of the bit of glass against which the storm beat.

But away down underground that weary soiled wailing song from the south was crying its lonesome bedraggled heart out in the lighted cellars, just the same as usual, as if there were no storm going on upstairs.

" And from a jail
Came the wail
Of a downhearted frail."

Sal was singing it in the Crib. Gussy was singing it on Broadway. Bridget, with Martha Hedding and a crowd of nondescript men, rather tipsy, was humming it, and Joe was beating out the time to it from his piano.

And Sal was wondering: "Where's Pete to-night? She's here, but what's she done with him?" And Gussy behind her footlights was whispering savagely under her breath: "Pete—darling—be careful. Oh, for God's sake, be careful." And Bridget was thinking; "This is hell without Pete!"

And Joe was murmuring wistfully; "I owe everything to Pete, I owe my life to that boy, but I gotta bad heartache. I feel awful bad. I guess I gwine 1 do in dat Sal one of dese days."

And Amanda Campbell, off there in Campbelltown where the rain was turned to sleet and snow, was writing

a letter in her shabby room that seemed all the more quiet because of the storm raging outside:

"MY DEAR SON,

"When are you coming down here? The house is ready for you. I've not been up to it, they don't want me fussing round, but I know that it is all ready and full of servants with nothing to do. Please write to me. I've not heard from you since that wire you sent from the train on your way to Chicago. Why did you think there was anything the matter with me? I am perfectly well—but Chris is sick. He just mopes round and won't eat anything, and then gets all worked up into spasms about you, suddenly bursting out and trying to talk to me about you. You know how he is sometimes, but this is worse. It is more painful than usual. He is so terribly excited and tormented. He seems to think that dreadful things are happening to you. He sits for hours on that stiff chair, the one he always goes to when he is unhappy, in the corner of the dining-room, saying your name over and over in tones of great anguish, so I promised to write to you. I made him understand that I would tell you how he felt, and that seemed to relieve him. But he has been crying dreadfully to-night, in his sleep. I know I've no call to be worried; and you know I don't hold with telepathy and such nonsense and foolishness, but if there is anything wrong with you, Peter, my darling son, please tell me, for I am your very loving mother,

"AMANDA CAMPBELL.

"*P.S.*—Professor Brown has sent me a very interesting account of his observations of Mars. It would be rather nice to know that Mars was inhabited. The Universe would seem a less lonesome place—but perhaps that's cowardly. Perhaps there's enough trouble on this planet—what do you think? Ought one to wish for the pheno-

menon of life to end, everywhere? But how can one? I am getting too old, you see, to have a proper scientific attitude even towards the stars. Pity Chris and write him a line; something that he will understand when I read it to him."

PART IV

CHAPTER I

It is possible that Ikey Daw suffered no more than most men suffer when they are tortured by jealousy, but however that may be, the repercussion of his jealousy was greater, for he did not and could not control it. It made him do things unfortunate and even disastrous to a good many people. He was a spider gone sick and delirious in the middle of a web that supported innumerable human interests, and as he crashed about in it, things happened in all sorts of distant places. A man who had been speculating in wheat blew his brains out in Denver, another cut his throat in Arkansas; it was oil that had attracted him. Various families were ruined in the suburbs of Chicago and Milwaukee and Pittsburg. No one of course connected these isolated incidents with the presence of Bridget Prime in New York, but it was because she had turned her back on Ikey at Gussy Green's party and then forgotten all about him that they happened. For Ikey was like a man maddened by a swarm of poisonous stinging insects, rushing this way and that to get rid of them, hitting out in every direction and doing incalculable damage. Not, of course, with his fists. He didn't make a spectacle of himself. He looked much the same as usual during the week that Bridget and Peter spent almost exclusively together, so regardless of the rest of

the world. When he came out of his rooms in the morning there was no sign on his swarthy face of what he had been through during the night. No one would have guessed that the wounded savage of the ghetto had taken the great financier and the prominent citizen of New York by the throat and thrown the whole of Ikey Daw into convulsions. It wouldn't, therefore, be fair to describe how, when his black rage flooded him, he rolled on the floor, tearing the sofa cushions with his long brown claw-like fingers; for this sort of thing, that looked so like demoniac possession, only got the better of him when he was alone in the middle of the night, imagining Bridget in Peter Campbell's arms. He had a low mind and an unclean but vigorous imagination. He was a movie fan. He was saturated with the melodrama and raw violence of the New York tenement world. It was out of this that he had been born, and it was into this that he plunged under the stress of his frustrated passion; but he hid it fairly well during the hours that he spent going about among men. That was the dangerous thing, his being obliged to hide it, to swallow it, to smile, to talk, to keep up the elaborate fake of his immaculate proud appearance. It had always been a fake. He had always been a fake. He knew this. He knew now that he had always known that he was a low-down Jew; but it had amused him to pretend to be something else, because it gave him the feeling of satisfaction, of getting his own back on the world, because he had been continually tasting on his tongue, all these years, the sweets of revenge. But now there was no sweetness, no satisfaction, nothing but the poisonous taste of an unbearable frustrated longing.

He couldn't simply sit still and bear it. When he sat doing nothing he began at once to think of Bridget and Peter together, so he occupied himself. He became more

active than he had ever been in his life. Some of his activities had a calculated and reasoned purpose, others had none. Everything that he could think of doing to ruin Peter, he did do. He called up on the telephone all the members of the Mayor's Town-Planning Committee, and went to see the most important ones. He did the same with the Directors of the Manhattan Development Company, with the exception of Sam Bottle and Mr. Jamieson. He had the happy inspiration on Tuesday of suggesting to the Chief of the Metropolitan Police that it would be a good thing to raid a night club called the Crib and run in a nigger called Joe and a yellow girl called Carolina Sal who sold dope as well as whisky. But this wasn't enough to keep him busy and his mind distracted. Doing in Peter Campbell was too easy. It was child's play. He wished the little cuss were more of a man, and cut more ice in the town. There was old Jamieson of course. He might take on old Jamieson, but it wasn't so much with the idea of engaging battle with the Steel King as merely by way of distraction that he began to plunge about in the stock market. He hadn't yet thought of challenging Jamieson to a duel on the Stock Exchange. His head was confused, he was feverish, he felt hot and cold all at once and his teeth chattered. He would grind them together and smile widely, pulling his sticky leathery lips apart, and give an order over the telephone to his stockbroker that made the man bounce in his chair.

His eccentric activities in the market passed, however, for several days almost unnoticed. Not quite. Mr. Jamieson, casting a shrewd comprehensive eye over the financial chart, was surprised by the erratic jiggling up and down of the price-needle when it touched certain columns. It was part of John Jamieson's job to know

who was doing what in Wall Street, and he was good at his job, perhaps better at it than anyone for all his tired manner; and so, sitting quietly at his desk, his shrunken form limp in his leather armchair and his thin shoulders sagging, he stirred languidly a cup of hot peptonised milk, and observed that Mr. Ikey Daw was loading himself up with millions of bushels of May wheat and thousands of tons of Bethlehem steel, while he was pouring enough oil on the market to fill the dry basin of Lake Superior. If he went on like this, Mr. Jamieson remarked to one of his confidential clerks, the streets of the town would be flooded with oil and they'd have to go about on rafts—"And it's darn funny," he added, "because the fellow's got a weakness for oil, always has had, and he's never touched wheat to my knowledge. As for this sudden fancy for steel—what's the game?" He asked himself the question drily. Since buying steel at that moment didn't make sense, no man in his senses would do it, unless he were up to something. Therefore, one of two things, either Ikey Daw was not in his right senses, or he had some deep-laid scheme which boded nobody any good. Mr. Jamieson sipped his hot milk and wiped his drooping moustache on his large soft silk handkerchief. "I guess the fellow's jumpy about something," he murmured.

Mr. Jamieson disliked Ikey Daw and all that he stood for. He thought it a pity that such men should be prominent figures in the city's life. He suspected him of being concerned in a good deal of the political corruption rife in the town. The city's government depressed him. He longed for the day when the millions who formed the population of New York would have achieved a public conscience. He could remember when men drove to business in smart broughams behind high-stepping horses,

and dainty ladies in curls and bustles promenaded a rustic Broadway with coquettish parasols tilted over their fichud shoulders. He sighed when he recalled the charm of that age, the smiling blue skies spreading in a homely intimate way over the low roofs, the flowers blooming in Madison Square Gardens, the children romping among daisies and buttercups in the vacant field where his own house now stood. The miracle of America's industrial development, while it stirred his imagination, made him uneasy. He had a hunch that his countrymen had not advanced mentally in a measure at all commensurate with their wealth and the growth of the town. The great jagged panorama of the city did often bring a thrill to his shy inarticulate heart, but he caught himself wondering sometimes what good it would be to anyone or to the world at large for New York to become the greatest city on earth, if the men of his own class continued to have nervous breakdowns at forty and to drink themselves into imbecility. He felt that great wealth put him under an obligation to society, and that his nation was under such an obligation to the world. The possession of a large share of the earth's riches involved to his mind certain definite duties. Mr. Jamieson was a simple-hearted man, with a few perfectly simple business principles and a correspondingly small number of childlike ideals which he brought into harmony with each other by the simplest of all methods. He took as his point of departure that what was wrong could not in the end bring about good to anybody. From this starting-point he went a step further, and laid down the rule that dishonesty in business didn't pay; and when the spectacle of the New York financial world seemed on all sides to give the lie to this belief, he merely sniffed and said, "You wait." He had never cared very much for

money. What had interested him had not been the amassing of a fortune, but the organising of a great industry that gave employment to many thousands of men. This was his life's achievement, and he was proud of it. He liked to think that because of his own labours a good many thousand children in a good many good-sized towns were well fed and happy. He had a weakness for children. When he visited one of the workmen's cities that had grown up round his foundries or mills, his pockets were crammed with sweets and weighed down with bright new ten-cent pieces. It was a bitter disappointment to him that he had no grandchildren. He foresaw that his old age would be lonely. He would have delighted in spoiling a dozen little girls and boys. The young women of his daughter's set who were afraid of ruining their figures by having babies filled him with exasperated contempt. He called them flibberty-gibbets.

Although he never nowadays went abroad, he always read the foreign news carefully, and took in the "Times," which it was the duty of one of his clerks to digest for him daily. He had been one of the first to take the stand that America must join the war on the side of the Allies, and he had believed from the first in the cancellation of war debts, saying openly that the financial policy of the administration was bad business. But he took no part in politics. They sickened him, and when once upon a time before the war a suggestion had been made to him that he might be asked to go as Ambassador to the Court of St. James's he had, in spite of his wife's entreaties, flatly refused, the only explanation he vouchsafed being that America was a good enough place to live in, and he wasn't going to take on the job of representing all those hoboos of Congressmen. Victor Joyce would have found him surprisingly well-informed and reasonable had they

ever talked together, but Mr. Jamieson never talked to anyone. He let his wife do the talking in their family.

He was fond of his daughter because he remembered her as a baby with a mop of tousled curls, when she sat beside him in her high chair at breakfast spilling her cornmeal mush down her bib and making a racket with her spoon. Her piquant prettiness still reminded him of the child who had climbed into his arms and nestled down contentedly against his shoulder. It had been his habit to go up to the nursery every evening when he came back from his office, often, too often, with a toy in his pocket, and sometimes he would creep back there up the stairs after dinner and tiptoe to the side of her cot to look at her in her sleep. He remembered her round rosy cheek snuggled into the pillows, the soft sound of her breathing and the hush in the room. The charm still clung to her now even when she was most impatient with him, and she did still at times make up to him, talking baby-talk, perching on the arm of his chair and flirting with him—but mostly when she wanted something. He knew that he bored her, and that she thought him ridiculous when he sat beside her holding her hand. Often she jerked away from him when he patted her shoulder or smoothed her hair, and if there were anyone else present she would give a self-conscious embarrassed laugh and say; "Isn't father absurd?" Indeed she often made him wince and draw back into himself. And often when he sat alone in his library of an evening, with a lonely cigar, the one forbidden luxury he allowed himself, he would think of how there would be no one when he died to carry on the great organisation he had built up. His Addy would inherit a good many of his millions, and would not know what to do with them. She would not even have a sense of responsibility about

them. Young people nowadays seemed to have none about anything. What good was to be done with all that money must be arranged for before he departed the earth. It wasn't easy to give money away wisely. Mr. Jamieson's will was an immense document leaving vast sums in trust to all manner of institutions. He had a special staff for investigating the thousands of requests that reached him in the course of the year. Its object was quite simply to leave no genuine appeal unanswered, and he believed that in a great measure this was realised. It was a relief to him to think that although he was a target for every swindling beggar and crook in the country and had to be protected like a prisoner even in his own house by private detectives and the police, he still did manage to get through to the needy and suffering and do some real good with his millions. It had been his habit to take his son-in-law into his confidence on these matters. He hadn't, he admitted to himself, much imagination, and Peter had ideas. It was at his suggestion that he had endowed Art Museums in a number of young thriving towns, had given largely to schools of medicine and scientific research, and now proposed to lay the foundation of an American School of Architecture which would rival the Beaux-Arts. "Why should our fellas have to go to Paris?" Peter had asked. "Besides many of 'em can't afford it." Mr. Jamieson had responded to Peter's enthusiasm. If he loved his daughter because of the charming child she had once been, he loved Peter for the companion he was. Peter would often drop in of an evening to talk over with him one of his schemes, and under the influence of the young man's ardour Mr. Jamieson would pluck up his courage and renew his faith in the generation that exasperated and disgusted him.

It had been his idea in regard to Peter himself, not to

interfere with the boy and not to harm him professionally by any obvious support in the great world of business, but to keep watchfully in the background and let him make his own way; and he knew that Peter understood this and was grateful. They had been friends and allies. Once Mr. Jamieson had even gone so far as to say with a mournful grin and a sigh; "We're a couple of henpecked fools"; but now all that was changed, and his heart was heavy.

It got heavier and heavier as his wife went on talking. She talked on and on about divorcing the young couple. Addy must get a divorce, that was all there was to it. It would be the best thing all round anyway. She and Peter would never have any children. If she married again, who could tell? The girl was only twenty-seven. She had her whole life before her. Mr. Jamieson, heart-sick and weary, kept silent. He knew what he knew, and what he knew about marriage was that what God had joined together no man should put asunder. The prospect of a lot of youngsters romping through his lonely house, dangled so gaily before his eyes by his clever wife, could bring him no pleasure under such conditions, and he felt that she was going too far for decency. It was distasteful to him to contemplate such interference on her part in the lives of her daughter and son-in-law. By Tuesday night he was sick of the whole subject. He had tried to get hold of Peter, and failed. A message left at his office on Tuesday morning had been unanswered. The servants at the apartment in Park Avenue said at ten o'clock that night that Mr. Campbell hadn't been in all day. They didn't know where he was. By Wednesday morning Mr. Jamieson was very much depressed indeed. He had heard nothing from Peter, but he had had one or two telephone calls from his co-Directors on the Board

of the Manhattan Development Company which had shown him which way the wind blew, and the wind had veered to the north as far as Peter was concerned. It was pretty clear to Mr. Jamieson that some dirty work had been done in regard to Peter's building proposition during the last few days. He was puzzled and gloomy, because he was not sure what he would do when he got to the Board meeting. If Peter were the dissipated scamp Adèle made him out to be, how could he stand by him? Mr. Jamieson took no great interest in architecture. He knew nothing about it. Left to himself, he judged skyscrapers purely as business propositions, and he was inclined to think them economically unsound. If it hadn't been for Peter he would have sided long ago with those who condemned them.

The Mayor's Committee of which he was a member was divided into hostile camps on the subject, and the question whether or not builders were to be allowed to go in for more and more of these high buildings had become of late a burning one. The skyscraper problem had been the subject of much violent discussion. The town seemed to have reached a crisis in its growth. Was it to spread up or out? Reports had been drawn up by various civic bodies condemning the skyscraper as the cause of traffic congestion, and calling upon the leading citizens of New York to notice that the dumping of skyscrapers into a huge hub of daytime business and manufacturing in the centre of the city was producing a congestion intolerable from the point of view both of comfort and decency. It had already swamped Manhattan's street system and the existing railways. Unless streets were stretched and a new subway system immediately designed, it would be impossible to take care of the huge workaday skyscraper population. In addition, these

great buildings were an increasing danger. Statisticians had calculated that if a catastrophe such as an earthquake or a great fire should suddenly empty the population of skyscrapers into Lower Broadway, there would be no room for the people in the streets unless they could be packed more than seven deep and standing on each other's heads.

Other reports had maintained the contrary, and summoned the great business and building interests to preserve the most beautiful architectural creation of the day, the American Tower. All that was needed, it was argued, was to insure more space between the towers, and to keep them free from the ugly types of packing-box office-buildings which were trying to surround them. As for the problems of congestion, a new subway system built like a spider's web would do the trick, together with the interweaving of streets at different levels and a sufficient number of tunnels under the cross-town streets. Traffic could also be diverted to the river front. Express motor highways along the river front would invite through-traffic which would represent no loss to the mercantile and other trades in the central region. The skyscraper was the result of economic necessity. It was built in Manhattan because there was an enormous business concentration in Manhattan. "One business," went on the report, "finds it advantageous to be close to another business, and that is why we have skyscrapers. If you dispersed business you might destroy the economic fabric of New York City. Workers in New Jersey might be required to travel a hundred miles to their offices," and so on. As to the danger involved, the view was held strongly that a steel skyscraper was the safest building possible in case of earthquake or storm, and that the risk of fire in such buildings had been reduced to a minimum.

