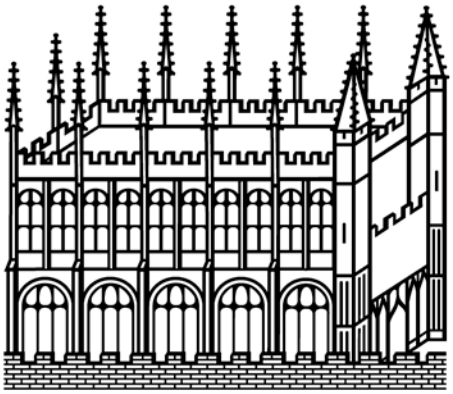

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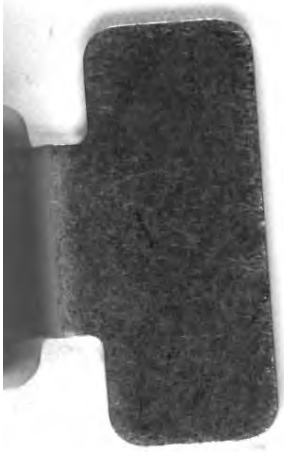
THE GIRL IN GOLDEN RAGS

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS



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THE GIRL IN GOLDEN RAGS

The Girl in Golden Rags

By

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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THE GIRL IN GOLDEN RAGS

FOREWORD

A RAGGED child with a dirty face, dancing through acres of golden-rod. Autumn gold everywhere on branch and bough, copse and thicket, swamp and swale everywhere burnt gold amid brake and fern and beech and birch. Gold dropping earthward through golden sunset woods; carpets of gold tissue where mosses glowed between the drifted autumn leaves; a slow river and a marshy pond dyed rose and gold by the fog-belted sun. . . . And a slim golden thing dancing through the golden-rod—a slender, naked little leaping flame in rags—palest gold of limb and body; brown golden hair and eyes—no other tint save two carnation lips and the same stain on her cheeks—and all a-flutter, whirling, pirouetting in her flowing golden rags.

Everywhere through the limpid, lemon-tinted light, yellow butterflies were flying. And those rose-gold moths that sleep all day in evening primroses were flying now across the golden-rod.

Her father, carrying an armful of wood to the kitchen, paused to watch the child for a moment, then went on, laughing. Her mother unpinned the last

of the wash from a sagging line tied between two apple-trees. Lifting the loaded basket she lingered by the fence a moment, looking at the little dancer, the sunset light touching her ruddy hair.

Her husband emerged from the kitchen and picked up two empty milk-pails.

"I'll get the water," he said. "You better start supper, Anne."

Anne Ardres rested her basket on the top rail and called:

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline!"

A far cry floated back across the golden-rod.

Anne said to her husband: "It's your story-book again. She's sewed that old Christmas-tree tinsel all over her raggedest dress, and she's pretending the golden-rod is 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold!'"

Her husband laughed: "That's the red French blood in her. If you've a drop of it in you a hundred years will never pale it. It's hot blood, too, and lawless. Good blood to fight and love with——"

"Oh, Phil, what nonsense. You fill that child's head full of the silliest stuff—and she's just nothing but a little Yankee child run wild——"

"Ha-ha!" he laughed. "There's older blood than that in her—good old blood, red as old French wine. You're laughing. Laugh then. But yon's no Yankee, Anne; she's all Ardrésienne! Ardres is her name, and the blood of Ardres is in her!—Jacqueline Ardres!—Ardrésienne of 'The Field of the Cloth of Gold!'"

He was in one of what Anne called his "French fits." She smiled at him; he laughed gaily at her with an upward fling of his handsome dark curly head; and went away toward the farm pump.

Foreword

Anne Ardres framed her fresh, sunburnt face with hollowed hands:

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline!" she called.

Through the saffron light came the far cry again; the flickering little flame came drifting and dancing toward her through vast uncharted seas of golden-rod.

Slowly the zenith flamed. The sun had set.

CHAPTER I

VIOLETS, shad-bush, and wind-flowers were in bloom, but there were patches of snow left in the woods and thickets.

Lavery drove his big, de-natured horse and his peddler's wagon into the front yard of the Ardres Farm, and pulled up beside the kitchen porch.

Sometimes, in Saguenay County, late in April there comes a day of wilting heat. The following day it may snow. That is weather in Saguenay County.

The peddler produced a polka-dot, scarlet bandanna and wiped his bald head. He was a soft, fat man of sixty or more, rosy-faced and good-natured, but with sly and faded eyes.