And so the skyscraper battle raged round the bases

of the beautiful and serene towers. It appeared that their fate was to be decided. There were those among the swarm inhabiting their slim perforated carcasses who predicted their doom. And it happened in this way that Peter Campbell and his design for a block skyscraper became a test case. It almost seemed as if he had been lifted up on the spears of the protagonists as the little prophet of the skyscraper, with his design in his hand waving like a banner. In any case he had become suddenly the centre of the *mêlée*. If the Manhattan Development Company adopted his design and pushed ahead with it, the skyscrapers would have won the first battle in the war of engineering, building and business; but of course the Development Company could do little without the approval of the Mayor's Committee, so at least the Manager thought. Were the City Government to bring in a lot of new laws restricting the height of buildings, they would be badly landed. And on the Wednesday morning when Peter was to come before the Directors, it was rumoured that the municipal body was pretty well decided to bring in a number of such restrictions.

Mr. Jamieson discounted the truth of these rumours; it was his private opinion that the politicians on the Mayor's Committee were trying it on—the usual game of graft—and that they could be either ignored or pacified for a moderate sum; but he realised on entering the offices of the M.D.C. at twelve o'clock on Wednesday that the important gentlemen gathered together there for one reason or another that had nothing to do with bribery, since they were placed by their millions above that sort of consideration, had changed their minds about Peter's building. Mr. Jamieson had a cold in the head and was feeling rheumatically. The weather was foul. Though

the storm of the last two days had abated, an icy wind was still swooping through the streets, and a thin steely snow was falling which was ground almost at once to brown slush by the traffic. Mr. Jamieson's face was bloodless when he entered the steam-heated office. It was cheerless enough, with its great streaked windows bespattered with melting grime letting in a grey flood of light, its showy mahogany woodwork, and its patent electric fire imitating coal in the fireplace. He gave his fur-lined coat and his warm gloves and his silk hat to the boy in the outer room, and went in shivering and rubbing his hands together gently. Peter's designs were spread out on the table, but no one in the room was looking at them. There were half-a-dozen different drawings on blue paper representing the various façades, a plan of the ground floor, and a detailed design of the great twin towers at the southern end; and exposed on the mantel-piece in a cardboard mount was a bold impressionistic sketch of the formidable building, washed in in blues and greys. The artist had silhouetted the immense mass against a dark indigo background, and had indicated the street and a procession of microscopic motors creeping along its base. The effect was huge and very strange. Mr. Jamieson was uncomfortably affected by it. It made him feel scared. The great curious jagged mass reminded him in some peculiar way of a view he had once had motor-ing in the evening through a dark pass in the Dolomites. It was more like a cluster of mountainous rocky crags than a building. The tiny windows in the steep sides recalled cave-dwellers to his mind. Putting on his eye-glasses he edged closer, and saw that the base was suggested in rugged blocks of rough stone, deep cut, and that the perpendicular flanks became smoother as they mounted up. The masses rose more and more ethereal

in aspect, until the towers, evanescent and fragile, but sharp, lost themselves in the clouds. At an elevation of what he judged to be a couple of hundred feet, minute figures were promenading under an open colonnade that ran along the length of the mountain-side of stone. Above that the masses were broken, and high above these again, bridges spanned the sky between the clustered towers.

Mr. Jamieson was troubled and disturbed by the view of this building. He stood before it, a thin, stooping, grey figure, and stared. "Whew!" he murmured helplessly. "Whatever's got into the boy?" He was dimly aware of being in the presence of something which impressed him too much for comfort, and which he didn't exactly like, but at the same time he felt a strange emotion swelling up in him concerning his son-in-law. What he felt was a kind of awe mingled with pity. "Poor little cuss," he said to himself, "the poor little cuss, to think of that coming out of his head! Why, you'd just about expect it to bust him open."

His co-directors were scattered about the room. Mr. Jamieson turned his usual mild and courteous gaze upon these gentlemen, so well known to him, who represented banks, railways, consolidated rubber, copper-mines, and oil. He reflected with a certain dry humour that these men who had gone on the board of this company for patriotic or sentimental reasons represented more financial power than any other similar group you could get together in New York, but that they looked pretty ordinary for all that, that they looked, indeed, pretty much what they were, just a bunch of tired, dried-up old men with bad digestions, and a good many sins on their consciences in one way and another. He wished them good morning.

"Hullo, John!"

"How de do, Sam? Nasty weather we're having."

"Well, Josh, how's the new granddaughter?"

"Fine. Weighs nine pounds."

The chairman begged them to be seated. They did so, chewing the ends of their cigars or cleaning their finger-nails or picking their teeth with ivory toothpicks, while the back curtain of their immense wealth, with all their steam-yachts and private cars, and palatial residences on Long Island and in Newport, and their foundries and forges and factories spread behind their bald heads and quite unimposing shoulders to lend them glamour and prestige. Most of them were bald and wore eye-glasses. Most of them looked slightly peevish. Their cheeks sagged, their eyes were puffy. Some were turning to unhealthy fat. Others, like Mr. Jamieson himself, were skinny and ivory-pale. Their hands were none too steady either. They gave an impression of nervous languor. Old Josh Billings cleared his shrivelled throat loudly, and expectorated into a brass spittoon. He had chronic bronchitis. Sam Bottle, plumped down like a pompous baby, alone was beaming. His round face was wreathed in smiles. "Bless me," thought Mr. Jamieson, "he's a perfect kid. Those hooks and eyes are a sure enough miracle." Of them all Ikey Daw, in his patent leather shoes, brown spats, beautifully creased striped trousers and cut away coat, was the only one who could be called good-looking, "and he's a darn sight too good-looking," muttered Mr. Jamieson to himself, "but there's something the matter with him. He's as yellow as cheese." He was. The pallor showing under his swarthy skin made him look ghastly. He lounged back in his chair twisting a ruby round and round the little finger of his left hand.

The chairman said yes, in answer to Mr. Daw's

question, that Mr. Campbell was waiting outside, but that perhaps they'd better decide before they had him in what they were going to tell him. He was obliged to inform the Board that it looked as if their building scheme was going to be held up by the Mayor's Committee. They were probably aware that there had been a lot of fuss lately over skyscrapers, and that public opinion was pretty strongly roused against them. It was his view that they'd have to go slow and see what happened before they undertook to put in hand anything sensational, "and I think, gentlemen, that you'll agree with me that this block skyscraper of Mr. Campbell's is what you'd call a sensational departure in architecture even for this town. You may like it, or you may not, but you can't deny it's sensational."

He paused, and they turned their reluctant uneasy eyes towards the mantelpiece. There was a slight scraping of chairs and throats, a slight nodding of heads. Then someone said suddenly, "Let's cut this as short as we can. We've made up our minds, so why waste time? Have the architect in and say the deal's off." But at that Sam Bottle bounced in his chair.

"Wait a minute. See here. At our last meeting you were as keen as mustard. What's up?"

"What's up," said Mr. Daw suavely, "is just this—that the Mayor's Committee is against any such thing as block skyscrapers, and has asked this Company to take on a large scheme for model tenements on the West side instead."

"Well, I'm jiggered! Did we, or did we not, give Pete Campbell to understand in September that he was to go ahead?"

Mr. Daw cast his heavy-lidded, questioning gaze round the table.

"Is that so? I was abroad at the time."

The chairman cut him short. "We gave Campbell no promise and no order. We're not bound to him in any way. It's true that he talked us into being interested."

"Say, he certainly did that."

"He's certainly some talker."

"Well, that don't matter now. Have him in." Josh Billings spoke again. He was an impatient, crotchety old man.

"Did you give his firm anything in the way of a written undertaking?" asked Mr. Daw.

"Not a thing."

"I understand in any case," added Mr. Daw, "that he is no longer a member of the firm in question."

Mr. Jamieson looked up at this. "What's that?" he asked.

"I understand that your son-in-law is about to sever his connection with Brown, Johnson and Campbell."

"It's the first I've heard of it."

"The head of the firm told me so yesterday."

"I see." The two men stared at each other.

There was something in Mr. Jamieson's tone that struck the others. The chairman looked worried.

"Perhaps you have other information, Jamieson, is that so?"

"That is not so," replied Mr. Jamieson shortly.

"Then if you agree, gentlemen, we can ask Mr. Campbell to come in, unless Mr. Jamieson has anything to say."

Mr. Jamieson stared a moment at the table, then spoke slowly. "What I have to say won't take long. It is simply this. I don't believe a word of all this talk about public opinion and the Mayor's Committee. Public opinion—shucks! Mr. Daw can manage that for us.

This Company is perfectly free to put up such a building as this block skyscraper if it wants to. If it doesn't want to, all right, that's its own business."

Mr. Daw's smile was unpleasant. It gave him a cruel, animal appearance, but he spoke softly.

"So you're in favour of our adopting your son-in-law's design, are you, Jamieson?" his emphasis on the "son-in-law" was noticeable.

Mr. Jamieson stroked his moustache. "Certainly I am," he replied calmly.

"Well, that's a pity, because none of the rest of us like it."

"Excuse me," piped Sam Bottle, "speak for yourself. I told you fellas before and I tell you again that that's a great building. I don't understand it, but I know it's beautiful. Why, it gives me the shivers just to look at it."

There was a snigger at this, but immediately someone said, "Well, beautiful or ugly's no matter, it'd cost too much."

Mr. Jamieson, still stroking his moustache and looking sleepy, murmured that he understood the money had been found, and that the Middle Western Railway were coming in for a quarter of the total. "Isn't that so, Bill?" he asked suddenly. "I understood you to tell me so yourself."

Bill Jennings, President of the said Railway, wriggled.

"Well, you see, John, it's not going to be so easy as we thought. Some of our people are kicking, and saying after all that they want a building of their own, and don't see why our railway station should be swallowed up in this combined block."

"So you're backing out, is that it?"

"Well, I don't know as you can call it that."

"Call it what you like," snapped John Jamieson. "And what about you?" he asked, turning to Josh Billings.

"Damn it, John, you seem to think we're going back on you personally," grumbled the oil magnate.

"Well, maybe that's just about what you are doing," drawled Mr. Jamieson to their astonishment, "but don't mistake my meaning. I guess most of you know me well enough to know what I mean, but for the sake of one or two here I'll tell you. It's just this, gentlemen. I don't like to be connected with a firm that changes its mind like a nervous woman, wriggles out of its promises on the excuse that it hasn't signed anything, and lets itself be dictated to by the politicians. Who's running this show, anyway, you or Tammany Hall? If it's Tammany, I quit. I've never been on the board of a shilly-shally concern, and I don't intend to begin going downhill that way at my age. I took this Company to be a building concern with a fine idea, and I believed we'd been invited on this Board with one object, the object of making New York a more beautiful and comfortable place to live in. This block skyscraper proposition is not a question of cost. You know it and I know it. Four hundred million dollars' worth of building went up in this town last year, and I estimate there'll be half as much again at a low estimate this year. This Board was formed, as I understand it, to co-ordinate various big interests into some sort of a unified scheme of building. Well, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to keep together or not? If not, what are you here for, anyhow? Two months ago you got Mr. Campbell in here, saw his first sketches, liked 'em well enough then, heard his exposition of a building that would comprise your railway station, Bill, and Josh's office-building, and Sam's monument to the hook-and-eye industry, and the American

Eagle Tower, and told him to get on with it. Now you've changed your minds. Well, I guess you've a right to if you want to, but I suspect you're scared, that's all. I expect you've got cold feet, and if that's so and you're going to be dictated to by a lot of newspapers and city aldermen, count me out. I resign from the Board. Now let's have in the architect who happens to be my son-in-law and tell him that it's off, and see what he's got to say for himself, but you should have known me better than to think I'd turn him down and let you get away with this just because he's my son-in-law. Not much. Have him in now. Have him in. I've said my say."

Mr. Jamieson was scarcely less surprised at this speech of his than the others. He didn't know what had got into him, except that that fella Daw riled him more than a good deal. "Can't stick the Jew," he muttered to himself. "He's done it. They've all been got at." Mr. Jamieson knew that there was nothing to be done. He knew it so certainly that it made him wince to see Peter in his neat blue serge suit and low soft collar, his hat in his hand and his coat over his arm, come in looking small and tired. His usual friendly grin lighted up his boyish unsuspecting face. He evidently expected to find them all well disposed towards him as they had been the last time. Mr. Jamieson found it impossible to remember, looking at the eager white face and the timid form of his son-in-law, standing by the chairman's elbow, facing them all, that the boy was a scallywag and a low, vicious brute; and as the young ardent voice began to explain, to plead for that strange creation in stone and steel, he felt himself going all queer and confused with pain, anger and friendliness.

They were pretending to find fault with the plans. They were asking him questions, useless questions,

since they had already decided to turn the thing down.

"Oh, yes, I've thought of that. The trains are at a depth of fifty feet underground. The tunnelling's all right." What was that up there? Gardens. What for? The School of Pathological Research, he explained, was to have its quarters on the roof to the left of the central tower on the south side. On the north was a concert-hall and a church.

"Church? I don't see any church." Josh Billings put his sharp nose close to a blue paper.

"The church is there in the north-east tower."

"What kind of a church is that? There ain't no steeple that I can see."

"It's a new Christian Science Temple. They like the idea of its being high up like that above the noise and rush. It's very quiet up there in the sky. Church steeples, you see, Mr. Billings, have gone out o' fashion since their spires can't spire any more."

"Hmph! And how'll you get the people up?"

"I've provided a system of automatic elevators. It's all done by elevators. Those towers? Well, those ought to be residential flats. They look fifty miles out to sea and down on the roof-gardens. The air's full of ozone at that height. No need to go to the seashore any more." Peter laughed, but nervously. He was beginning to realise that they were against him. The light from the great plate-glass windows which he was facing showed his eyes to be intensely blue, like cornflowers, in his pallid pinched face. There was a deep vertical line between his brows. His eye-sockets seemed to be stretched and sore. The eyelids were red, and his nostrils were pinched in as very sick men's are pinched sometimes.

"He's sick," thought Mr. Jamieson. "He looks dead-beat."

Someone said, "Now what kind of a building would you call your building, Mr. Campbell? It don't look like anything I've ever seen anywhere. It don't look right or natural to me, and I guess if it went up on this piece of ground it would put all the streets round it out of gear, wouldn't it?"

"Sure it would," answered someone else. "It'd make 'em look crazy. It's my opinion, Campbell, that the thing won't do. It's too different, too darn queer. Those towers now. Why, they're so bare, they're terrible. They're as ugly as a bunch of factory chimneys."

Peter was evidently labouring under an increasing sense of difficulty. He began to look apprehensively from one to another, and then back to the sketch on the chimney-piece. He seemed to feel that they didn't see that drawing, and that he could never make them see it.

"Those towers—" he began, "those towers—they balance——" He hesitated, stammered, looked hopelessly from one to another, moistening his lips and swallowing with difficulty. "You see, the conception is one of vertical planes, of flat massed planes straining up. It's meant—it should stand as a symbol, a picture in stone of the progress of the American twentieth century, the mind of young America rushing upwards, looking out, out, aspiring to omniscience." He stopped, looked miserably round him. His eyes had gone very dark. They seemed to be all pupil.

"I see," said Mr. Daw, "that these drawings here have the mark of Brown, Johnson and Campbell on them."

"That's so."

"You worked them out yourself?"

"With my draughtsmen. Everybody in the office helped."

"Did your partners have a hand in them?"

"Sure. They pulled them about and made a lot of useful suggestions."

"Then the design belongs to the firm?"

"Certainly."

"And where do you come in, Mr. Campbell?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that since you've quit the firm these gentlemen had better be dealing with someone who's a member of it."

"You're making a mistake. I haven't quit, not yet."

"Johnson told me yesterday you were through."

Mr. Jamieson observed that Peter swayed a little on his feet. He leaned forward.

"I guess we've had about enough of this, Daw," he said. "Sit down, Peter."

"Oh, thanks," Peter smiled uncertainly. "I'm all right, but it looks as if my design were all wrong. You don't like it, is that it?"

"Yes, that's just about it," said Ikey Daw smoothly. "Some of us think it's ugly and some of us think it's not a bad sketch, but we all of us know it's no good as a business proposition, and in our opinion it is a darned piece of cheek on the part of any one man to think he can design a railway station, a theatre, a church, a hospital and an office-building all in one. The thing don't hold together. It's all a jumble and a mess, to my mind. We've had a number of expert opinions on these drawings, and we're told by the engineers that it's not a practical proposition, and I have it straight from the senior partner of your firm that he didn't pass the design and that he didn't think it was sound."

Peter opened his lips as if to speak, but made no sound. He could be seen to be swallowing painfully, and he seemed to Mr. Jamieson to be dwindling as he stood there to the size of a small boy. He had flushed crimson. Mr. Jamieson felt he must put an end to this.

"The fact is, Pete," he said, "that these gentlemen have turned your building down. They've given up all idea of a block skyscraper. They're going in for model tenements."

"Now if you'd like to design us a tenement," began Bill Jennings, but something in Peter's wavering, uncertain smile stopped him.

"No, I guess not, thanks." He began to gather up the blue papers spread on the table.

Ikey Daw put out a hand. "Hold on a minute. We'll keep those." He leaned over till they were quite close to each other. "They're the property of your late partners. We'll let 'em burn 'em if they want to, or have 'em framed."

Mr. Jamieson, seeing Peter choke, and catching the sudden look of panic that he cast at the sketch on the mantelpiece, spoke sharply.

"Nonsense. You let the boy have his drawings, Daw, and mind your own business. Here, Pete, take 'em, and clear out now, this is no place for you, and when I'm quit of this one-horse company you can bring 'em to me."

But Peter scarcely seemed to hear him. He turned away empty-handed to the door, stood an instant with his back to them, then opened it and faced round again; but it was at the drawing on the mantelpiece that he was staring.

"I wouldn't mind so much your turning down my drawings," he said, "if you'd taken some other fella's. I guess you don't understand what you're up against.

There's something going on in this town that's going to get its own way, whatever you do. You can't stop it. That building of mine is dead. It's only a ghost now. You've killed it. Those particular towers will never come alive and rise up on Manhattan. They'll never cast their own peculiar long shadows over the roofs, the streets. The special beauty locked in there, inside that drawing, will never get out into the light of day now, you've choked it off all right; but there'll be others. Other block skyscrapers will come into being, whatever you say, any of you, and other towers 'll shoot up, higher, better ones than mine, maybe. You won't have anything to say about it."

He stopped. He was still looking at that sketch of his on the mantelpiece. His white face seemed to strain out with a timid, desperate longing towards some incredible beauty that he saw there on that piece of cardboard, and that no one else could see. His eyes had a puzzled, pained expression. "Good-bye," he said then, and was gone.

The elevator shot him down to the street. The great buildings rose up suddenly above him as he slipped into the crowd. He was at once swallowed up in it. An indistinguishable minute figure in the swarm of figures that were hurrying through the wind and sleet, he was lost to view.

No one knew where he went. No one saw him that day or that night. He didn't go home. He didn't go to his office. He was not at the station to meet Adelaide when she arrived with the Joyces from Washington at four, as he should have been. Mr. Jamieson, trying to locate him, failed to do so. Gussy, getting wind of what had happened, tried too, but with the same result. Even Bridget knew nothing of his whereabouts. She hadn't

seen him, she told Gussy over the 'phone, since Sunday night. Mr. Jamieson, by Thursday morning, was seriously thinking of putting the police on his son-in-law's trail, but it didn't seem quite fair. He had a hunch that all the boy wanted was to be let alone. He caught sight of a dejected little figure sitting on a bench in frosty Central Park that morning on his way to business, but when he got out of his car he found that it wasn't Peter after all. It was just some other young man who had lost his nerve and didn't know where to go. Mr. Jamieson had an impression that there were thousands of them that day scattered through the city, sitting on benches, walking aimlessly up and down Broadway, hanging round the street corners.

And then on Thursday night Peter turned up at the Crib and saw Frederika. It was Bridget, half-distracted, who had taken Frederika there, begging her to come, saying they must do something to amuse themselves. Bridget had been telling Frederika all about Peter and the Ikey Daw business and the mess she'd got into, and how Peter had disappeared since the board meeting, and Adelaide too had been talking on the phone to Victor, about her husband who was lost: "I've mislaid my husband," she had said gaily, and Frederika, who had been having a rather trying time in Washington, began to feel very much irritated by it all—and then, there he was, sitting in the Crib with the negro girl surrounded by all those rollicking black men, and with the jazz band making its infernal row.

It was unlucky for Peter that he and Frederika saw each other just then and just there. His luck was most certainly out that night. If the author of all mischief had planned it, as the last final joke on Peter, in order to turn his poor secret romance into a farce, the time and

the scene couldn't have been better calculated. There he was, with all the stuffing taken out of him, his hopes ruined, and the stones of his beautiful building cluttered round him like a heap of rubbish, sitting pallid and shaken in a negro dive, staring at a dream city that no one but himself had seen, could see, or ever would see now; and turning away from it with a jerk, he looked past Carolina Sal's immense, black, revolting shoulder to see gazing at him, startled, gentle, summoning him, but with a slight surprised look of anger on it, the face of the woman whom he didn't know but on whom he had been thinking with concentrated tenderness for fifteen years or more.

He thought—what didn't he think? He was capable of thinking anything, of holding any fantastic belief. He was a romantic American, and he believed in the incredible and the impossible. He exulted in his age and in the miracles of his age. He had faith in mankind. He was convinced that the end of human progress was the omniscience and omnipotence of man, that the physical and the metaphysical worlds were one and the same thing, and that mind and matter were of the same stuff, all interwoven and linked together by magnetic waves, electric, ethereal. He knew that he was a worm, but he was aware of another self, psychic twin of the worm, caught by mistake in the poor rotten cage of his flesh. He believed in his soul, and in his love, and he believed that Frederika was the unique solitary friend of his soul come at last, when he was down and out, to save him. He got to his feet, saw her move to the door, started forward. He heard Sal say through the din, "What's the matter, Pete?" He bumped into a table, a chair, a couple of dancers. Someone cursed him for a clumsy fool. A lot of people got in between. He struggled. He seemed to be struggling through a wall of black men. The great

black masks crowding up against him wore outrageous grins. There was a sort of scuffle. He must get to the door before she was gone. Was he pushing, fighting? What was the row about? He got through to Bridget. The other one was gone. "Where is she? Who is she?" He was almost sobbing, but he rapped out the words fiercely, snarling at Bridget, in his frantic haste. "Oh, God, child, tell me quickly who she is and where she has gone."

Bridget gaped. He had time to notice the idiotic loveliness of her face that meant nothing at all to him now, and to hear her say, "Who do you mean? Freddie?" and to see Ikey Daw making towards them through the crowd, and then someone said in his ear, "The cops!" and on that, confusion, a wild squeaking from the orchestra, followed by the report of a gun, the scream of a woman's voice, a sudden silence, and the lights went out.

CHAPTER II

FREDERIKA and Perky had left the Crib before the shooting began. They saw some policemen getting out of taxis as they came up from the hot cellar into the icy street, but paid no attention. They were both too preoccupied to notice anything very much. Frederika stepping quickly into the waiting motor said sharply to the chauffeur, "Drive us back to the house on 72nd Street where we went after dinner," and leant back in her corner. The dismal form of a young negro in a round cap with his collar turned up, ducking, head down, into the wind, past the lighted window of a cheap, all-night restaurant, caught her eye for an instant. She shivered and wrapped herself more closely in her furs, watching from half-

closed eyes the long, bleak street with its double line of small, unbeautiful buildings, its interminable lamp-posts and its occasional slouching bedraggled figures. She said nothing to Perky as they sped through the streets, leaving Harlem with its dark population behind them and whirling on through the shadowy glades of Central Park towards the fantastic façade of 58th Street and Fifth Avenue that could be discerned in the distance beyond the trees. The sky high up behind the dark buildings was alight. The labyrinth of streets still blazed at this late hour, and many high windows were lighted, making the little stars in the heavens look pale.

They drove back in silence to the ball where they had left Victor at supper with Adelaide Campbell. They had been much together of late, she and Perky, and had been much of the time silent. Indeed, during the ten days in Washington, they had repeatedly found themselves driving somewhere or coming back from somewhere together, or facing each other across their deserted hotel sitting-room, or keeping each other company in a chattering crowd; and most of the time, especially of late, without attempting to talk. There seemed to be nothing to say.

Coming back from Washington in the train, the usual sort of thing had occurred. Mrs. Campbell had inevitably come back with them, and of the row of four seats reserved in the Pullman she and Victor had occupied the first two, and Victor had turned his round quite naturally to face her, turning, of course, at the same time his back to Perky, who faced Frederika. It had not escaped Perky's attention, for he had the faculty of observation so highly developed that he couldn't miss seeing things even when he wanted to, that this arrangement of seats was the result of a slight manœuvre of Mrs. Campbell's. He had

noticed, too, that Frederika had paid no attention to the orders given to the porters and had not seemed to hear the bright coquettish voice which Perky had by now come to positively loathe, saying, "Do sit here, Mr. Joyce, I have so much to ask you about, if you are not going to be too busy sorting out your dreadful papers." Frederika had dropped quietly and abruptly into the end seat opposite himself, and at once opened a book. The high backs of the seats and the noise of the train provided a comparative isolation for any couple of occupants who desired it, and it was apparent to our poor friend Perky that Mrs. Campbell was making the most of this. Every once in a while he caught snatches of her conversation. The way she was going on at Victor, the way she cooed and gurgled was simply sickening. Perky longed for two bits of cotton-wool to stuff into his ears, and thanked God Frederika was out of earshot. Only the back of the top of Victor's head and a bit of one of his legs was visible to her from where she sat, but she didn't look in his direction. She appeared for a time to be absorbed in her book. Every now and then she yawned into her hand. At last she smiled at Perky, said, "What a bore one can't smoke. I think I'll have a nap," and laying her head back had re-crossed her long legs and gone, apparently, to sleep. Was she asleep? He couldn't tell. Was she bothered? She gave him no right to suppose so. She looked tired and grim. Her eyes were slightly more sunken than usual, the bitter line of her mouth more marked perhaps, but they had been racketing about at a tremendous pace, never sitting down to a meal of less than twenty, and she had done a lot of sight-seeing in between, motoring to Mount Vernon and Fredericksburg, taking the night train, and doing Richmond and Charlottesville in a day. Her energy had been inexhaustible,

her equanimity unbroken. What had she been thinking of it all? He didn't know, and he didn't really, when he faced it, want to know. Well, one thing was certain, she wouldn't tell him. She would never say one word to him about Victor's making a fool of himself, and never by a flicker of her eyelids would she let on that she knew that he too saw it that way. From that sort of embarrassment she would protect them all, but the question was how far was this thing going, how far would she let it go, and what would she do if it kept on?

Perky, miserably sandwiched in between Victor and Victor's wife, had been left to his reluctant and uncomfortable thoughts, and reflected that for a man who had early in his youth renounced a more active share in the drama of life for the sake of the finer pleasures of observation, contemplation and analysis, he had had of late too much of a good thing. He had had the sensation ever since their arrival in New York of being in his quality of observer uncomfortably crammed and stuffed. There had been from the first day really too much to see. The great gay monstrous panorama of American life had seemed to unfold and fly past before his eyes like a super-film. Even without the appearance on the screen of familiar figures the spectacle would have been enthralling. He had stared and chuckled and stared again in a growing excitement as he did sometimes at the Tivoli in the Strand, hanging on to the edge of his chair when Douglas Fairbanks leapt down the shaft of a lift or Harold Lloyd scaled a skyscraper, clinging to dizzy window-ledges by his finger-nails. Indeed this America had been really far too good of its kind, too grand, too unique and awful, too comic and too sensationally beautiful to be true. One couldn't quite take it seriously. It was too exaggerated. If one took it seriously one would, he felt, die of

it, explode like a balloon; but one needn't. One simply chuckled, delighted at the joke. The buildings were too high, for instance, to be seen properly, so you didn't have to see them properly. The pretty women? There were too many pretty women and they didn't keep still long enough to be visible, so that was all right; and when you went up to the top of the Woolworth Building you shot past the floors so rapidly that you couldn't count them, and when you got to the top you were dizzy and couldn't look down, so you might as well have stayed at the bottom. He had discovered this secret after the first day or two, and had given it up, let his body be flung up and down through the air and stayed quite comfortably at the bottom all the time, burrowing away as usual through the mass of Victor's obligations, speeches, interviews and despatches just as if he were snugly at home in Whitehall; and he had been rather pleased with himself for achieving this detachment, for after all he too had had his wistful moments and his wild moments of temptation when he had felt that he, too, would like to throw his modest private secretary's cap over a skyscraper and kick up a shindy on Broadway with Bidly and her lot. It must be, he had told himself, something in the air, some electricity that got into your blood and made you feel vulgarly young. One caught oneself wanting to do things one had never thought of doing in England at any rate since school. One even caught oneself wanting to be something one hadn't been for years, or perhaps never had been, another kind of man from what one was, more brutal, more slap-dash, more careless, more noisy, more alive—that was it. One longed, under the terrible stimulus of this country, to live as one hadn't lived, to throw oneself into the *mêlée*, to join in the scuffle, to bang with one's fist on the table as the Senators from the West did,

and bellow out platitudes and be ignorant and raw and full of hope and faith. In what? In anything, in the God of the Bible, the child of the Sunday School, the human race, the future. But one didn't, one couldn't. It was his job to look after Victor. And his fun was and always had been and always would be in watching kindly, disinterestedly, the doings of his friends and the antics of the world at large. He wasn't any good now, he had reflected, for anything else, and he didn't ask for anything more in the way of payment than to be allowed to watch, and to help some of his friends a little if he could, without interfering with them, and finally to be allowed to do his job well, his job, that is, of looking after Victor. He had never realised before just what that meant, but in the train coming back from Washington he had realised it and faced it. What it all came down to was that he had no identity any more, separate from Victor, and that everything Victor did was to him as important and as compromising as if he had done it himself. When Victor made a good speech, he, Perky, had the satisfactory feeling of making a good speech. When Victor was bothered and nervous he, Perky, felt funny in the pit of his stomach, and when Victor made a fool of himself, it was he, Perky, who felt silly and was ashamed; and it was in addition he, Perky, alone, without Victor, who felt uncomfortable in Frederika's presence when Victor was such an ass over Mrs. Campbell. It was almost as if he experienced not only many of Victor's sensations but a good many others that Victor might have had if he had been more sensitive, but didn't have because he was thick.

The Washington visit on the official side had been in Perky's opinion one of those apparent failures which turn out to be sound and lasting successes. Victor had

been impossible. He had been incredibly dull, fantastically obstinate and magnificently selfish. Throughout the entire round of official luncheons and dinners he had remained practically speechless, unless on his feet with a sheaf of notes in his hand. At the end of the week it had been said pleasantly in diplomatic circles that at last Mr. Coolidge had met his Waterloo in the person of an Englishman more monosyllabic than himself, and it was rumoured that the private interview between the American President and the British statesman had been in the nature of a long unbroken pause. In any case, if they had said anything to each other no one knew what it was, not even Perky, though from Victor's general behaviour in public he could gather an inkling of the line his chief had taken. Once Victor took a line he stuck to it, and his line in Washington was, well, straight and to the point. It was simply that it didn't in the least matter to him and his Government what the American administration did or did not do. The Ambassador had been at first non-plussed, then worried. The whole Embassy had ended by getting in a fuss. Even Perky himself, scrapping all those carefully prepared discourses which Victor now refused to utter, had wondered if his chief weren't going a little too far. "Put something down that sounds well, but means nothing," were his instructions, "that's all I've got to say to these fellas. World Court? Mind you don't mention it. I shan't." And he didn't. When others did he stared blankly, as if he had never heard of the Hague. The Ministers of various Continental powers, who had counted on Mr. Joyce to argue with the American Government about those tiresome restrictions, had become very uncomfortable. Every one had been uncomfortable except Victor and perhaps Frederika. Frederika had said to Perky, "It's all right. Leave him

alone. What difference does it make whether they like him or not? He doesn't care. He's thinking of England. Besides, they do; they're impressed; they don't understand him. They keep thinking he's got something up his sleeve."

But of course he hadn't. He had simply thrown up in disgust the job of making Washington see sense, and had washed his hands of them, with the result, more unexpected to him than to anyone, that they did see, at any rate, one thing. What they saw, strangely enough, was England looming behind Victor's shoulder—distant little England, fogbound, seabound, gloomy, aloof, indifferent and indomitable and formidable. Victor had shown her to them, and Frederika had been the one to point this out to Perky.

"We shall go back without having done anything, and Victor will feel that he has failed, and when he gets over being annoyed and finds himself comfortably at home again he will worry and curse himself, but you'll see, it will be the best thing that could have happened. No one will know just how or just why, but they'll come round on some things and will do some things that they wouldn't have done hadn't Victor come and been too impossible for words."

He had listened to her with amazement, feeling that she was right, and feeling at the same time that her being right made her a more puzzling enigma than ever. He didn't want to pry into her secrets, he had always refrained from that sort of impertinence. Living as he had done for years so close to her, and being by force of circumstances foisted on her for so many hundreds of breakfasts and lunches and dinners during the course of a year, being, indeed, on top of her in her own house almost all the time, he had felt that the least he could do

was to keep his distance mentally; but all the same one couldn't help wondering sometimes and being intrigued by her quiet, and recently since they had all arrived in America it had been impossible not to notice her and be puzzled. She had appeared more striking here, perhaps merely because of the strange background. In London she had been shadowy, had fitted in, melted in, as it were, into the background that was primarily Victor's own; but here she stood out and became dramatic. The sparkle and glitter, the gay noises and the hilarious confusion, even the incredible aspiring towers of New York set her off, to his eyes, if not to those of the natives. America was, he reflected, becoming to her, for some reason difficult to define, though the Yankees didn't admire her. It wasn't only that among so many pretty vivacious women she struck him as having in some way more of the real quality of good looks than any of them; there was more to it than that; but the funny thing was that poor Victor didn't see it. He didn't see anything, apparently, but Mrs. Campbell's dimples; not even that business about the Jamiesons' house on Long Island. That had been very odd indeed, but Victor had taken it all in the stupidest way and had been satisfied with the most unconvincing explanation. Perky had squirmed uneasily, wanting quite desperately to pinch him, wake him up somehow, but, of course, Victor's crass stupidity about his wife was none of his business.

None of this was any of his business. He had no right to spin theories about Frederika's attitude to Mrs. Campbell, who simply must be boring her to tears. What was so baffling was that she seemed to be taking no line whatever about the woman. She was as abrupt and as casual as ever. She didn't even pretend that she liked her, and her manner to Victor showed no shade of differ-

ence. You couldn't detect her in any manœuvre. Nothing could be less descriptive of her attitude than what is called in such circumstances an effort to hold a man. If Mrs. Campbell were determined, as she seemed to be, to get off with her husband, Frederika appeared quite indifferent, and Perky had been inclined to think that the real explanation was that she didn't care; but if that were true, how then could she understand Victor so well, even better than he did himself? One simply couldn't appreciate the worth of a man who was behaving under one's nose like all kinds of a fool, unless one cared about him profoundly, or were a very remarkable woman. Well, she was remarkable. He had had a growing sense of this, and it had become suddenly so acute as to be extremely painful when he heard her briefly and brusquely accept Mrs. Campbell's invitation to spend their last week-end with her in the country.

They were all to go down on Friday, it appeared, to a place called Campbelltown, and to hunt the fox on Saturday. At least, Victor and Mrs. Campbell would hunt, though Victor hadn't been outside a horse for two years, and possibly Frederika. Mrs. Campbell's husband didn't hunt, she explained, so perhaps Frederika would let him take her round. There would be a lot of people staying in the house, and there were plenty of horses. Every one could be mounted, Mr. Parkinson too, if he wished. They would have an American country supper one night, cook johnnie cake—it was made of Indian corn meal smeared on a wooden plank—in front of the open fire, roast chestnuts, pop corn, and so on. Perky had groaned inwardly, but Frederika had said that would be quite delightful, and then they had all come back to New York to find that Mrs. Campbell had mislaid her husband. He had, it seemed, been spending most of his time with

Biddy while they were in Washington, but she too had lost track of him. In any case Mrs. Campbell didn't seem to mind very much, and the invitation for the week-end held.