A brown-skinned, dirty little girl, quite naked under the one-piece garment of cotton, came dancing and skipping and pirouetting across the grass from the barn.

"Hello, Mr. Lavery—hello—hello!" she cried joyously; and caught the side board of the wagon with both soiled hands, continuing to dance and skip and hoist herself high to gaze upon the peddler's stock of goods.

"Why ain't you in school?" he demanded.

"It's Saturday, Mr. Lavery."

"Gosh, that's so!" He yawned, looked lazily about the yard "Is your ma to home, Jackie?" he

inquired, still wiping the sweat from his fat face and pink, bald head.

"No, she's ploughing—oh, what's that?—*that!*"—pointing at a shiny box with yellow roses painted boldly all over the lid.

"Into that there box," said the peddler solemnly, "is three kinds of perfoomed soap; and also tooth-wash, lotions—'n'everything to make you clean, and make you smell good. But *you* don't want none o' them kinda things——"

"No, I don't," said the child cheerfully, "but the yellow roses are pretty—oh, look at the nest of shiny pans!"

Still restlessly jumping up and down, she continued to devour with eager brown eyes the peddler's stock of notions, and was inclined to rummage and paw them, which impulse disturbed Mr. Lavery.

"You think your ma would want some new kitchen ware?" he inquired. "And say," he added mildly, "your hands is too sticky 'n' dirty for to handle them new cotton goods——"

"I've been burying a dead hen," explained the child. "I like the colour of that bolt of cotton. I just love red roses——"

"Mebbe your ma might want some print cloth to make you a new dress," suggested the peddler with mild irony. He leaned backward, opened a big paste-board box, unrolled the bolt of brilliant cotton print for the child's inspection. "Ain't it kinda gay and gallus?" he inquired.

"Yes, it is. It's beautiful. But I guess I don't need clothes," she said carelessly. "I have a better dress than this, anyway——"

Over the loaded wagon suddenly she caught sight of her mother, and she hailed her shrilly. Mr. Lavery turned to look. Over the snake-fence in the field beyond, a white horse drawing a plough came slowly into view over the hilltop. Guiding the plough was a woman.

The turning furrow rolled away from the ploughshare in an unbroken, brown-gold wave; the big whitish horse came on steadily; the plough undulated across the fallow, rising, sinking like a wave-rocked craft.

Twice the woman who guided it lifted her head to glance at the peddler. The reins sagged loosely around the flawless column of her sunburnt neck.

Leisurely she advanced; her gloved hands grasping the plough handles; the vigorous, deep-bosomed shape of her superbly revealed with every stride.

Opposite to where the peddler's wagon stood, she stopped the white horse, disengaged the reins and flung them across his back. Leaving the plough in the furrow, she came toward the house, her heavy canvas skirt swinging just below the knees of two graceful legs.

"Good morning, Orlie," she said, pulling off her heavy gloves and flinging them on to the porch.

"Morning, Anne," replied the fat peddler, beaming amorously upon her. "Gor-a-mighty, but you're a spry one for work—ain't you, Anne?"

"I've *got* to work, Orlando. Won't you come in and sit a while?"

"No, I guess I'll be gettin' along—without you need anything to-day—like tinware 'n' such? Nothin' in rat-traps, mebbe——?"

"What do you ask for an egg-beater?"

"A shillin' is what they bring——"

"That's too much, Orlie——"

"Well, that's what they bring——"

"I can get along. . . . I need a colander, though."

He named his price; she nodded acceptance. "Run in and get my purse, Jackie," she said to the child.

"Mouse-traps?" inquired Mr. Lavery. "Somethin' in mops, brushes, brooms—cotton prints——"

"I need some cotton print to make a dress for Jacqueline—if you'll take it out in trade? I can't give you money, Orlando."

"What you got to trade with, Anne?"

"Some nice new sugar?"

"Pure?" he inquired cunningly, twinkling his weak eyes at her.

"Just as pure as when I boiled the sap in the bush. Not a spoonful of brown sugar or anything else. It's almost black and heavy as lead."

"All right. You pick out your pattern and measure off what you want."

Anne Ardres bent over the wagon as Mr. Lavery lifted the big, flat, cardboard boxes piled with print cloth in brilliant colours; and placed them before her.

"Jackie," she said, examining the brightly coloured bolts, "run into the kitchen—there's a dear!—and bring out the sugar-scales. But don't try to lift the sugar buckets—mind what I say!"