The confusion in Perky's head by Thursday night made him feel quite dizzy. Biddy had behaved very oddly on their return. They had found her lodged in their hotel, and in a strange state of nerves over the disappearance of Peter Campbell. She seemed to think that he might be dead or something, and that she was in some way responsible. She had said, "It's that brute Ikey Daw," and burst into tears on the spot in front of Victor and himself. Frederika had taken her off then and they had been closeted together for hours. That was on Wednesday night. On Thursday morning Miss Augusta Green had rung up and had told him, Perky, when he answered the telephone that no, she didn't want to speak to Biddy, that she was sick to death of Bridget Prime and he could tell her so, and would he please tell her as well that she had no news of Peter Campbell, and the best thing she, Bridget, could do would be to go home to England where she belonged and stay there. And then they had all gone off to separate luncheon parties—Victor was lunching, he said with a rather silly smile, at the Ritz Carlton with Mrs. Campbell; and after that they had all gone together to a vast dinner-party and a ball, and then Biddy had collected Martha Hedding and some men and had dragged himself and Frederika up to Harlem to a place called the Crib, where she was apparently in the habit of spending her nights, and there they had discovered Mrs. Campbell's mislaid husband sitting at a table with a quite stunning terrible-looking negress; and at the sight of him something odd had seemed to happen to Frederika. It was as if she had come unexpectedly in

contact with a live battery. She had given a start, had quivered and stiffened, and said sharply to Biddy, "Who is that man over there with the white face?" and Biddy had answered, "Where? Why, that's Peter Campbell!" and had begun to laugh rather hysterically, saying, "What a fool I've been. Of course he's all right. We'll get him over here." And then, just as the pleasant, harmless-looking young man got to his feet and made towards them, Frederika had abruptly got to hers and left the place, taking Perky with her.

It was another case, the most striking one so far and the most maddening to Perky, of having suddenly been stuffed to bursting with impressions and being given no chance to sort them out or even half take in the kaleidoscopic phenomena that made up the whole thrilling entrancing puzzle. He had been allowed no more than five minutes altogether in that dance hall full of black people. That in itself was maddening. He had just had time to gape, to feel his eyes bulging and strain greedily at the weird, wild scene, when Frederika's suddenly jangled nerves had sent through him a distracting current of sympathy, and then her pale, rigid face and the look of fear in her eyes had got in between him and the awful beauty of the African camp-fire dances going on round them, and on top of that when he heard Biddy say, in answer to her sharp question, "Why, that's Peter Campbell," he had suddenly remembered that this Peter Campbell, whom everybody was making such a to-do about, was the architect who had built the house on Long Island that was such a wonderful copy of Wellowburn; and that knowledge coming over him on top of all the rest, and with the jazz band drumming frantically in his ears, had made him feel positively sick and faint. But when he had followed Frederika out of the place, stumbling

and scrambling up the steep stairs after her, for she seemed to be in a great hurry, and when he had got into the motor and was whirling off through the New York night beside her, he had realised that he felt worse than sick, he felt scared. But again he had had no time to dive into himself and find out why. During their drive of twenty minutes or so down town and back to the ball, he had only been able to babble foolishly to himself idiotic questions that he couldn't answer and had no right to ask. Did Frederika then after all know the young man? Was there some secret between them, some past romance, something of that sort? Had she met him in England and had him down to Wellowburn all unknown to Victor? It seemed impossible. That sort of thing wasn't at all in her line. He simply couldn't see her involved in any surreptitious affair of any sort. For years now he had lived in her house and had watched her steer clear of entanglements and intimacies. She had had no admitted admirers in England, and few men friends. When you came to think of it, she had been peculiarly aloof and isolated in the midst of her crowded world, rather a lonely creature. Could it have been because of some secret, jealously-guarded attachment? But if so, why hadn't she seen the man when she arrived? For he was certain that she had not seen him till that night. Had he, perhaps, once been a friend and become afterwards a detestable memory? Certainly she had been jumpy during the week-end on Long Island, and certainly tonight she had left the Crib in order to avoid him; but then if for some painful reason she wished not to see him, why had she agreed to go and stay with him and his silly, tiresome wife for the week-end, and where, again, did Biddy come in? Biddy, at any rate, was in love with Campbell, that much was clear. They had been hard

at it while the Joyces were in Washington. The rest defeated him. "And it's none of your business," he kept whispering to himself. "You're being extremely indelicate;" but the trouble was that he really was agitated, and when he pinned down his fluttering, distracted attention to the point he found that what agitated him was nothing more nor less than the perfect beauty of the house on Long Island. This fact brought the young man Peter Campbell himself to the fore, and obliged Perky to think about him for a while.

He couldn't help it, he found his heart going out to Peter Campbell because of that excellent achievement. The house had charmed him. It was indescribably better than Wellowburn, and also much more like Frederika, that was the uncanny thing. It was really very hard for Perky to keep his head in all this, for he was, though the fact was known to almost no one, a disappointed artist himself. Once upon a time he had wanted to be a painter, but he had had an indigent mother and an invalid sister to support, so that dream had gone by the board, and now all he could do in the creative line was to write little stories and rhymes for "Punch," which he illustrated with comic drawings; and it was so long ago that no one remembered, and every one took him for granted as the ideal civil servant and private secretary destined from his birth to serve such a man as Victor. He never spoke of his own concerns. He himself alone remembered. But he remembered in a way that drew him irresistibly to artists, especially the struggling, ardent, unrecognised ones, and among his many acquaintances in London these were his real friends; and so it came about that he found himself rather frightened by a situation which he did not understand but felt somehow to be dangerous to Victor, and yet was drawn to this young stranger who

was the cause of all the trouble that threatened. And he was still thinking about him in a wistful, respectful way when he came to the end of his drive. Frederika vouchsafed no apology for dragging him away from the negro club five minutes after they had got there. She had not said a word to him all the way. He thought rather peevisly that he had a right to feel himself badly treated. It wasn't after all much fun being hurried and hustled this way and that by the complications of other people's dramas.

As far as fun went, he was to get less and less. Sent by Frederika to find Victor at the ball, he discovered him in a small shaded room sitting on a couch beside Mrs. Campbell in an attitude of quite decent but fatuous content. They neither of them welcomed him with cordiality, and Victor, when it was suggested to him that Frederika was ready to go home, it being by that time nearly three o'clock in the morning, replied, "Home? I thought she'd gone with Biddy somewhere." And when Perky explained that she had been there and come back, Victor waved him away with the words, "Tell her not to wait for me. I'll be back presently," while Mrs. Campbell, all curls and dimples and fluff, had stared demurely at her toes. The sight of her was too much to be borne. Perky, feeling rather like the proverbial worm, turned in the doorway as he left them and said airily, "By the way, Mrs. Campbell, your husband is found. We found him," and waited just long enough to see her round eyes grow rounder in astonishment before he bolted back to Frederika, to drag her this time into the street and back to the hotel. Half-an-hour later, when they were occupied with chicken sandwiches and a bottle of milk, Victor joined them.

The most interesting event of what was left of the

night, however, and it was only known to Perky in the morning, was that Biddy didn't come home. At ten o'clock in the morning he learned on leaving his room that she hadn't turned up. Victor was furious, Frederika nervous. They were leaving for Campbelltown from the Grand Central Station at noon. Frederika suggested that perhaps they had better put off going. Victor saw no reason on earth for doing anything of the kind. He had washed his hands of Biddy long ago.

"But ", said Frederika, "I'm not at all keen to go anyhow."

"You should have said so before. We can't throw over Mrs. Campbell now."

"You go, Victor, and leave me behind. I really am troubled about Biddy."

"Nonsense. You know perfectly well that I can't go without you, and that people are always getting mislaid in this town. There's that young fella Campbell, he's turned up all right."

And then Perky, who was trying to hide behind the morning paper, gave a jump and said; "Look at this!"

They had none of them noticed on the tenth page of the voluminous journal the announcement of the raid on the Crib. Shootings of that sort were apparently of too common occurrence in New York to merit large type in the press. The news that a negro called Joe had been run in and the coloured singer Carolina Sal shot during the cleaning up of a negro dive in Harlem was conveyed modestly in a few short lines. The fact that certain members of the city's Four Hundred had also been swept within the arm of the law was not mentioned. Whatever Ikey Daw's object had been in going there with his friends of the police that night, it had evidently

not been to send Bridget Prime and Peter Campbell to spend the night in the tombs together and to make of it a newspaper story. But they had spent the night there all the same. Bridget appeared at a quarter-past eleven, in her evening dress and wrap, to tell them so. She came bursting in on them, looking almost plain for once, Perky thought, her hair bedraggled, her eyes burning and her absurd tinsel clothes glittering in the sunlit room that was filled with their week-end luggage. He was at that moment hanging on to the telephone and talking about her to the Chief of Police, Victor was pacing what was available of the floor, and Frederika was standing with her hat and coat on in the window.

Bridget said without preamble, "I must talk to you, Freddie. It's important. Where are you going? What's all this luggage?"

Victor said, "Well, I'm blessed, and where have you been, young woman?"

But Bridget only jerked her head, wiped her hair back from her forehead, and repeated:

"I must talk to you, Freddie. I forgot—of course, you're going to Campbelltown. Please stay behind and go later."

"I'm sorry, Biddy, we're leaving——"

"Yes, and will you kindly tell me where you've been?" Victor growled, beside himself.

"I've been in the tombs. They took me up with the others. Sal's dying, I believe, in a hospital somewhere. Peter's gone to find out. But that's not what I want to talk to you about, Frederika," and then as Victor made a new beginning she said, "Oh, do shut up, Victor." She was evidently not at all herself.

But Frederika had picked up her jewel-case from the table. "I'm just off," she said in a voice that sounded to

Perky curiously cold. "Come, Victor. Come on, Perky. We shall miss our train."

"But Freddie—I must, really I must speak to you. Can't you see? Can't you imagine? Can't you guess what it's about?"

"No, Biddy, I can't. Don't be silly. Have a bath and go to bed. Now that you're safe I really can and must go. If there's any more trouble, ring up Mr. Jamieson. He'll look after you. I've been talking to him. Come, Perky. Good-bye." And she was gone after Victor who was already out in the hall, but Perky, lingering, was startled to hear Biddy saying desperately:

"Tell that Campbell woman to expect me to-morrow. I'm not asked to this party, but I'm coming!"

Mrs. Campbell in her turn was evidently very bothered. She tried to laugh it off, and made a really pathetic effort to appear glad to see them when they boarded the private car that Mr. Jamieson had put at their disposal, but it was clear that she might at any moment burst into tears.

Her husband, she explained, was unavoidably detained in town. He might be able to join them the next day. Would they like to lunch at once? Or to play bridge? Would somebody please turn on the gramophone? Would someone else hurry up the cocktails? Did Mrs. Joyce mind sitting with her back to the engine? Yes, this was her father's car. Where were the cigarettes? Fanny could tell fortunes. Would anyone like to have his fortune told? Yes, the staterooms were really very cute. She chattered on and on endlessly. Her voice, growing shriller and shriller, sounded to Perky above the din of the train like one long agonized scream. What on earth was the matter with the woman? A few hours ago she had been quite undisturbed by the loss of her husband.

If finding him again affected her like this, things looked black indeed for their ill-fated week-end, and he was wondering whether she had best be informed of their knowledge of her husband's short sojourn in jail and of Bridget's intention to join them on the morrow, or whether it was kinder to say nothing, when he heard Victor saying to her:

"Don't distress yourself, Mrs. Campbell. We heard about last night just now from Bridget Prime, and gathered that it amounted to nothing."

"But you're wrong. It does amount to something, at any rate to me. You see, my husband is involved with those niggers financially. I have only just learnt that he held the lease of that place. He went into it to help a darkie called Joe, so Papa says. But now Papa says the nigger will get five years for trafficking in drugs, and it will all come out about Peter's backing him, and oh, I don't know what may happen. Papa, of course, may be able to keep it out of the papers, but it seems that that horrid man Ikey Daw is out to ruin Peter once and for all. He has already just about spoiled his career as an architect, not that I care much about that."

Mrs. Campbell, under the stimulus of a very strong cocktail, was no longer discreet. She talked on, and they were obliged to listen. Some of her young friends—there were half-a-dozen young men and women in the party besides themselves—tried to head her off, but unsuccessfully.

"Oh, come now, Addy, it's not so bad."

"That's all rot, Addy, Ikey Daw can't do anything."

"Why, what difference does it make if it does get into the papers that Pete gave a nigger a leg up? The Crib's no worse than any other place. Why, lots of us have been there lots of times."

But she wailed, "I don't understand you. I can't bear those nigger dives. I don't see how any nice woman or man either can go to such places."

Frederika, after luncheon, sat back disgusted. Her silence was even more frigid than usual. Her gloomy eyes were turned to the flying landscape, and the corners of her mouth were pulled down in a way that betrayed strikingly the scornful bitterness of her thoughts. And Perky watching her felt suddenly very sorry for Peter Campbell who was, he knew, a very great artist and a most unfortunate little man.

The trip was such a nightmare to Perky that he could have cried with relief when he found himself at last, after a frosty drive through the darkening country, in the Campbell house in Campbelltown. It was in its way almost as much of a surprise as the haunted haunting house on Long Island.

"Oh," he said softly, "oh, how simply lovely!"

The hall was large and square, and its panelling was painted white. All the woodwork was white, and in the centre of the ceiling was a round well perhaps twenty feet in diameter surrounded by a spindly white railing and a mahogany balustrade. To this circular gallery on the floor above a very beautiful wide stairway led up on either side of the room. Opposite the front door a fire of birch logs blazed in a wide fireplace. The sparse furniture was old colonial mahogany. A couch and some easy chairs covered with rather faded chintz were drawn up to the blaze. There were one or two portraits in oval frames on the walls, but not many objects or ornaments of any kind. A spinning-wheel stood in a corner. Wax candles in brackets were the only light besides that of the fire. There was a pleasant smell floating about, faintly pungent, of pine and rosin and lavender. The place was serene and

quiet, with a stillness of its own that was not disturbed by their entrance.

He found Frederika beside him staring into the fire. The others had scattered.

"Isn't it charming, Frederika?"

She didn't for a moment answer. She looked, he thought, very tired, but in the firelight the hard bitterness was gone from her face.

"Yes," she said at last, "it is," and she looked at him gravely with a puzzled, sad look. "Let's try to enjoy ourselves, Perky," she added smiling. "I'm afraid I've given you a bad time lately."

But oh, oh, he asked himself, what did it, what could it all mean? And how sad she was! He hadn't somehow the courage to tell her Bidy was coming down the next day.

CHAPTER III

HE would have been even more worried than he already was, though he might have encouraged himself with yells of laughter, had he known what was going on in Addy Campbell's head, for what was developing in it was quite simply the idea of becoming Victor Joyce's wife. She had begun her flirtation with Victor in order to make her husband jealous, but she had lost sight of her object during the brilliant days in Washington when as the one young woman who amused him she had shared with him the limelight. In fact, she had had her head turned, had done a neat *volte-face*, and was facing away from Peter towards England, towards London, towards the wonderful old world of great traditions, great houses, great names, which had always seemed to her so full of glamour and which she told herself was so much more worth while

than her own raw new country. As the wife of a great English statesman, a fascinating vista of influence opened before her. And she saw no important obstacle in her path. Victor Joyce's attitude to herself was read by her to mean that Frederika was none. As for Peter, she was now persuaded that she had all along intended to divorce him anyway. His scandalous affair with Mrs. Prime gave her the best of excuses, to say nothing of the even more shameful business of the negro dance club. Indeed, her father represented the only opposition which she deemed of any consequence. She had had a very unpleasant talk with him the night she got back from Washington, but she knew that in the end she could bring him round, at least to the extent of preventing him from making a public fuss and cutting off her income. She must, however, go slow and be careful. She wished to appear well through it all, in her own eyes and in the eyes of the world. She must appear as the long-suffering wife whose patience had at last given out. The idea of having "an affair" with Victor Joyce she never entertained for a moment. Her relation with him could be read as a harmless flirtation or a grand passion, depending on how it worked out. To be any man's mistress was not at all in keeping with her idea of herself. Such a liaison would be low and immoral, but to divorce Peter and marry the Englishman when he was divorced from his wife would be beautifully romantic.

She had made up her mind to bring Victor to the point of proposing marriage during the week-end. Her plan was then to break the news to Peter after the English party had sailed, and follow them in a month or so, taking up her abode in Paris in her mother's apartment and getting her divorce that way, as so many American women did. Victor, of course, would arrange for his in the

English way. It seemed to her quite easy. She had always done what she wanted, so why shouldn't she now?

In the meantime she must behave beautifully, and put every one else in the wrong. Her father had upset her, he had been very angry, and said things to her about the duties of a wife and her own selfishness which had made her cry with rage and mortification; she had spent a wretched day on Thursday, and a perfectly horrible morning on Friday, when Peter had telephoned to say he was just out of jail and had to go off to see someone in a hospital who had been shot and was perhaps dying, a negro girl—he had actually told her that, bang out—and so couldn't get down to Campbelltown that day. She had been furious, for she had wanted him to be at her house-party, so that the members of her own set would have no chance to talk, that was very important. And so altogether it had been quite horrid, and she had been overwrought in the train, but by Saturday morning, after a gay evening of singing round the piano and dancing in the hall and sentimental pauses with Victor by the fire in the library which did provide a romantic background though it was so shabby, she felt much more herself.