Jacqueline danced away again into the house and presently reappeared with the sugar-scales and weights.

Her mother selected a gay bolt of flowered print cloth, measured it off between extended arms, then proved it with knuckle, thumb and little finger.

Mr. Lavery produced a yardstick, then a pair of shears, and solemnly cut the cloth. Jacqueline set the scales on the seat beside him, and Anne Ardres went into the house and carried out a heavy tub of maple sugar.

Between the three they weighed out the solid blackish-brown disks with their bevelled edges; the bargain was agreed upon; and Orlando Lavery accepted payment in full in Saguenay County maple sugar.

The fat, lazy old man sat there in his wagon for a while, sometimes mopping his rosy face, sometimes exchanging gossip with Mrs. Ardres, or regarding her out of moist bluish eyes that could be amorously sly at moments.

"Y' oughta hitch up with a reel nice man," he said, with a giggling sort of chuckle; "somebody who's kind an' lovin' too. He'd be company for you, Anne—a reel pleasant man——"

"Like you, Orlando?" she inquired drily. She had heard that suggestion before.

"Waal," he giggled, "*I* ain't much of a man at that. But I allus was a lovin' one."

"You should have been a good deal of a man, Orlando! You had schooling and opportunity. Trouble with you is you're lazy."

"I know. I ain't much—just a peddler. . . . Not that I ain't reel kind and lovin'—but——"

"But you just can't work," said Anne, smilingly.

"That's the trouble," he admitted. "I never could abide plowin'. I never could do more'n kinda drive 'round the country and dicker 'n' pass the time o' day with the good-lookin' ones—like you, Anne."

"Aren't you ashamed, Orlie Lavery!"

"No, ma'am, I ain't. If I was ten year younger, I'd spark you good, I would—a nice, big, hefty, likely girl——"

"Girl! I'm well past forty, my poor man. I'm an old woman already."

"You're just ripe to a turn," he simpered, his fat, pink visage wreathed in smiles. "And if I had a leetle money laid by——"

"Go on with you," she retorted. "Here, Jackie, take this print cloth into the sitting-room. Mother is going to make her poor, ragged baby a nice new dress after supper."

She straightened herself, pushed back the mass of ruddy blond hair, secured it in a big, glistening knot at the nape of her neck.

"Well," she said, "I've got to break up that fallow before noon dinner—but you are kindly welcome to stay and eat a snack with us if you're a mind to, Orlie."

"I thank you kindly, Anne, but I'll be gettin' along," he yawned, rousing up from his slumping, but admiring, contemplation of her.

As the Ardres Farm was the southern limit of Mr. Lavery's circuit, he slowly turned his huge, fat, red horse northward.

"Waal," he said, "I'll thank you kindly and say good-bye to you, M'ss Anne."

"Good-bye, Orlie. . . . How are things in the village?"

"Trade's kinda dull, I guess. But I ain't complainin' none. They's a sale to Pilcher's, but no one has went that I hear of."

"Any other news?"

"Old Mrs. Grayson, she's kinda poorly. . . . 'N' young Dave Wessels, he's quit his wife 'n' run off with the Holloway girl."

"How shameful!"

"Waal, the Holloway girl was goin' to have a baby anyway—or so I hear tell. . . . Yes'm. . . . Yes, there's allus doin's down to Drifting Bridge. Yes'm. I kinda disremember what else has happened."

"Do they talk any more about the Hawk Hill dam?"

"They talk of it like they been talkin' for the last ten years. I dunno. . . . Waal, I'll be gettin' on."

"Come again real soon, Orlie!"

"I thank you kindly."

He drove leisurely out of the weedy yard, and down the hill, still mopping his pink, fat face with the scarlet bandanna.

Saturday night was bath night. And, after supper, Jacqueline, in a clean night-gown, curled up on the sitting-room sofa, while Anne, by the light of an oil lamp, cut out, basted, and began to sew on a sleeveless slip-over dress for her daughter.

There was not much furniture in the sitting-room; fewer decorations.

Over the mantel hung a photograph of a dark, gay-eyed man in British uniform and metal helmet. Under the picture dangled a brittle, dusty wreath of immortelles, tied with rusty black ribbons.

A cheap carpet covered the floor. Cheap, village store furniture of yellow oak—a table, a rocker, two side chairs and a sofa completed the ensemble, except for a tall walnut case full of books.

Jacqueline, now beginning to read for pleasure, had

already found among these books a few that interested her.