Thanks to her mother and the efficient Miss Brown everything had run smoothly, and every one had been charmed with the house, somewhat to her surprise. The prim bedrooms with their white dimity curtains, gay patchwork quilts, polished floors, and rag rugs, had been dubbed "too cute" by her own vivacious friends, and even Mrs. Joyce and Mr. Parkinson had seemed to like the old place. She had explained to them that it was Early American, built by her husband's great-great-grandfather, and that the Campbells had always lived there ever since before the Revolution, and that Peter hadn't wanted it changed. Mrs. Joyce had been taken with the

old models of ships in the library, and Mr. Parkinson had been interested in the cases of Indian trophies, arrow-heads, strings of wampum, beaded moccasins, and so on, that Miss Brown had wanted to clear away. Addy was glad now that she hadn't had time to do so. She had told them very prettily after dinner about the days when the Indians had lived in the hills and had come down the lake in their canoes to trade with her ancestors, drawing liberally upon her imagination, for she really knew very little about it, and inventing a ghost, the ghost of an Indian chieftain, for the house; and Mrs. Joyce, pale and monosyllabic as usual, had turned to Mr. Parkinson and said, "Yes, there is something rather nice and eerie, don't you feel it, Perky?" so that Adelaide had felt her house-party to be a success.

Saturday morning dawned frosty and clear, a beautiful autumn day. The last leaves on the trees still made splashes of vivid colour in the brown woods, shreds of white mist floated about the still lake that could be seen beyond the village at the bottom of the hill. Sunlight flooded the old white-panelled rooms that were awake again after so long, and from whose open windows came the sound of gay voices calling good-morning, the tinkle of breakfast trays, the splashing of baths, and all the pleasant bustling sounds of people getting ready for a day of sport. In the stable-yard too all was bustle. Addy's own hunters and some others out of her father's stables had been sent up the week before from Long Island. The young New Yorkers had their own. Miss Brown had found extra stabling for them in the village. Miss Brown, sitting in a little room next the pantry with a telephone at her elbow, saw to everything so well that no one would have known that all this elaborate business of entertainment and hospitality had been thrown together

on the spur of the moment. Things were being quite as well done as in any English house, Addy thought with satisfaction, sipping the glass of orange-juice which, with a cup of black coffee, formed her breakfast. She had nothing to do but enjoy herself, and she meant to enjoy herself. Even when, on coming downstairs, she was handed a telegram from Peter saying that he was motoring down and would arrive that afternoon with Mrs. Prime, she didn't allow herself to be ruffled. She hated Mrs. Prime, of course, but she intended to use her, so her coming fitted rather well into the general scheme. Moreover, she knew that she looked very fetching in her riding breeches and short coat, and she was pleased to note that Mr. Joyce, who was waiting for her in the hall, thought so too. She drew a satisfactory comparison between herself and Frederika as she swung herself up astride her little chestnut horse in front of the shallow pillared porch. Mrs. Joyce was really too thin and lanky for words. Her stiff black habit hung on her as if on a clothes-rack. There seemed to be nothing but a very long backbone and several yards of cloth between her small, stiffly veiled hat and her boots. Adelaide's idea was to drop out of the hunt with Victor early in the afternoon—he grumbled a good deal about not having hunted for years, which made it all the easier—and ride home with him alone. She had mounted him on one of her father's very best hunters, which she had wheedled out of Mr. Jamieson with some difficulty, and Mr. Joyce had been pleased to say that he liked the looks of the animal.

She took in with a self-congratulatory pleasure the gay scene, the beautiful restless horses, the laughing handsome men and women who were her friends, the really charming dilapidated old house with its long rows of green shutters flung wide, and the village street stretch-

ing away from the bottom of the hill; and then just as they were turning down the drive and making for the gate, she saw Christopher, her terrible brother-in-law, leaning over the white fence and gesticulating at her. She flushed scarlet. She saw that she would have to pass close by him. She was overwhelmed with annoyance and humiliation. He looked, she noticed, even more crazy than usual. He had on a shabby coat. His narrow head was bare and the wind had blown his rather long wavy hair into his eyes. He was blinking and smirking into the sun and waving his hand. She decided quickly to pretend that she didn't know who he was. One of the grooms had run ahead to open the gate. Victor was beside her, and Frederika behind with Jim Prescott. How unfortunate that Jim should have come over from his farm to join them! He knew Christopher, of course, as every one did who lived in Campbelltown. The others had no idea that she had an imbecile brother-in-law. If Jim Prescott gave her away—her heart sickened. And then in another moment as she passed through the gate not a yard from Christopher, the awful man leaned forward, made a wicked, vicious face, and stuck his tongue out at her. She was so horrified that she scarcely knew what she was doing, was scarcely aware of raising her riding crop and of shouting to the groom, "Turn that man out!" and as she dug her spurs into her horse and clattered wildly down the frosty, slippery hill, she actually did not see Chris suddenly cower under her threatening gesture and cover his head with his arms.

Perky, left behind alone on the porch, could not quite make out what had happened at the gate, but he saw the groom, after the cavalcade had passed, take hold of the young man who was hanging over the fence with his head on his arms by the shoulder and give him a push down

the drive; and when the clatter of hoofs had died away in the direction of the lake, he saw a little woman in black come up from the direction of the village and join the young man who was wavering uncertainly down the drive, seeming to stumble, to slip among the dead leaves and to be wringing his hands. She stopped him, appeared to reason with him, then put her hand through his arm and led him away; and Perky saw the two slight figures going down through the sunlight towards the village. He followed them with his gaze as far as the bridge over the little river, saw them stop there, and saw the young man turn and look back towards the house and wave one arm, while the little lady in black clung to the other and urged him forward; and presently they were hidden from view by the trees. He wondered who they were. There was something very pathetic about them.

The episode spoilt Adelaide's morning. She didn't dare look in Jim Prescott's direction. She had no means of telling whether the others had noticed anything, but she imagined that Mr. Joyce was more stiff than usual, and she thought she detected a sneer on Mrs. Joyce's icy face. That woman was really too withering. What right had she to give herself airs? Adelaide smarted under that look of real or imagined contempt. She knew that she had done something shocking and impossible. Well, Christopher had no right to come hanging round. What did his mother mean by letting him loose like that? He gave her the shudders. And really it was too awful, she had seen it in a flash at the gate, he was dreadfully like Peter. You couldn't mistake their being brothers. Could Peter, too, be a little, a shade half-witted? She felt suddenly very nervous and frightened, as if she had come in contact with some unclean infection. Suppose all those wild moods of Peter's were signs of mental decay!

The Campbell blood was certainly rotten. Well, she would soon be free of them all. And oh, she did long to be rid of them, and to be the cherished wife of this great, strong, magnificent Englishman who would look after her and enthrone her in his old strong established English world. But she would have to be clever. She would have to efface the bad impression of that horrid occurrence at the gate. She didn't feel quite sure of Victor. She must do something, something that would bind him and make him definitely hers, "enslave him" was the expression she used to herself, turning the matter round and round in her head as she flew after him across country, over fences and brooks, and along the frosty sunlit slopes of Jordan Valley.

And so it happened that Frederika, having lost hounds about four o'clock—her horse wasn't very fast nor a very good jumper, and she didn't, of course, know the country, and her escort, the good-looking young Mr. Prescott, who had offered to give her a lead and had been very nice about looking after her, had come to grief in a brook—Frederika, wandering about near some farm buildings, looking for someone to show her the way home, observed two riders standing in a lane, their horses close together, and recognised her husband just as the man leaning over in his saddle kissed the lady's lifted face. She had turned her own horse's head at that and gone off in the opposite direction without being observed, and had simply ridden on through the unfamiliar, darkening country, not bothering much where she was, since her own thoughts were very absorbing, until she had happened at last to come upon a nice trim white house behind a gate with light streaming from its windows and someone dismounting in front of it, and had found it to be Jim Prescott himself, who lived there, and told her

that she was twenty miles from Campbelltown; and he had insisted on giving her tea before he drove her home.

It was late when she got back. They were all drowsily gathered in the hall, with the remains of a rich American afternoon meal of coffee, waffles, corn pone and hot bread on the centre table when she came in, and Peter Campbell was standing in front of the fire facing the door. She hung there a moment taking in the scene. Jim Prescott had refused to come in. She heard his car going off down the drive, and had for an instant an hysterical longing to run after him and ask him to take her away; but of course she did nothing of the sort, she merely stood there in her muddy habit and boots, leaning against the door and staring at the wide low room with the firelight flickering the white panelling, and the candle flames mirrored in the polished floor.

She saw Bridget in her hat and coat talking to Perky, and Victor in an easy chair smoking his pipe, with Adelaide on a low stool beside him turning the pages of a picture paper. The gramophone was going, of course, and a couple still in riding kit were moving lazily round the table in a sleepy one-step. It all looked and sounded very far away. For a minute or so she couldn't move. She felt like some sort of tall black invisible ghost, and she thought, "If I do join them they won't see me, and if I speak they won't hear"; and the impression that she had nothing any more to do with these people, save perhaps one, the fair young man whose presence she dreaded, was so strong that she felt really incapable of making a movement, until they caught sight of her and someone called out, "Here she is," and Bridget cried, "Freddie darling!" and Adelaide jumping up shrieked, "Dear Mrs. Joyce, we were so worried till Jim telephoned. Where is he?" but it was Peter who came forward shyly,

though in the most charming and natural way in the world, and greeted her with the words, "I thought something dreadful had happened again, at last, after thirty years, to prevent my meeting you."

Perky, blinking behind his spectacles and watching as usual, and more than ever painfully aware of fine shades in the troubled atmosphere, was struck by something defiant in the way she threw her head back when they called out. She had conveyed to him an impression of wanting to bolt, and then of standing at bay. He imagined that she was quivering. She reminded him of some frightened, wild animal, but he saw her control whatever the dangerous impulse was and look down kindly and gravely at Campbell, who was several inches shorter than she, and heard her say in her usual abrupt way, "It is thirty-four years, you know, to be exact."

It was all very strange to Perky. He felt all at once perfectly calm and convinced about everything, with all his reluctant nervous curiosity satisfied. He simply knew as they stood there that those two were very old friends, and when Adelaide said, "For heaven's sake, have you two met before?" and Frederika answered casually, "Yes, in England, when we were——" and Victor interrupting asked, "What's this? You did come down to our place then after all?" and Frederika, after a pause just long enough to send a quick oblique look from Peter to Victor that was like the turn of a knife-blade, answered curtly, "Yes, he did come down to Wellowburn," Perky knew all the time that she was lying, and yet was speaking the truth in a sense that no one there understood except perhaps Peter Campbell himself; for the young man had flushed under her look, and then at these words of hers had gone white as if under the stress of a quick profound emotion. Indeed, it was all so quick and made up of such swift

slight flashes that Perky, hugging himself in a kind of excruciating ecstasy, wondered at himself for seeing it; but he did see it, while they stood there, the two of them, facing the group, for not more than a minute at most; and he did see, when Frederika suddenly dropped the young man and strode across the floor to join them by the fire, and wheeling took up her stand there, and looking down at Victor said, "Extraordinary, isn't it, that you shouldn't remember?" and gave a short, harsh laugh, not only that she was very excited and keeping a strong hold on herself, but that her words and gestures were fraught with a special significance. For each one of them was by way of being a refusal to do something else more violent probably, or a denial that anything had happened to her or that there was anything the matter. She took off her hard hat and mopped her face, which was pale and had a smear of mud on the left cheek, with her silk handkerchief.

Adelaide was keeping it up. "But Peter, you never told me. He never said a word, Mrs. Joyce, about ever having met you."

"Didn't he?" Frederika swung her hat gently and tapped her boot with her riding-crop.

Victor pulled himself forward in his chair, screwed his eye-glass into his eye and stared at Peter.

"Fancy my forgetting you. When was it you came down?"

Mr. Campbell looked rather flummoxed at that, not exactly frightened, but taken aback, Perky thought. He seemed to appeal to Frederika to tell him when it was.

Frederika smiled rather wickedly. "Perhaps you weren't there the last time, Victor."

"The last time? Do you mean to say you were there more than once?"

Campbell, then, as if he had got his cue and knew now what to do, grinned pleasantly. "Yes, sir, several times."

"He had, in a way, the run of the place," said Frederika. "He came", she paused and looked straight, with a level deep gaze, at the young man, "often. Didn't you?" But her changes of mood seemed to affect him painfully. She seemed to be too quick for him, to take his breath away.

"Yes," he muttered, scarce audibly, "often."

"Well, I'm blest. I don't understand how I could have missed you," snarled Victor, throwing himself back. Adelaide was not going to be headed off so easily.

"But where did you first meet, and when?"

"In Cornwall first, when we were children," answered Frederika again, but quite calmly and pleasantly. "Your husband was five, I was six, nearly seven. Weren't you five then, Mr. Campbell?" He nodded. "And the next time—when was the next time, I forget?"

"In nineteen-twelve in Paris."

"Ah, yes, in Paris," murmured Frederika.

"And the year after in Vienna at the Opera. They were doing 'La Bohème'. Do you remember?"

"Of course." Frederika took a cigarette from a box. "Can you give me a light, Perky?"

He was convinced by now that she was playing with them all, and as he struck a match and held it for her, he found her eyes as she leaned forward level with his own and challenging him. It was as if she had spoken and said, "I defy you to interfere with my little game." Well, he wouldn't, he couldn't, how could he? All this was terribly beyond him, and what right had he to be angry with her for making a fool of Victor if that was her object, and if that was really what she was doing? But was she? And if she was, wasn't it a little hard on Peter Campbell

to be used in that way just because she was angry with Victor? Victor could look after himself. Even then, with the Adelaide Campbell situation pervading the house like a music-hall tune everlastingly humming in everybody's ears, Perky knew that Victor could look after himself. That sort of thing didn't matter to Victor, but it mattered very much, Perky suspected, to his host with the pleasing, sensitive face, who seemed so very young and naïve and had the misfortune to be an artist. Such youth only went, and then only rarely, with genius, Perky reflected, sinking back into his corner and hugging his knees and feeling somehow very sorry for Peter Campbell who, like Shelley and Keats, was bound to make a mess of his human relationships because he really only understood beauty and really only lived as it were in his sleep. And after that it seemed to Perky, looking from Victor to Adelaide and from Bridget to Frederika, and to Peter Campbell, that each of them began an elaborate attempt at hoodwinking all the others as to their real thoughts and feelings, but that, of them all, the one consummate, because desperately serious, actor in the farce was his host.

Adelaide multiplied herself as the attentive solicitous hostess. She was so perfectly delighted, she said, when Frederika made a movement towards going up to dress, that Mrs. Prime had come, and she was sure that they wouldn't mind doubling up. She was terribly sorry but she would have to put her into Mr. Joyce's room and ask Frederika to let him share hers. Frederika said certainly, that would be perfect, but she told Miss Brown on the upper landing within earshot of them all that Mr. Joyce would stay where he was and Mrs. Prime would sleep in one of the twin beds in her room, it really wasn't worth while moving all his things.

There was at the same time a certain strangeness between Frederika and Bridget. They had exchanged a couple of words by the fire and then drawn apart, and Bridget had turned to Perky saying, "Be kind, Perky, talk to me. I've had the most awful night and morning in a hospital," and then after Frederika had gone up, someone had turned on the gramophone again and a deep hoarse, terrible voice had come wailing through the room:

"They say the darkies long ago
Were looking for a tune,"

and Bridget had called out; "For God's sake stop Carolina Sal's voice. She's dead. She died this morning,* and Peter had gone over and taken the record from the machine and broken it in two, but he did it quietly, as if merely to please Bridget; and when they all plied him with questions he answered in a tired, absent-minded sort of way that yes, she was dead, and he'd been to see her, so had Bridget. They had both been there when she died. But Bridget said it had been awful, and please would they not talk about it, because the big coloured girl had been terribly afraid to die; and then she had gone upstairs after Frederika, to leave Peter explaining to his wife that it looked as if the negro Joe were going to be tried for murder. Peter had been to see him, too, in jail that morning. He, Peter, should have stayed in town. He would have stayed, except that he had felt it even more important to come down to Campbelltown than to stay with Joe. All this had been rather strange and dreadful; but the young New Yorkers had taken it lightly, gone on mixing cocktails and fox-trotting, and said that those niggers always ended up that way, anyhow; and Peter had not contradicted them, and seemed to pay little attention to any of them.

It would have taken a very refined, perceptive faculty like Perky's to see that there was anything wrong with him or that he, too, was playing a game, and for the very highest stakes. What was at stake for him even Perky didn't know, nor did Bridget, though she knew a good deal by that time, nor did Frederika, perhaps because she couldn't bring herself to admit it. In any case, Peter didn't lose his head or give himself away. If he was playing one of the most desperate games of poker that had ever been played in America from Idaho to New York, he was doing it according to the best traditions of Bret Harte's wild west stories: and the Colt revolver was hidden under the table, and he laughed and gave his opponents a long line of talk, and was slow about putting his cards on the table.

At dinner that night with Frederika and Bridget on either side of him he was merely a very charming host, and if occasionally Frederika took him up quickly without waiting for him to finish a sentence, knowing beforehand what he meant, and he in his turn seemed to understand her when she made some brief allusion to something that seemed to Perky and Bridget to have no connection with the matter in hand, this was only gradually noticeable. He did not seem to be talking to Frederika more than to anyone else, until towards the end of the meal, when they both seemed to have slipped unconsciously into a conversation made up of fragments of phrases, quick responses and terse recognitions that being incomprehensible to their neighbours at the long candle-lit table, shut everyone else out. By that time it was true that he was leaning forward in the candlelight and looking exclusively towards Frederika, who sat back very straight with her head high; but for all his absorption in her his manner was distant, impersonal, the reverse of sentimental, and

there was a firm precision about his utterance that made him appear to Perky much older and much more brainy than he had at first thought him. He and Frederika were by the time the ice had arrived talking shop, a rather special sort of shop, Perky noted, since it had to do not only with steel structures and engineering but with the relation of art to science. And what was the significance of this new astounding American architecture, Frederika wondered, in the great scheme of things? She had had, she said, an impression on her first night in New York of seeing the world of the future, but that wasn't what she meant. There seemed to be a certain amount of magic going on in the world of mechanical invention, and somehow she was teased by the thought that perhaps these new discoveries in mechanics were going to be, oddly enough, the proof of a controlling or central spring in the universe that was not material but ideal.

"Certainly," he had answered. "Anyone who works with wireless, for instance, knows that the stuff of the physical universe is the same as the stuff of our minds. A friend of mine is experimenting now with a mechanical appliance that can influence men's thoughts at a distance. It is all a question of sensitiveness. Some day soon we shall have made a plate sensitive enough to register the presence of ghosts in haunted houses, and echo to our ears the voices of the dead."

"Carolina Sal's voice sounded to-night——" put in Bridget, but Frederika ignored her interruption. "You must assume for that that there are departed spirits hovering over the earth. Suppose there are none? It is like throwing a bridge into the void."

"But that is what we are doing all the time. Every new invention is a leap in the dark and a bridge thrown out across the void. If you find it holds, you cross over,

if it doesn't you try again in some other spot in the unknown."

Bridget, save for an occasional remark, had long ago lapsed into silence, and with her lovely round chin in her hands was listening, her eyes fixed gravely on Frederika's face, which, perhaps because of some trick of the candle-light, appeared to Perky to be softer and more animated than usual. He couldn't make out what Bridget was thinking. She had not made the slightest effort to talk to Peter Campbell since she had arrived, and now as she stared across at Frederika, who was looking handsomer than Perky had ever seen her, there was no shadow of annoyance on her face, but a look so direct, so compelling, so grave and friendly that it, too, seemed fraught with a particular meaning. Victor, at the other end of the gleaming mahogany behind crystal and candles and porcelain, didn't seem to be saying much to Mrs. Campbell. Every now and then he looked in his wife's direction. He could see her dark cropped head that she held so well and so high, her long throat encircled by his great-grandmother's pearls, and the fold of her black velvet gown over her shoulder. Perhaps he was remembering Wellowburn, and his own distant dinner-table.

There was something rich and sombre about Frederika to-night that suggested a more formal grandeur than was suitable to her present surroundings. She gave a certain air and elegance to the table that would otherwise have been lacking. Her sables had slipped low on her shoulders. She had gathered them against her breast with one of her long emaciated hands. The other rested on the table holding a cigarette. Her thin arm was weighted with a number of heavy bangles. Small sparks of light glistened in their stones, and in the large pearls in her ears, and in her small black eyes. Her face was ashy pale as usual,

and as usual her lips were vermilion. Exotic she certainly looked, but strong and defiant. Her backbone was straight. Her shoulders were back, her head was up. If she had been drilled to it in a gymnasium she couldn't have sat better, and she was talking quietly and seemed so perfectly at ease that one felt she might sit on like that all night.

They didn't sit long however, because a note was brought in for Mr. Campbell, which he said was from his mother and asked permission to read. On doing so, he became obviously distressed, and when his wife got up said he would have to excuse himself for an hour, his brother was not at all well, and he must go to him.

Mrs. Campbell had seemed annoyed at that and had said, "Oh, bother. It can't be anything serious. I saw him this mor—" and had then stopped and turned very red.

Her husband took her up quickly. "You saw Chris? Where? Did you go down to see mother?"

She stammered, "No. I couldn't get to the village. I didn't have time, but I thought I saw Chris walking down by the lake about a mile from here."

"You couldn't have, Addy. He's in bed with a high temperature. Anyhow, I'm sorry, but I must go," and he made for the door, but she went after him. "Please don't, Peter. Send someone else. Let me send Miss Brown. It'll be quite time enough in the morning. If you go you'll spoil our evening. Look, it's snowing."

He was gently impatient. "Snowing? So it is. What difference does that make? Let me go, Addy. I'll be back as quick as I can. Inside an hour."

But he wasn't. The evening wore on sleepily. Adelaide drifted off to the library with Victor, who was reluctant. The others were all drowsy from the long day

in the open air, except Perky, and Bridget who had really every reason to be tired; and when at last after some desultory talk and half-hearted bridge the women went up to bed, their host hadn't yet returned, nor had their hostess reappeared.

It was Frederika who gave the signal, loudly yawning into her hand at the card-table, and it was she who dragged Bridget up out of her chair where she had been sitting for an hour in silence by the fire. "Come, Biddy, I'm dead."

They looked down together over the railing on the floor above and said good-night.

"Good-night, Perky dear."

"Good-night."

The wind had risen a little and it was snowing hard, someone said. One had the sense of it, in the warm lighted bedrooms, the sense of all that soft whiteness falling, falling, drifting down, silently through the dark.

"Suppose we were snowed up here," Bridget said to Frederika in their room, piling logs from the basket on the fire. "Then I wonder what would happen."

"I don't suppose anything would happen except that we should all get very bored. I don't know what you mean."

"Well then, I'll tell you. I have quite a lot to tell you."

"I'm too sleepy to talk, Biddy."

"You must keep awake for a little, my dear."

The room was not very large. It had twin mahogany four-poster beds, quite narrow, with white dimity valances. The floor was bare save for some gay but faded rugs of woven cotton. There was one comfortable chair covered in a pretty chintz. The rest of the furniture was stiff and old, and rather lovely in a prim, severe style. The cold night crept in through the thin hangings of the

windows. Small snowdrifts lay on the window-sills. Frederika, wrapping herself in a warm dressing-gown, said, "I rather like your young man."

"He's not my young man." Bridget's voice was emphatic.

"Oh?" Frederika lifted her eyebrows.

"He's yours, body and soul."

Bridget took the pillow from her bed, put it on the hearth, and sat down on it cross-legged with her back to the blaze. "Don't pretend not to understand, and please listen to what I have to say. Perhaps you'll attend to me if I admit at once that I had fallen in love with him, well, rather badly, so you see I'm not doing this for fun but because I've got to. When we were taken up by the police at that place the Crib, he was on the point of going after you. The sight of your face, my dear, had wiped me clean out of his mind. I didn't exist for him any more."

Frederika, running a comb through her hair before the worn mirror of the dressing-table that gave back a blurred reflection, said nothing. So Bridget went on:

"I've not been very lucky in my loves, have I? I suppose I've got a beautiful face. Well, it hasn't brought me much luck so far, seeing that I've only cared for two men in my life and neither of them can bear the sight of me now."

"What nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense. It's the truth. Peter Campbell hates me, or at least he would hate me if he weren't such a very kind man."

Frederika, turning, said, "What on earth are you talking about? You and he seem to understand each other perfectly."

"We do. We had it all out. He told me in the nicest

way in the world, while we sat in the police station, that he had always been in love with you and had been waiting to meet you for fifteen years, and I understood, though he didn't say so, that he hated me for getting in the way. He was, I could see, perfectly frantic at the thought, at the fact, you know, of my face getting between him and his—well, call it his memory of you, but the idea that you had been here for three weeks in this country without his knowing it seemed somehow to be for him the worst of all. He couldn't get over that. He sat there white to the lips saying over and over, 'Why didn't I know? How could I not have known?' He seemed to blame himself terribly, to feel he had committed some awful crime. He said something about having been warned not to go to Chicago on a certain Tuesday. It was the day our boat arrived in New York. We worked it all out together in the police station. He kept asking me questions about dates and trains. At what hour exactly did the ship dock? When was it that you left for Washington? Where were you on a certain morning? What day was it that I called you up on long distance from Washington? He was really quite tiresome about all that. It was rather a strain. I gave him as much precise data about your movements as I could."

Frederika had come over to the easy chair by the fire, and was sitting now staring into it. The birch logs spluttered and simmered. Little lovely blue flames wavered up from some bits of driftwood. The wind outside was sighing and moaning in a melancholy, weary sort of way. She shivered slightly. Victor's step sounded in the corridor, and presently the two women heard him moving about in his room. At last they heard the bed creak as he got into it. When Bridget spoke again she had lowered her voice.

"I thought you ought to know, Freddie, because this sort of thing doesn't happen often, and it is or ought to be to you rather touching, the fact, I mean, of this man thinking about you all these years with you away off there in England. At any rate it seemed necessary to tell you that I no longer counted, that I'm out of it, so that you wouldn't have the excuse of missing the point because of me." She paused. Frederika still said nothing. There was silence between them again for a little while, after which Bridget said drily, "I suppose I'm not to mention Victor in all this business?"

"No, I don't think we'll bring Victor into it."

"Well, that's just as you please, but you may be interested to know that you are likely to have Mrs. Campbell a good deal on your hands in the future."

"But we sail early on Wednesday morning. We go aboard the night before."

"Exactly. You sail in three days, and if you don't do something about it you will probably never see Peter Campbell again, but you will see plenty of Adelaide. She means to divorce him and live in England."

Frederika gave a start and frowned. "How do you know?"

"Peter told me to-day on the way down. It seems that yesterday morning, when he went home, just before leaving to join you at the train, she told him that she was sick of New York and had decided to close her apartment after Christmas. She takes a house in London for next season."

Frederika looked at it for a moment, and it looked, to judge by her expression, unpleasant, but presently she said with a slight jerk of her head :

"Victor's only been having a bit of fun."

Bridget shrugged her shoulders. "You know more about that than I do, my dear, but I should say——"

"Please don't say, Biddy."

"Oh, all right, but for God's sake do face it yourself."

"Face what?"

"Victor, and all your life with him, and his crass stupid blindness to—to everything—but most of all to you, darling, to you, to everything about you that this other man understands and adores, somehow, as if by magic, by some magical intuition. I tell you, Frederika, that this thing is—very odd, so odd that you must do something about it."

"And what would you have me do? Chuck Victor and go off with this young American?" She gave a harsh little laugh.

"Why not?"

"It strikes me as quite mad, my dear."

"Well, why not be mad for a change?"

And at that Frederika unexpectedly covered her face with her hands and seemed to quiver from head to foot, but silently, making no sound at all. Bridget, cross-legged on her cushion, watched her and made no movement of sympathy.

"Peter Campbell is not ordinary," she said. "He is a genius, you know that, and his life is in pieces. He is being kicked out of his firm, and as an architect he is for the time being ruined, at any rate he believes so. I am partly responsible for that. It was Ikey Daw's doing. Thanks to Ikey Daw, they have thrown all Peter's designs and plans that he has been working at for a year into the waste-paper basket. Another bit of good work done by my face. He took it hard, very hard, but now that you've arrived on the scene, he doesn't care any more. Even his beautiful block skyscraper doesn't count. It counts no more than big Joe, the nigger, with his black face gone grey with terror, looking through the bars of his cell like

a gorilla in a cage. He'll probably swing for shooting his girl, Carolina Sal. They were Peter's friends. Joe loved Peter. But Peter doesn't care now, even for them, not really, since you came. Everything, you see, is comparative, and you have blotted everything out, me, Joe and his gallows, Carolina Sal's awful deathbed, Adelaide Campbell's heartless idiocy, even his own profession, even New York, the city of the future that he was so in love with. None of it, and none of us matter in comparison with you. Funny, isn't it? Well, it's true. I know, and I was determined that you should. Now let's go to bed."

She had only one thing more to say, apparently, and this she said from under her quilt when they were stretched side by side in their twin beds in the dark.

"Things are very bad for Peter just now," she said wearily, "but all the same, if he were happy, he would do great things yet, better things, I imagine, than he has ever done."

Her voice was little more than a murmur. When it stopped Frederika could hear the fire fluttering and the wind sighing in the chimney. She lay awake a long time listening, and Bridget lay awake, too, but they did not talk any more; and there were other people as well awake in the house that night, Victor and Perky and Adelaide were all awake, and outside the snow was still falling.

Down in the darkened village, within the circles of light made by the street lamps, you could see the snowflakes whirling and dancing. Amanda Campbell saw them when she came to her door to say good-night to Peter. A blast of wind and snow flew in as she opened it.

"Good-night, Mother."

"Good-night."

"I'll come in to-morrow."

"Do, Peter, for Chris's sake."

From the windows of the cold unlighted drawing-room she watched him, her face close to the glass, go down the street with his lantern, and pass under the arc of light that was all powdered with small white particles, then she went back to sit beside Christopher's bed. All night she sat there, dozing now and then in her chair, and waking with a start, ready to tuck the warm blankets round him or to talk to him. Once or twice she said, "But you must keep covered up, Chris, you mustn't kick the blankets off again. Yes, I know, but you simply must be all hot and sticky," and once she said desperately on a soft note of appeal—"Oh, can't you be good, Chris, just for a little?" Her voice was exactly the same voice that had spoken the same words in the same house thirty years ago to a small boy, and the snow was covering Campbelltown and Jordan Valley with a soft white quilt, just as it had done in that bygone time.

CHAPTER IV

It was Perky who in the end warned Victor and made him understand that he must cut short the Adelaide Campbell affair at once if he didn't want his marriage to go smash. It was very disagreeable to him to do this. He had the nicest appreciative feeling for Frederika. He had never admired her so much, and he hated seeing himself as a busybody. Indeed, he sympathised with them all quite painfully, but however much he might suffer through his faculty for understanding, and however much he might feel drawn to the ardent young architect Peter Campbell, he was bound to do it, because Victor's life was in the last analysis so much his own that with Victor's life in a mess his own would have become an intolerable burden and reproach to him.

He simply couldn't contemplate Victor recrossing the Atlantic alone to appear in the London Divorce Court for the purpose of demanding the restitution of his conjugal rights over Frederika who had bolted with an American to the scandal of two continents and the British Isles. Victor might and undoubtedly would survive such a blow and such a scandal. His grandfather had done worse before him, and continued to be a trusted Minister of the Crown. What then? Adelaide Campbell would most certainly get him, and Victor would find himself landed with a skittish new addle-pated curly-headed wife masquerading at Wellowburn as a modern edition of his own naughty exquisite great-grandmother. The thing was unthinkable and preposterous. Perky couldn't bear to look at it, and yet all through that hideous Sunday which would have appeared to an innocent eye so beautiful and so gay, with the modest American village and the wooded American hills covered with snow, and a few scarlet maples still flaming against all that whiteness, and the sun coming out about noon in a pale blue sky to sparkle through the frosted windows, and sleigh-bells jingling down the village street, and shouting children shooting down the slope on their toboggans and floundering up again—all that day he was obliged to look at it and watch it developing in all its awful ridiculous inverisimilitude under his nose. For why, he asked himself at last in desperation, throwing all delicacy overboard and plunging head first into the business of trying to make out what they were at, did Frederika go off for a long tramp in the morning with Peter Campbell if she weren't immensely taken with the young man, and being so taken with him what did that mean but that she accepted the extraordinary compliment of that lovely accursed ghostly house on Long Island, and all the rest of it;

accepted in fact the very odd basis of what to be polite one might call their life-long friendship? And why, if she wanted him, Perky, to keep his hands off, did she ask her host, in the most open brazen manner at the luncheon table, to take her to call on his mother, whom she had known so well as a child? If it were simply that she didn't propose to be shut up behind those frosted windows in the same house with Victor, she could have gone bob-sledding with the rest of them; but no, off she went at three o'clock with Campbell and didn't come back till five, and then sailed in looking wantonly handsome in her snowy tweeds, and with her eyes shining in a strange way that gave him the most awful sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. So that really by evening he knew—at any rate he was sufficiently convinced to feel quite ill with suspense over it—that she was hovering on the brink of one of those devastating passions he sometimes read about in trashy novels.

He scoffed; he fumed; he poked himself in the ribs and was convulsed with mirth over the impossible absurdity, all this figuratively and in a manner of speaking inwardly, while he sat by one fire or another, or hung about at people's elbows, or wandered from one gay couple or group to another. Some were roasting apples or chestnuts, some were popping corn in strange wire cages attached to long handles; you held the thing over the fire while the popcorn popped and became all fluffy and white, and then you poured molasses over it and ate it and got very sticky; some were telling fortunes with cards, and one pretty girl gave him red-hot chestnuts that burnt his tongue, and another gave him a charred apple, and another said—"Come and see what the future has in store for you, Mr. Parkinson." He had never been more miserable in his life.

And that night they had a party. Adelaide Campbell had invited some of the Jordan Valley hunt to a country supper and dance. "I'm going to show you what real American cooking is, Mr. Joyce," she had said in her high smart real American voice, tossing her curly head, wriggling her hips and flashing her eyes and her dimples and her little white teeth at him in what Perky was pleased to call bitterly the real American way. Well, he was obliged to admit it, the food was more tempting and infinitely more satisfying when you came to grips with it, than his hostess's bright brittle charms, of that he was certain. It was succulent, heavy, and full of strange spices that tickled the palate. They all sat round on chairs against the wall with their plates in their laps, and the table groaning with good things in the middle. There was fried chicken with a thick brown creamy sauce served with crisp bacon and corn fritters. There were half-a-dozen kinds of hot bread, fried bread and pop-overs, and soda biscuit, like scones, and graham muffins. There were bowls of lobster salad; and hot lobster Newburg and creamed oysters and creamed mushrooms simmering in silver chafing-dishes. By way of sweets there were pumpkin-pies flavoured with cinnamon, hot mince-pies, small plum-puddings, cinnamon rolls, gingerbread, very flaky and sticky, a large black sodden kind of chocolate cake called Devil's food, luscious and most indigestible, and various kinds of ices. In addition to these dainties, there was a spiced ham and a couple of cold turkeys and a cold roast goose on the sideboard, and Peter Campbell made Johnny cake from a paste of Indian meal on a plank in front of the fire, and Adelaide made Welsh rarebit on still another chafing-dish. The repast had been introduced, of course, by cocktails, and was washed down with beer or cider or Burgundy or champagne, or large cups of

hot coffee freely diluted with thick rich cream, whichever you preferred, or a mixture of them all.