Among these few was one that completely fascinated her—a flamboyant historical romance laid on in garish colours, and called "The Field of the Cloth of Gold." A moral writer, popular in late Victorian days, had perpetrated it when historical romance was in demand, and the physical virtue of the heroine a *sine qua non*.

It was a characteristic specimen of the Victorian literary chromo. And it enraptured Jacqueline.

Also, the romance had pleased her father; and the child remembered very clearly sitting on his lap after supper, while he read it aloud to her, and smoked his clay pipe, and followed the fine print with labour-worn forefinger when the oil lamp burned dim and smoked.

The child remembered, too, how her father used to say that an ancestor of his family was present at that Golden Field, and was dressed all in cloth of gold, as was everybody else.

And the more her father talked, the more the French blood in him warmed his imagination, and the more excitable and genealogical he became.

At such moments, involuntarily, little Jacqueline, lying loosely on her father's knees, would turn her brown head and seek her mother's face to read the expression on it. And always she felt, vaguely, that her mother was not in very ardent sympathy with her father's vivacious loquacity concerning the early glory of his ancestor and the wondrous magnificence of his apparel at the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Now, it being Saturday night, and the bothersome bodily scrubbing over, and her mother safely sewing,

Jacqueline got the beloved romance in question from the book-shelf, settled herself on the sofa, and read it aloud for their mutual pleasure and instruction. The child adored to read aloud.

Now and then she would interrupt her lecture to emphasize some gaudy detail:

"Mother," she exclaimed, "even the big war-horses that the nobles rode were covered with real cloth of gold! . . . And all the little pages were dressed in cloth of gold; and all the knights and men-at-arms, and the foot-soldiers and bishops and priests and tents and banners—do you hear what I'm telling you, mother?"

"Yes, Jackie."

"You believe it, don't you?"

"I suppose it is history."

"Do you think father's relation really wore gold clothes?"

"I don't know."

"Father used to say so."

"Yes, he thought so."

"Don't *you?*"

"Really, I don't know, dear——"

"Don't you believe that father's relation was there?"

"I really don't know, Jackie——"

"But it says so in this book. . . . Here—right here on this page it says that the Sieur d'Ardres led the horsemen from Pas-de-Calais and bore aloft the golden Oriflame. . . . It *says* so, mother."

"Really," murmured Anne, leaning closer over her sewing.

The child sighed, turned the magic pages slowly.

"It must have been beautiful—beautiful—all the whole world in gold and scarlet. . . I wish you and father and I had lived then and wore gold dresses, mother——"

"Come here, dear; I want to measure——"

Jacqueline jumped up and came dancing on bare feet—impatient while the process endured—then, her ardent imagination thoroughly stirred, she caught Anne around the neck and kissed her violently.

"Darling," murmured Anne, releasing herself.

"Mother—what a beautiful world God has made for us! I do love it! I love, love, love it! Don't you?"

Her mother's smile became mechanical; she inclined her head in silence.

"The kindness of God is too wonderful for me," mused Jacqueline. "Father must be having a good time up there. He is, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"It's wonderful," mused Jacqueline, "that God should have made so beautiful a place down here, too. . . . I think of that, sometimes. Do you?"

"Sometimes."

"And all that blue sky, too," murmured the child, "and the white clouds and the sun and moon—oh, mother! and the lovely green colour of the grass and trees!"

"Try this on, darling! Be careful; it's only basted——"

Jacqueline wriggled out of her nightgown; stood naked, a gold-brown shape in the lamplight. Nervously she submitted to the martyrdom of fitting—to the jerks and pulls and the ripping out of threads, and the gathering and pinning.

"Mother?"

"Yes, dear."

"I've written my blank-book full of poems. I'll have to have another copy book."

"Very well; as soon as I have a little money."

"Yes," sighed the child, "money!"

But her face brightened again and her smile flashed: "Mother?"

"Yes."

"I wrote a poem about *you!*"

"Really?"

"I'm saving it for your birthday."

"Thank you, darling."

"Shall I tell it to you *now?*"

"Yes, I'd like to hear it."

"This is it, then:

"' *Anne is plowing.*
I hear little round stones strike
The plowshare.
I see grass and dead weeds
Curl over and fall; and
I see wet earth and
Angleworms underneath.
Anne has very blue eyes.
Anne is my mother.
Anne's hair is reddish.
She wears buckskin gloves
On her dear hands, which
Hold the plow steady.
I love her hands.
The plow-horse is
White. He has white

Eyelashes and looks
Kind and sleepy when
He walks. He is benevolent.
Anne is beautiful——' "

"Oh, *Jackie!*"

"You *are!*"

"You silly child——"

"*I* think so, anyway. Let me go on and tell you my poem—ouch!"

"Did a pin prick you?"

"Yes. Let me tell you the rest of my poem:

"'*The blue in Anne's eyes*
Is like the sky in July.
The colour of Anne's hair
Is like sunshine on a red leaf.
Anne is tall and she stands straight,
I love to hide my face on her neck,
Because Anne's skin smells sweet——' "

"Oh, Jackie! that isn't poetry—to say how somebody *smells!*"

"Isn't it? Well, you smell like clover-hay. Why isn't it all right to put it into a poem?"

"Yes, but don't show it to the children in school."

"No," said Jacqueline, "they just laugh at my poems. . . . I wrote a piece about Mr. Jackson fishing under the covered bridge, and I let Elmer Cresson read it, and he said I must be crazy to write such stuff. . . . Would you like to hear that poem?"

"Very much," nodded Anne, absently, lifting the dress off over Jacqueline's head.

"This is the poem called 'Under Drifting Bridge,'"

"Yes, but put on your nightgown first!"
"Let's pretend I'm an angel——"
"No; put on your nightgown!"
Jacqueline struggled into it, reciting all the while:

"'*Under the covered Bridge there is*
An old man fishing in the rain.
It is dry under the bridge.
He sits on the dry stones,
All hunched up. He doesn't move
Except to spit, or to
Draw in his line and throw it
Farther out. It rains on the water
Outside.
The cork floats very still.
The cork begins to dip.
I see little rings of water around it.
The cork begins to bob.
It comes up and it goes under.
It goes deep down and swims.
The old man takes the pole
In both hands. He jerks it.
He pulls. He pulls out a fish.
The fish is grey and white.
It is slimy. It has whiskers and
Very little eyes. It croaks and croaks.
The old man cuts out the
Hook with a jack-knife.
The hook is very deep down
He gets slippery blood all over his fingers.
The fish is all bloody.
The old man guts the fish
And gets the guts all over——'"

"Jack!"

"What?"

"You sicken me. Why do you write about such things?"

"About guts?"

"Yes—don't say that word again——"

"Why, that's what I *saw*, mother——"

"Yes, but—don't put it in a poem."

"Isn't it poetry to tell what you see?"

"Sometimes. But you don't want to write a poem about a bucket of swill, for instance, do you?"

"I never thought of that," said Jacqueline. . . . She studied the idea for a while in silence; then, abruptly inspired:

"' *O swill in our tin pail,*' "

she began loudly,

"' *You are full of egg-shells and*
Coffee-grounds and
Potato peeling! And sour milk,
And bones.
You do not smell nice, O swill,
Yet God made you for the purpose
Of pigs——' "

"That's enough," interrupted Anne.

She straightened her back, looked at her daughter, and laughed.

"You're a droll little thing—more Ardres than Stafford. . . . I suppose you're my child—but sometimes it seems incredible."

"Mother!"

"I said it in fun, darling. Come here and try on the dress again"

CHAPTER II

If Nature abhors a vacuum, on the other hand Nature will not tolerate overcrowding.

When, in any given area, too many living creatures of the same species assemble, Nature decimates them. That's one way she gets rid of what she doesn't want.

Her weapon is an epidemic.

Locally as well as continentally—and even universally—this is true.

As a local example: about every seven years, in Saguenay County, the wild grey rabbit becomes too plentiful. And regularly every seven years the species is nearly annihilated by an epidemic.

The ruffled grouse, too, in Saguenay County, may not increase above a limit set by Nature. Insect parasites regulate their population periodically.

In the chilly pools of Saguenay County Nature tolerates just so many trout to a pool, and no more.

Nature limits the fox and lynx population in proportion to the number of rabbits. In epidemic years there are few foxes and fewer lynx in Saguenay County. They must leave or starve.

Perhaps this is the same law which starts an epidemic on overcrowded continents. These epidemics, known as plagues, sometimes sweep the world.

Accident and the consequences of human ignorance usually are sufficient to decimate the race at successive intervals. If these do not keep the world's popu-

lation within bounds, then an epidemic restores the balance.

Throughout the world, orders, sub-orders, genera, and species are eternally mobile—ever in motion—ever on the ascendant or descendant; never fixed. And this is true, too, of sub-species, varieties, and of individual races and family groups. Ever the tendency is to expand and improve, or to dwindle and decay—to advance or to retrograde—to regenerate or to degenerate. And, proving the rule, the contrary, also, happens.