Mr. Parkinson expected the guests at this succulent banquet to sink into a pleasant stupor on leaving the dining-room. Not a bit of it. They began at once to play games. The hall had been cleared already for blind-man's-buff, and blindman's-buff they played, and Victor when it was his turn was forced to have his eyes bandaged and to grope and lunge about in the air for ten minutes while shrieks of delight from pretty young women perched on the backs of sofas and chairs cheered him on, and other young women leapt through space behind him, before him, all round him, and Frederika leaned against the wall in a scarlet frock, laughing like a girl of sixteen, with Campbell beside her, laughing too, but with a face as white as a sheet. And after that they acted charades, and then they played hide-and-seek all over the house in the dark, and Perky found himself shut into a black stifling cupboard with Biddy who seemed to have gone perfectly wild, and hissed into his ear:

"If you do anything to spoil all this, Perky, I'll kill you."

And he, breathless and wretched and quite sick with apprehension and pumpkin-pie, had snarled back, "Spoil what?" and she had answered, "You know what I mean. You saw Frederika's face to-night. I caught you staring at her. Did you ever see her look happy like that before? Or did you never bother to notice at Wellowburn what she looked like?" And then one of the young Americans had found them and dragged them out of their beastly cupboard, and made them tiptoe through the dark corridors to squat in a heap with the others under the dining-room table. And after that Biddy had begun to flirt outrageously with a horrid fat-faced young man

who had had too much to drink; and when at last they all settled down in their exhaustion to dancing like ordinary human beings, she disappeared with him in the direction of the dining-room and the butler's pantry, where at two o'clock in the morning she was discovered by Perky and Jim Prescott—the fat boy had come back into the hall alone and mumbled something to young Prescott—lying drunk across the pantry table with a bottle of whisky beside her.

It hadn't needed this to tell him that it was all ghastly and horrible, but this did clinch the matter for him, and remove all hesitancy from his mind. He and Mr. Prescott, who was quite a decent sort and very much concerned, had got poor Bidy up the back stairs and into her room, and on to her bed, and he had then gone in search of Frederika. The party was breaking up as he came down the lovely shallow stairs, and the hall presented a disorderly appearance. A chair was overturned. The wax candles were dripping and spluttering. Several of the men who were saying good-bye to Adelaide Campbell were unsteady on their feet. Victor, planted stolidly in front of the fireplace, was surveying the scene with a wooden countenance, the other members of the house party were there, but neither Frederika nor Peter Campbell was visible.

He found them after some wandering in a small sitting-room which he had never before entered in the far end of the east wing. This little apartment he saw was even more prim and bare and faded than any of the others. The coverings of the few stiff chairs were worn, and had evidently not been renewed for many years. The armchair in which Frederika sat was a tufted Early Victorian affair in faded rose plush, rather ugly. The hangings, frayed in places, had once been crimson.

Frederika's clothes made the room seem pale and shabby, and yet it suited her. It had an indefinable charm and a certain severe homely dignity. It had been evidently used as a lady's writing-room, and much lived in at one time. There was an odd sort of work-table by the fire, with a silk work-bag let into a mahogany frame for a top and little shelves underneath. There were framed daguerotypes on the walls of meek ladies with smooth parted hair, and gentlemen who might have been handsome in side whiskers and stocks. Two chipped Dresden shepherdesses had been left abandoned on the mantel-piece and behind them, propped against the panel, were some shiny faded photographs, stained and yellowed, of awkward boys in choke collars and of a stiff defiant little lady in leg-of-mutton sleeves. It was perhaps this lady's personality which pervaded the room, thought Perky, hovering in the doorway, and doubtless the lady was Peter Campbell's mother, who had lived here in the 'eighties and now had a house down in the village; and then suddenly he recalled the little woman in black who had come up the hill the morning before, and had led away the poor young man, the one who had been turned off the place by the groom. Perhaps, yes, certainly that had been Mrs. Zeb Campbell. If so the stumbling young man who had gone away wringing his hands was Peter's invalid brother. Perky winced and blushed painfully behind his spectacles. He saw now that a writing-desk in the corner of the room stood open, and that there were some letters scattered on the blotting-paper. Peter Campbell held one of these in his hand. He had evidently been reading it aloud, and at the interruption looked up and flushed. Poor Perky felt very confused, all the more so when his host a second later grinned cordially and said with his rather charming American nasal drawl, "Hello

there, come on in," and looked at him with unsuspecting friendliness. Perky squirmed. The idea of Peter Campbell reading his old family letters to Frederika seemed to him both pathetic and frightening. He would have liked to have wanted to laugh, but he didn't and couldn't. He merely stammered and grew very red, and felt exquisitely embarrassed and foolishly moved, for how far had things gone with these two, in the course of that one single day, he asked himself hurriedly, if they had reached this point at the end of it? He saw then that Frederika's eye was fixed on him coldly, inquiringly, and with displeasure.

"What is it, Perky?"

"It's Biddy. I'm afraid she's not well."

Frederika got to her feet quickly. "Where is she?"

"Upstairs in your room."

"Forgive me, Peter;" she was at the door, and included them both in her grave challenging glance. "I must go to her," and she was gone, and he was left in the little room with those old letters and old intimate faded souvenirs scattered about, facing his host. They looked at each other a moment in silence.

Would the young man say anything to him, Perky wondered, would he give himself and the whole show away, and appeal to him, and so make everything much more unpleasant and difficult? He had a feeling that he must give him the chance, and he waited, but the American said nothing. He merely stood there looking at him, with a cloud gathering on his forehead, his luminous penetrating gaze darkening until a look of intense puzzled pain was all that showed in his eyes; and it seemed to Perky that something was tugging at him and hurting him, that he was being softly attacked in his most vulnerable spot; and suddenly the old ardent emotions of his

youth seemed to rush through him, making him weak, and blurring the room before him. "Oh, oh!" he whispered to himself, "what a pity," and that was all that ever passed between them.

He did not find himself alone with Peter Campbell again. Indeed he scarcely saw him during those last two nerve-wracking days in New York; and afterwards in England, when sometimes he thought of him, it was as he had seen him that night standing helpless and quiet in the centre of the shabby lonely little room, with an expression on his face that seemed in the light of after events to have been one of exquisite prophetic instinct, and he would say to himself, "He knew then. He knew already that it was hopeless. He knew it so well that he had nothing to say to me, and didn't even blame me, though he knew too, along with everything else, that I was against him." And it was almost in a way a comfort to Perky afterwards away there in London in his snug room in John Street, Adelphi, to remember the look on Campbell's face, for it absolved him. It was a proof to him that it hadn't after all been his doing, that Frederika wouldn't have stayed with Peter Campbell anyhow, even if he hadn't interfered, and that Campbell knew, had known all through the hideous hilarious week-end, when, with that haunted look in his eyes that were so very young, like a child's eyes, and his full passionate mouth pale and stiff, he had thrown himself into their silly games, that his own desperate game was up. How he must have clung to the hours, the minutes, the seconds, as they flew by, counting them, clutching at them, saying to himself "In three days, there are still three whole days," and then with what a spasm realising that it was now the day after to-morrow.

But suppose Perky had known that what was at stake

was quite simply Peter Campbell's life, what would he have done? Would he have done what he did? He was to ask himself this again and again when he found himself at Wellowburn or in Bruton Street. He didn't know. He was never to find an answer to that question—and he was never going to dare speak of it to Frederika, was never indeed going to mention Peter Campbell's name to Frederika; but it was to haunt him off and on through the years that he was still to spend working for Victor, thinking for Victor, writing out answers to questions in the House of Commons, writing out speeches, making notes of what Victor was to say to the Licensed Victuallers, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and so on, marking each one with a letter so that Victor wouldn't get them mixed. And sometimes he was to see, as he drove down the Mall or along the Embankment, the stark profiles of great shadowy towers rising up, ephemeral and gigantic, massive and light, into the sky; and he was fated to wonder then about the relation of art to life, the comparative value of a poem, a building, a strain of music and an empire, and to wish that when he was a very young man full of hope, he had had the courage to paint and to starve, to be an artist and die of it.

But all that is after all of little consequence. He was bound to do what he did do and what he did when they all got back to New York, and the city suddenly caught them up in its roaring torrent, and they went whirling off through the frantic jangling streets, and he found himself alone with Victor, shot up to their high rooms in the monstrous hotel; was to tell him in the most timid and respectful way possible that he was a fool, and try to explain to him why.

It wasn't easy. It was even more difficult than he had

anticipated, for Victor had at first understood nothing, and even after a two hours' trying discussion was still unable to understand some things. He never would understand any of the important points, Perky realised towards the end, and he never would believe that this young man or any young man could have been in love with Frederika for fifteen years at a distance of three thousand miles, and he couldn't entertain seriously the suggestion that Frederika accepted the fact and was touched by the romance of it. He didn't in other words feel himself in danger, because he couldn't be made to see what Perky painfully and timidly tried to suggest to him was the truth, namely, that his wife had been a lonely woman. And of course it was impossible for Perky to tell him so in so many words, and even if he had, it wouldn't have done any good. He wouldn't have believed it. He knew better. He became quite annoyed when Perky suggested that perhaps in the old days Frederika had been rather bored. Bored? How could she be bored? Didn't she go everywhere with him? Hadn't she hosts of friends, and her own motor, and a house in town as well as a place in the country to look after, with all the village people and the farmers thinking no end of her, and what about her Girl Guides and her Woman's Institute? and her Hospitals, not to mention her very responsible position in the Party? Wasn't she hard at it every day and all day? Nonsense, she never had time to be bored. Perky had mopped his forehead, and realised that the idea of Frederika's bolting with a raw young American would not, after all, strike Victor as fantastic, because it would never at this rate strike him at all. He tried another tack, and mentioned Mrs. Campbell. At that Victor had snarled; "Do you mean to suggest that Frederika is jealous and has been amusing herself with this young fella out of pique? My

dear chap, you don't understand her. She's incapable of such a thing." He had begun then to walk up and down. Frederika knew perfectly well there was nothing in it. Had she shown any sign of annoyance? Had she ever made him a scene? Certainly not. Frederika had never made him a scene in her life. To begin, at her age—bah! He snorted. He cleared his throat noisily. He fidgeted about, avoiding all too obviously poor Perky's gaze; and at last, coming to a stand at the window with his hands in his pockets and his back to the room, he went on muttering and grumbling into the curtains. As for Mrs. Campbell, she was very pretty, but tiresome when you got to know her—and she couldn't of course hold a candle to Frederika, or any well-bred Englishwoman. She carried herself badly, always wriggling her hips, didn't Perky agree? Now, no one carried herself so well as Frederika. Frederika put all these American beauties in the shade. Not that she was exactly handsome, but well, after all there was a lot in breeding.

Perky, huddled in his chair behind the broad back of his chief, squirmed and then in what sounded to himself a peculiarly silly falsetto, squeaked, with all his courage, "Oh rather! And I expect she'll be very civil to Mrs. Campbell in London."

"What's that? Why should she be? Frederika is under no obligation to be civil to any of these people as far as I know."

"But Victor—when Mrs. Campbell comes to London—she will naturally——"

"Naturally be damned!" Victor wheeled round. "That affair is finished. Can't you see that I'm sick of the woman? And you needn't whistle like that, my dear chap, and pretend to be a fool—just because I've been one. Besides, of course one doesn't like to discuss—but

—well—she did something, something, I simply can't—the sort of thing you know that one simply doesn't——” He stopped and stared miserably at his secretary.

Perk leaned forward. “Did something? Did what?” he urged in a whisper.

But Victor couldn't say it. “Oh well, it was merely something that happened, an incident—on Saturday when we went out you know—not worth mentioning.”

And then Perky had one of his flashes of genius. “You mean the incident at the gate,” he said under his breath excitedly.

Victor nodded solemnly. “Yes; that delicate looking chap. She lifted her riding crop—thought for a minute she was going to hit him.” They stared at each other. Victor's round blue eyes had a curious expression of mingled shame and relief. Perky held them a moment with his own, and then said softly:

“The sick-looking chap was her brother-in-law.”

“What d'you mean—whose? How?”

“The young fellow hanging over the gate was Campbell's invalid brother.” Victor stood stock still. He looked for a moment so idiotic, with his eyes bulging and his mouth gaping, that Perky had an hysterical longing to squeal with laughter; but then all at once he found that he had no desire at all to laugh, and couldn't even bear to look at Victor any longer, for Victor was blushing slowly a deep crimson, and it was very painful to Perky to watch that dark flood of blood suffusing his face.

But presently, when they had each lit a cigarette and smoked for some moments in silence, each pretending the other wasn't there, Perky heard Victor saying more in his normal voice; “You might just call up Mrs. Campbell for me later, and tell her I'm sorry, I find I can't dine to-night. Much easier all round if you do it. Just say

I'm snowed under, and won't be able to see her before we sail—will you? Awfully good of you, awfully grateful to you if you would; and don't for God's sake let her come here. She'd make a scene." He mopped his forehead.

Perky felt quite sorry for him; but a moment later, when he had promised to deal with Mrs. Campbell, there was Victor expanding his chest and being his own grand impossible ridiculous self again, and saying pompously:

"You'll see, Frederika's been a bit restless over here, but she'll settle down when we get back, and if she has been rather taken with this young fella, mark my words, she'll forget him inside a month once she's at home again." And then suddenly Frederika herself came straight into the middle of the room, advanced with her long stride to the centre of the carpet, turned on them, and said abruptly:

"Well, now that you are on the subject, what am I to do about this young man?"

They both gaped at her in silent astonishment, too shocked, too bewildered to speak, and this she seemed to find very irritating.

"Why don't you say something, Victor? You and Perky were discussing Peter Campbell weren't you? Well, what shall I do about him?"

"Frederika! What has come over you?" Victor gasped, horrified. His gasp seemed to madden her. She threw back her head and burst into a wild yell of laughter. It went on and on, shaking her and pealing harshly like a lot of clanging bells through the room, and through it they caught the words, "Oh, oh, how idiotic! What an idiot you are, Victor, what an idiot, what a fool!" and then suddenly she was serious again.

"No, Perky, don't go. Stay where you are. You are

Victor's friend, and you're bound to protect him from the folly of his wife if you can, but which would be folly, that is what I want to know! Do listen now to what I say to Victor, and if he doesn't understand it explain it to him. You may even be able to find an answer for him to my question. You see Victor, I like this young man very much indeed, and he would like me to stay with him always, would like me never to leave him again. Now what shall I do about it? I am asking you because I have not yet made up my mind, and it seems only fair to give you a chance to influence my decision if you wish; but let me make it quite clear that no arguments about England or our life in England or your official position or anything of that sort will have any weight with me. We'll leave them all out if you please, because you see they don't really count, and I'm sick of them. It is you or Peter Campbell; you shorn of your prestige and without a job, as he is, two men, whom I've known for a good many years. As far as that goes there's not much to choose. I've been with you most, but I've known him longest, and on the whole I think I know him best. You see I only met you when I was eighteen, and I've known him since I was seven, and really when you look at it with an unprejudiced eye, the twenty years we've spent supposedly together have been spent mostly quite separate, you leading your life and I mine. If you boiled it down, the time we spent really together, mind you, Victor, I mean truly together, during those twenty years, it would amount to how much—a week do you think, or two? Whereas Peter Campbell has been so constantly with me and so, shall I say, whole-heartedly and frankly, that even without ever going to Wellowburn he knew through me, though I wasn't aware of telling him about it, exactly what it was like, knew it much better really

than you know it now, just as he knows me much better than you do. Whatever else is in doubt, there is no doubt whatever about that, and your expression at this moment is a proof of it; for you are very surprised, Victor, at my talking like this, and quite horrified and shocked; whereas Peter wouldn't be shocked or surprised at all, and you don't, I can see, understand in the least what I'm driving at, and you will never understand, never, never. Do you hear, Victor, whereas Peter Campbell understands everything, absolutely everything that I have ever said or not said, or ever could say, so don't speak. Don't for God's sake open your mouth, Victor, because if you do you will say something that might be fatal. Wait till I've gone, and talk it over with Perky. I'm going now. I'll decide to-morrow. I shan't see you again to-night, as I'm dining with Peter, and want to talk to him about a good many things, and shall be back late; but think over what I've said, and if you can possibly get rid of all those ideas about your high official duties, then come to me in the morning." She stopped. She fixed them with a sort of glare, then her eyelids drooped and her painted lips curved into lines more bitter than any Perky had ever seen on her face before, and she turned and left them. But in the door she wheeled again, and burst into another harsh yell of laughter. "Oh Victor, Victor, what a fool, what a fool you are," and then she was gone.

She had already made up her mind, of course, though perhaps she didn't know it. She meant all the time to stick to Victor. She had never seriously thought of bolting with Peter Campbell, though there had been moments when she had wanted to terribly, moments when she almost saw it as more important than anything else in the world, moments when she felt a heart-breaking tenderness welling up in her, and he almost made her

believe in their relationship enough to act on the belief. It was as if he were standing with her at the top of one of those high American towers, pointing out a star to her that she wasn't quite sure she saw. It was faint to her but brilliant to him, and while he pointed, trying to make her see its brilliance and its beauty, it seemed to her to flicker and go out, or perhaps it was that her eyesight was no longer sufficiently keen to see steadily so far.

Or possibly he didn't describe it well, or place it accurately in the great scheme of things, that starlike love of his that was so clear and steady to him. In any case, whatever he said, it evidently wasn't quite the right thing, since his words did not prevail with her. He said either not enough or too much, or perhaps in all the phraseology of love that he used, he missed the one phrase that would have been the magic one for her. Or it may be that she did not hear what he said, did not hear, that is, quite clearly. The words he was bound to use were after all merely the same old words, hackneyed, worn, man-handled and bedraggled, that lovers have always used since the beginning of time. They may have sounded ordinary to her, not fresh and new and wonderful in the least, or again when he said one thing, she may have heard another, something quite different. In any case, though she listened, she apparently didn't listen closely enough, and he must have felt at times as if he were talking to a deaf person; and no doubt this was very bewildering and baffling to him, for he must have had the desperate feeling that if she could only have heard accurately the true sound of his love, she would never have left him again.