Periodical profusion of larvæ, of adult diptera, hemiptera, hymenoptera, lepidoptera, always are episodic and never have been indefinitely maintained. Nature will not endure any permanent alteration of equilibrium.

But, because Nature's swiftest weapon is the epidemic, it does not follow that it is her only weapon.

At intervals it appears to be Nature's deliberate determination to rid the world of certain orders, genera, species, and individual family strains, not always because they are bad.

Yet this apparently relentless determination sometimes is merely a threat and a warning.

Her weapon is not the swift scythe of the epidemic; it is a slow, subtle poison. And it is called Degeneration.

All living species are subject to this threat. Many do not or cannot heed it; and they vanish. Others, by accident or through instinct, have saved themselves at the eleventh hour, and, through regeneration, have preserved the race.

But the tendency to degeneration becomes a habit of the very cells that form the ensemble. Once started

it progresses through generations toward final extermination.

The race that is infected with the initial taint of degeneration rarely is regenerated.

The virus is very deadly. And often infection occurs through no conscious fault of the race involved. Which phenomenon most terribly resembles the revolting dogma of preordination.

Because, while through generations a degenerate race may increase, branch out, and spread like cancer, races of finer moral, mental and physical fibre sometimes appear to be foredoomed, in spite of, and even because of, these very qualities.

In the forest there are trees that die, not because they are mature, not because of disease or accident. There seems to be no reason why they die.

In the forest, too, those sturdy trees known as "hard-woods," when felled at the proper time, sent out sprouts from root and trunk. They reproduce themselves. These sprouts grow into trees. Thus is a hard-wood grove reforested.

But if, in time, these sprouts be felled, the sprouts which succeed grow more slowly, and into less vigorous trees. And, in generations to follow, finally there will be no sprouts. And then only new seeds can reforest the wasted woods in which family groups have become extinct.

So it is when the shock of circumstance is endured by successive human generations of a family group. The rally is slower with each check, until finally there is no recovery, and the race becomes extinct.

Not, perhaps, losing any of its integral quality. It is the sheer inability to continue that ends the race. It

is impotency, sterility, incapability, wilful or accidental, that finishes a race—disinclination, lack of instinct to perpetuate in the face of successive reverses.

Under such conditions species that persist seldom are of the finer sort.

Where repeated checks, shocks, reverses, disasters, modify, halt, and finally atrophy the sex instinct, racial annihilation naturally follows.

There are millions to whom the symbol of human perfection is virginity.

But even in the Dark Ages it was believed that the virgin by conviction was condemned, after death, to lead male apes through hell——

Now in Anne Stafford there remained no sex inclination whatever, only the atavistic instinct, to be protected from bodily want. Her family group, apparently, was done for.

In Philip Ardres the sex instinct was as infrequently recurrent as in forest animals remote from civilization. But it happened that his business and bodily wants required looking after. A female of the species seemed to be the natural solution. It was the only motive that suggested marriage to him. But he hesitated.

Physical virginity in itself involves no moral qualities in its possessor. But chastity is spiritual self-control, involving mind and body.

Had not Anne Stafford possessed all of these qualities, and natural corollaries, possibly Philip Ardres might never have noticed her at all, and his race would have ended with him.

She had been teaching school for three years at

Drifting Bridge before he chanced to encounter her. It was in April.

Probably she was the only female within his world's circuit that he ever would have noticed, even in April.

Something about this woman, physical or occult, arrested his attention. And suddenly in that April hour all his needs culminated.

As catnip agitates a cat, so the psychic or material emanations from the subliminal or corporeal person of Anne Stafford reacted upon Philip Ardres.

"By golly," he said, "that's what I want and I need it right away!"

He married her in a few weeks. But, of that, later.

CHAPTER III

NATURE'S intentions toward the race of Stafford and that of Ardres had seemed sinister. The former race was a left-handed branch from the man who lost his head in 1680; the latter originated in a little village made famous by The Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Now, long before the American Revolution and shortly following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, there came to the British Colonial possessions in the New World an impoverished French family named d'Ardres, from Pas-de-Calais—husband and wife and one sinewy son.

Generations later a descendant of that son served as an officer in Knox's regiment of artillery during the Revolution, and, for duty well done, was granted a farm in Saguenay County after the war.

He married the lace-making daughter of a French shop-keeper from Quebec. His only son eliminated the small *d* and apostrophe, called himself Dardres, pronounced it *Dar-dress,* and married a French girl from New Rochelle, who painted miniatures for a living.

One son to a marriage seemed to be the rule, custom, acquired habit, or natural limit throughout succeeding generations of the d'Ardres race.

In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War had an odd effect on the family. They knocked off the *D* and became Ardres again, but pronounced it *Ar-dress.*

In 1884 a son, Philip, was born of the legal union of

The Girl in Golden Rags

John Philip Ardres, farmer, market-hunter, trapper, and general good fellow; and wife, Cécile Lanois.

She was a young French girl who had been leading rather a careless life when Ardres met her in an Albany dump, where she sang and danced and otherwise exercised her professions.

She made a faithful and industrious wife; and she died of grief when her husband died in 1899.

In 1903 their only son, still working the original Ardres farm in Saguenay County, married Anne Elizabeth Stafford, the local school-teacher at Drifting Bridge—the nearest Post Office to the Ardres Farm.

Her name was Anne Elizabeth Stafford. Despite the sturdy, left-handed origin of her race, her pioneer stock had steadily degenerated in virility since the early Republican era. It would have ended with her—nearly did—for she was perilously close to the procreative limit when Ardres—still pronounced Ardress—married her. And begot the first Ardrésienne of the race of Ardres.

For, in 1904, a little brown-skinned daughter was born to an Ardres for the first time in America. She was named Jacqueline Anne.

In August, 1914, her easy-going, good-natured father stabled his horse, dragged his plough under a shed, filled his pockets with bread and meat, walked twenty miles to the nearest railroad, beat his way to Canada, enlisted in a Canadian unit, and, ultimately, was gassed to death in a meadow full of white butterflies and scarlet poppies.

Jacqueline had attained her tenth year. Her mother was now over fifty. They wept very often that summer and tried to carry on the farm.

It seemed rather a grim jest, this ending of the name of Ardres, once kicked out by France because he spelled *G-o-d* in his own way, had gone back after nearly two hundred and fifty years, to die for France in the name of God. Yet this last living male descendant of a once sturdy, ambitious, intelligent race had degenerated to the plodding, uninspired, unaspiring level of that American peasantry which would repel the appellation with dull and bovine resentment, if so characterized; but who, nevertheless, are peasants, soul, mind and body, though of a far less admirable fibre than their European confrères.

As for the widow Ardres, née Stafford, degeneration from English stock had been neither moral, mental nor spiritual. Not physical but procreative inclination and ability had degenerated. Instinct to perpetuate had become non-existent in Anne Ardres. In her still remained, however, that English *something* which seldom is extirpated—some indestructible fibre that made her keep her body clean and her mind alert amid the decline of material fortune, and a life-long association with mental and physical slovens. Anne was clean of body and mind; and sexually emotionless.

But little Jacqueline seemed inclined to Latin warmth and gaiety, and to Latin carelessness of person, too. In no wise was she disturbed by her rags or by her own unwashed body—as though the happy, fervent blood in her were enough to burn up such negligible dross as mere dirt—and her fiery, passionate soul purify the world itself of superfluous débris.

Ardent, wiry, nervous, excitably intelligent, constitutionally slipshod and youthfully callous to dirt from

birth, she faced the world with outflung baby arms of welcome.

Year after year everything became more welcome to Jacqueline; sun, clouds, breezes, the four great winds that roared through swampy woods, or tossed horizon-wide wastes of alders. Night, with its silver moons of various shapes; night, with its snow or rain, she welcomed. Myriad green leaves, motionless, or a-quiver, or lashed white by storms; the dark waters of Drifting River; the flash of brown and silver brooks; dusty roadsides abloom with meadowsweet; ploughed fields, sun gilded, flaky crisp; or the pricking corn where crows walked busily; or snowy acres of perfumed buckwheat; or cattle cud-chewing in the noon shadow of trees; or the roofs and chimneys of Drifting Bridge; and the faded flag adroop above the school-house—all these were welcome.

And those of her own kind were welcome—the half-stupid, half-tamed, barefoot children gathered from surrounding wastes to wrestle with the rule of three under one school-house roof.

The yelling troop loosened at noon; the loungers in some village store, with its fly-blown candy and cheap hardware; and the old loafers sitting and spitting on the tavern porch—all were beloved and welcome.

And the single village street, where ancient maples met overhead and where, behind picket fences, phlox and yellow lilies grew.