But perhaps the simplest and most brutal way of putting it is the truest. One can explain it all quite easily on the ground that after all she liked Victor best. That was the way Bridget put it to Perky afterwards on

board ship, when they were all four of them heading once more towards England. For Bridget sailed with them. She had suddenly made up her mind to go home. She didn't want to stay in America a day longer, she had said, so Perky hustled round and got her a cabin and a ticket. "I loved Peter Campbell, and he loved Frederika, and Frederika loves Victor. She always has and always will, so that's that. And no one gets much out of it all, except Victor. Victor's the kind who always gets what he wants and keeps it." That was about all she said. None of them talked much. They struck a gale almost immediately. The Atlantic was certainly behaving very badly that winter, but Bridget was probably right, and there is really no point in making a great to-do about Frederika's state of mind in America. She had been very much excited by New York, but her mind after all had already gone slightly stale when she got there, and she wasn't a free person. She dragged her life after her. It was fastened to her like a heavy cloak, stifling at times to wear, but then she was accustomed to it. Certainly she was attracted to Peter, certainly her imagination was touched by the fairy tale of his love for herself, and she had liked Campbelltown, the old American house, the snowy sparkling country, the scarlet maple trees, and she liked Amanda Campbell. She had been very much struck by the little old lady with the fiery blue eyes that shone like blue flames in her withered face. She didn't even mind Christopher, who was better that Sunday when she went to call with Peter on his mother, and had come down to sit by the drawing-room fire. She had thought his slender face rather beautiful, and he had been very quiet all the time she sat there talking to Amanda, with his large pale eyes fixed wistfully on her face, never moving or making a sound, not even biting his nails; and when she got up to

go, he too had got up quite quietly, and when she said good-bye to him he had leaned over and kissed her hand. Amanda and Peter had been quite astonished at that. They had no idea how he had ever thought of doing such a thing, but probably he had got it out of a picture-book. You never could tell where Chris got his ideas or how much he knew. In some ways he seemed to know more than other people, for when the front door of the little house had closed on Peter and Frederika, he had stood against it, inside the dark hall, panting like a dog that has been running, with a terrible look of fear in his face. Amanda had had no idea that it was the last time she would ever see Peter. She had waved and nodded to him in her sprightly way from the drawing-room window, standing there straight and prim between the stiff curtains of Christmas green brocade, and her old friend John Prescott dashing by in his cutter up the snowy street with sleigh-bells jingling and all his grandchildren packed round him under the bearskin rugs, and a whole gang of others hitched on behind on their sleds, had waved back to her and to Peter who was walking down the street with Mrs. Joyce. None of them had any idea that Peter would never come to Campbelltown and Jordan Valley again. If Amanda had known, if she had had an inkling—but she didn't know. It would have been too cruel for her if she had known. It was better of course—I would like to think so.

But one can't go on for ever writing about these people. As it is, a great deal must be left out to make an end of this story, all the part that came after the Joyces had sailed, Mr. Jamieson's great duel on the stock exchange with Ikey Daw, and how he did end by ruining the Jew, but dropped anything from ten to twenty millions doing it, so they say. They say too that the old

man, having got rid of Ikey, who has disappeared into South America somewhere, has bullied the Manhattan Development Company into putting up Peter's block skyscraper after all. One hears rumours that the strange terrible walls of that mass of masonry are about to go up, but New York is always full of rumours. One can't believe everything one reads in the papers, or one-tenth of the gossip. It seems to be true, however, that it was Gussy Green who got Big Joe off. She ran his trial for him, and did it in the teeth of Ikey Daw's newspapers. He didn't swing for Carolina Sal's murder. He went back south to Alabama and married there, and settled down to work on a cotton plantation, and he named his first-born son Peter Campbell Jefferson, so that there is likely to be a small black Peter Campbell on the earth for some time, a little nigger boy with a kinky head, dressed in a frayed pair of trousers and a broken straw hat, sitting on a log of wood outside his father's cabin with his teeth in a slice of water-melon. He may be sitting like that now. His father may be calling him through the drowsy air, "Hi Pete! Hi there, come along in now, Peter Campbell!" I don't know. It is all so far away, and that southland is a vague sleepy place, and Big Joe is a lazy devil. Sometimes I imagine he sits at his cabin door and strums on his guitar in the evenings, while the moon rises and hums one of those tunes that used to sound through the cellars of New York, exciting Bridget to a delirium, but again, I don't know. What I do know is that Bridget and Perky and the Victor Joyces went on board the *Aquitania* at midnight that Tuesday, and that the ship sailed at three in the morning when the tide turned; and that there were a lot of people down to see them off, and that their cabins were filled with flowers and boxes of sweets and baskets of fruit, even more

expensive than the flowers and sweets and fruit sent down to them when they left Southampton, because New York is even more expensive than London. So that Victor must have known in the end what to say to Frederika. They must have come to an understanding, and made it up, as the phrase goes. No doubt she understood Victor's way of talking better than Peter's. Whatever she said in her wild outburst about not knowing him, she was used to him and his ways. One knew where one was with Victor, one knew what one could expect, not much perhaps, but something that seemed, when she was absolutely up against the choice, to be good enough; and it may be that it was just that lack of imagination in him that held her. Victor was all on the level, compact between his habits and traditions. He forged ahead like a train, but Peter swooped about in the air and looped the loop, and seemed likely to crash at any moment. He was capable of rising much higher and falling much lower than Victor. He was a great artist, but a weak little man, and, on the whole, for a husband, Frederika evidently preferred the strong man who didn't care so very much; and although the giant profiles of those tapering American towers had thrilled her, New York City, exciting as it was, wasn't her home. It was a strange place, too strange. She preferred when it came to the point her deep somnolent troubled England, and her life there with all its boring round of official duties; and so she had really a feeling of relief when she stepped on board. That passionate interest of hers in the future and in the wizardry of science didn't after all count for her very much any more. It didn't at any rate count enough, and though Peter had awakened her for a moment, and sent a strange thrill through her mind, he had no time even to show her his Radio Building. He had no time for anything. So she let it all go.

Well she knew what she had to look forward to. She knew that Victor would be no different, and that most of the time he would be too busy worrying about England to pay much attention to her; but somehow when she faced it, she probably felt that she liked being alone, a separate independent being. She may not have wanted to be known too intimately and understood too uncannily well by any man. She may have been afraid of Peter's love. She may even have found it a bore. She had always been a stand-offish, arrogant creature, very shy.

In any case, she couldn't seriously think of letting Victor down, and making a mess of his life, and creating a scandal. But she probably said something to Peter about seeing him again, and doubtless talked in the way women talk when they are sorry for a man, about being friends, and his coming to see them in England. No doubt she was kind, as kind as she could be, and she spent as much time with him as she could that last day; but really it was all a frantic rush and confusion, with all the boxes cluttering up their rooms, and Perky going about with his hair on end and his hands full of labels, and a hundred people wanting to say good-bye. She told him to come to the hotel to see her that last evening. She had had it all out by that time with Victor, and Victor had promised to be nice to him, and so when he came, they were all there except Bidy who kept out of sight, with a crowd of people coming and going, and Peter could only sit quite still and very white, watching her while everybody chattered and laughed round him. The most she could do for him was to go down with him in the lift to the front door of the hotel, and it was there, in the great doorway on the edge of the dark blue street, with the rows and rows of lighted windows rising high

above their heads into the night, that she said good-bye to him.

He was awfully pale. He smiled uncertainly, and there was a puzzled patient gentle look in his eyes as he lifted his hat. He looked very small to her in the frame of the big glass door. She caught her breath, and her face too went suddenly very white.

"My heart will be out on the water waiting for you when you pass Sandy Hook," he said, and then he was gone.

He went home after walking the streets a little while, to find his mother-in-law in the flat with a doctor, and Addy in hysterics. A maid was packing a bag. When Addy heard him come in, she screamed from behind her bedroom door, "Send him away. Don't let him come in. I can't see him. I can't bear to see him," and he heard Mrs. Jamieson answering, "There, darling, there, you shan't see him." The maid, it appeared, was packing his bag. His wife was in a state of nervous collapse, the doctor told him. It would be very bad for her if he stayed, and his mother-in-law told him that he and Victor Joyce between them had just about killed her child. He didn't understand. He didn't know what to say. He agreed to go to his club for the night. So they called him a yellow cab and he went.

He couldn't sleep that night in his room at the club, and at three o'clock he watched the ship from his bed, seemed to see it quite clearly move slowly away from the dock and down the harbour.

He had a great many things to do the next day. He called on his lawyer and made his will, leaving all his possessions, including his sketch-books and his drawings, to Amanda Campbell of Campbelltown, Jordan Valley, to do with as she liked. From there he went to the jail

to say good-bye to Joe Jefferson and tell him that he had to go out of town for a few days on business. He lunched with his father-in-law down town, and discussed with him in a quite friendly way his separation from Adelaide, and in the afternoon spent an hour with Jim Baker in his laboratory, talking about his mysterious life-tissue. At seven o'clock he met Gussy Green, and shared with her an early dinner before her evening performance. She thought he looked very peaked and sick, but he didn't seem to her to be unhappy. He talked to her all through the meal—he didn't eat anything—about Joe, and said as he had to go away would she help Joe with his trial, and he gave her a cheque for a thousand dollars towards expenses. "Get the best lawyer you can, Gussy, and if there's anything crooked going on, raise hell, even if it's with Ikey, will you?"

"I'll raise hell with Ikey all right, count on me."

"I do, Gussy, I always have."

"Rats! Anything else I can do for you while you're gone?"

"No, I guess not. Let's have a drink."

"No, sir, I don't drink with you, Pete, and you know it. You can't afford to drink."

"Well, I guess I can afford it to-night."

"No you can't. Not by a long way. Where drink is concerned you're stone broke, remember that, always."

"All right," he said wearily, "have it your own way." But when he got her to the stage-door of her theatre he looked so white and queer that she almost gave way.

"Come in and I'll get you some brandy."

"No thanks, Gussy. I've got to go to the office. I'm quitting there to-morrow, and I've got a lot of papers to sort out." His voice dragged. He gave a poor sort of smile.

"Where's Bridget Prime?" she asked suddenly, looking closely at him; and when he answered indifferently that she had sailed with the Joyces she was relieved again. Afterwards she blamed Bridget. She believed that it was her doing. Bridget, because of that face of hers, was always getting blamed for things. It seems strange that those two women, who would have done anything in the world for Peter Campbell, didn't understand each other; but they didn't, and they weren't any good to him any more, either of them.

"Where is it you're going, Pete?" asked Gussy, standing in the windy street, reluctant to leave him.

"Well, I don't just know where, but somewhere where it's quiet."

"Promise you'll write to me, Pete, and tell me how you are."

He smiled slowly. "I will if I can."

She was frightened then for a minute. Some instinct warned her. She grabbed his arm.

"What do you mean by that, Pete?" she asked sharply.

But he laughed it off. "I don't mean anything, Gussy. It's only that I'm doggone tired. Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye, Pete," and "Good-bye" again she called after him with her ear-splitting voice down the jangling windy street.

Nobody saw him after that, no one that is who knew him, except one of the night watchmen in the office building who let him in at the back door and took him up in the elevator through the great shaft of the deserted skyscraper to his office. The Eagle Cable Company were hard at it on the ground floor. Hundreds of messages were coming in all that night. Whizz! they passed through the storm, tiny whispers travelling with perfect

composure above the Atlantic through the roaring obstreperous tempest. New York was talking to London, to Berlin, to Paris, to Petrograd, and to the *Aquitania* that was nosing her way through the gale, heading for England.

New York took no account of Peter Campbell sitting high up in that building at his desk by his little green shaded lamp with a whisky bottle beside him. Why should it? Other things more important than the life-spasms of human beings occupied its attention. It was feeling very bucked with itself. It had just put Detroit in its place. That Book Tower of Detroit would be nowhere. The highest skyscraper in the world—wasn't that what Detroit had boasted? Well, New York was going to put up a building one thousand feet high. It would cost fifty million dollars. If anyone thought New York would let a one-horse town of the West get away with a piece of cheek like that, they'd soon find out they were mistaken. And it was gassing away to London at the same time about a new toy, this new wireless telephone. London was complaining that there were difficulties, that the ether was getting over-crowded, but New York was patting London on the back and telling it not to worry. She'd see to it. She'd organise the ether as slick as anything; she knew all there was to know about traffic-control, and she had the liveliest bunch of inventors in the world at work on the scheme. Why, her wireless engineers would find it child's play—making those little air-waves behave themselves. And so while New York went on talking Peter sat in his little cubby-hole high up in the sky, tearing up papers, and drinking every little while from that whisky bottle; while way down underneath him in the lighted cellars of the city the syncopated yowl of the twentieth century went on, beating, beating and whining, as if a lot of sick animals were locked up in

the city's basement, and yelping and howling, while higher up, on top of them on another layer, herds of shrieking trams were rushing in and out of the town's quivering flanks, and higher still, innumerable bells were ringing, and horns hooting and great engines throbbing; but all that clamour was muffled, and gradually as the night passed it grew dimmer, was almost silent, became only a rhythm, an immense soundless pulse, beating in the city's iron veins.

A thousand lighted windows winked and went out, one by one. The towers rose up into the night, silent, motionless, as if abandoned, as if the whole city were a shell, empty, or a dream, substanceless. Peter's lighted window seemed now to be unattached to anything. It was like a single little hole punched high up in the sky to let the light of heaven through from behind somewhere, and when he staggered across the room and stood in the window he was an indistinguishable speck, and his voice apostrophising some sort of bird that he imagined he saw perched on one long pink leg in the corner of his room was inaudible to any human ears.

"So you've come back, have you? And what's the good of that to me now? Don't you know, old bird, that she's come and gone? Oh, it was a miracle all right, don't make any mistake about that. She came, and it was true. It was all true, damn you! But now it's finished. She didn't believe it, you see, but I knew, and so I guess I'm happy, since I've found out what I wanted to know. Listen, will you? The end of human progress is omniscience. Remember that. Don't forget it. And she was just what I thought she was, only more so, more wonderful. I got her right because I loved her, and she came, and then she went away again for good. So I'm finished. I've got nothing more to do here, and I'm

quitting this planet. So you be off, will you! Shoo—get away. Magic? Sure—the magic's mine."

He waved a threatening uncertain arm and threw his whisky glass at the flamingo that wasn't there, into the corner of the room, where it splintered. Then he opened the window and looked out and down. All round him the profiles of the skyscrapers cut shadowy perpendicular slices out of the sky. The great towering structures seemed to be swaying. Opposite was his white Radio Building facing him, a frosted glimmering needle piercing the dark sky. He didn't look at it.

When he jumped no one heard his tiny cry or saw him fall, a whirling speck, rolling over and over, down the immense stone precipice, past the many tiers of dark vacant windows; but a moment later, away there in Campbelltown by Jordan Valley, Christopher Campbell, the idiot, leapt with a piercing shriek from his bed crying "Ai—ee, Peter," in a voice that sent a shiver of agony through the old sleeping house.

What was it Peter Campbell had called out across the night, where those shadowy towers seemed to be leaning together and stretching their skinny necks like monstrous cats plotting to do him in? "Hello! Are you there? Then catch me God!" Could it have been that? I don't know, but the patent automatic telephone was ringing in his office a minute afterwards, the P.A.X. thing that worked without an operator, skipping from one empty room to another and keeping on ringing through all that dark honeycomb of rooms till it found its way to his room. Gussy was on the other end of a wire trying to reach him, but she was too late.

And now it's all over, and the story is finished. We've no more to do with these people; we can't follow them any longer, or keep track of them in the swarm. They are so

small, so far away. You and I can't hear Gussy sobbing her heart out for her little pal Peter. We can only hear the roar of the wind and the sea, and that other breathless sound of life rushing on. We can't see Amanda Campbell sitting with Chris in her shabby room in Campbelltown. I fancy that she sits there very still, seeming to listen, to wait, with her sewing in her lap and a book open beside her. She always sewed while she read, and at the same time she kept an eye on poor Christopher; and I know that there is the same look of vigilant tenderness in her vivid blue eyes as she watches him making mysterious signs in the air, as if he were communing with the spirit of the fire. But Amanda is only a speck now, she was merely a little old woman who believed that no one has a right to be unhappy in this world, and couldn't ever bear to blame God for what happens to folks; and she has only a minute more to live, but to her the few years will seem an interminable time. There is a great clock ticking out the seconds. Perhaps it is that sound that she is listening to, with her tired defiant head trembling a little, and a questioning look on her face, and her hand stealing to her side as if it hurt her. We don't know what has become of Peter any more than she does, or Christopher who keeps saying "Peter's gone—Peter's gone". He is gone, that's all. No one can tell her more than that. There was nothing left of him that could be shown her when she hurried up to the city. There was merely a grease-spot left on the side-walk for an hour at the base of a high building—then that too disappeared under the scraping tramp of men's feet. And she does not believe that there is anything left of him that could ever be identified anywhere, out there, in those lonely spaces that he talked about; but she can hear his voice, and sometimes when the silence of her little room becomes un-

bearable, and those old school-books of hers that deal with the world of timeless being are no relief to her, she calls to Aunt Clo to keep an eye on Christopher, and goes out into the dark and walks rapidly up the hill through the wind that blows little sandy wisps of hair into her eyes to the empty white house with the closed shutters. She is still light of foot, a skinny little thing. Puff! you'd think the wind would blow her away. But she stands there defiant in the dark, before the shadowy pillared porch, remembering everything and making not a sound, not even allowing herself to whisper Peter's name, while the tears stream down her small withered face. There is no one to see them. If there were an eye to see, a great eye watching—But she is alone, a speck of a woman, and over her head arches the eternal night of space with little lighted worlds spinning in it, a few thousand million or so, tracing across the void a faint luminous trail no bigger in the immensity than the whisk of the tail of a firefly in the night.

THE END