To all these—and the far hills, blue as a trace of smoke; and the endless wilderness of alders and wet woods—to all these were Jacqueline's thin little arms outflung in passionate accolade and self-offering.

That, at ten, was still her attitude toward creation—"Love me because I love."

Not that she didn't have her *mauvaises heures,* anger, violence, wild griefs—and was a devil when enraged. Born with the simple instincts to love what pleased her and to attack whatever annoyed her, at ten these primitive impulses remained uncurbed. She was still too young for anybody to forecast what she'd do upon provocation. She had already indulged in several bloody combats at school. She even stalked her enemy and devised ambush and trap. Her resentment lasted; but not indefinitely.

Jacqueline Ardres, at twelve, was a wiry, velvet-skinned, brown-gold child—brown-eyed, gold-brown of hair, and with a patch of startling carmine for a mouth and a delicate carnation stain under the skin of her cheeks, which deepened or paled, sensitive to every emotion in her golden-brown body.

Her first grief had been the loss of her father—a sorrow not clearly understood at the time, and which gradually became fitful, less real, and finally legendary —after the manner of all children.

At that age in Jacqueline's life nothing was clearly understood. The operations of her mind were limited; purely objective; casual, sensuous. Bodily wants alone were of definite importance to her. Physical sensations predominated. Mind played only a small part in the child's waking hours. What part it played was creative.

At that age her emotions were very active. She formed impulsive friendships, offering and craving affection among the dull little girls and boys at school. Once or twice she developed violent partiality for little

boys of her age, and was nonplussed at masculine indifference or sullen repulse. The fierce caresses she lavished on her mother consoled the child, the imperative necessity of whose nature was affection. . . . A sorrowful inheritance.

But so far, excepting the death of her father, whom already she was beginning to forget, nothing really mattered.

She was fed and clothed, and had no thought for the morrow. She slept in a bed, soundly. There always had been a bed for her. The future, so far, had no meaning to a child to whom last week was already years ago. Hers was a heart never touched by cold.

In winter a sheet-iron stove kept her body warm indoors. In summer she was warm anywhere—heart and body.

As for school, it had no terrors for her. From her mother, who had been teacher at Drifting Bridge, Jacqueline inherited routine capacity of mind. Her mental process was supple.

After supper, between the two, the three R's had been quickly and easily disposed of.

But one particular misfortune menaced Jacqueline—a misfortune common to all children of the poor—the threatened necessity that she aid her mother with manual labour.

A girl child with immature body and tender, undeveloped limbs, is likely to be more or less deformed by premature heavy work, or even by that lighter sort of drudgery locally known as chores.

Round shouldered, stooped women, too early aged, and with finger joints distorted or feet broken down,

were the rule and not the exception in Saguenay County. "Stomach trouble" and other functional disorders were the usual complaints.

Anne Ardres, having been a school teacher, and usually obliged to walk miles to and from the schoolhouse, had suffered scarcely at all from the general malformation and broken health of the fried-cake belt.

A sound body was her heritage from a school-marm mother and a self-respecting Massachusetts coast-guard father; and an unblemished physical system was what she intended for Jacqueline—perhaps all she could hope to ensure her now, excepting a primary education with lashings of Chautauqua culture.

Anne Ardres was a straight, firmly knit, ruddy-haired daughter of Saxon England—even more powerful, muscularly, in middle life, than in youth.

The farm had to go on if she and Jacqueline were to eat every day and sleep under a roof. She had no money to hire help. That had been her problem in 1914—or, rather, it had been no problem, no question at all; no choice, even; but a condition as desperate as deep water to a poor swimmer.

So, her easy-going, good-natured Philip having been planted under those distant poppies; and with a growing girl-child at her side; and with stark years ahead of her; Anne Ardres dragged her defunct Philip's plough from under the shed, harnessed the family horse, and set her Saxon features toward the fallow, where, God willing, rye should grow to give them winter bread. And if her first furrow proved to be as crooked as Drifting River, nevertheless it was a furrow, and would grow the seed she sowed across acres of broken clods and stones—nourish the tarred corn

kernels and the slivered potato eyes, crows and other vermin to the contrary.

Since the summer of 1914, Anne Ardres's days had begun before sunrise. She milked, turned out the cows, watered and fed the old white horse, Jim; made the fire, cooked breakfast for two, ate hers, left Jacqueline's covered on the range, fed the chickens, collected eggs, gathered what vegetables were in season, ran a cultivator through the kitchen garden, drew water for the boiler on Mondays and set the clothing a-soak, split and brought in wood, cleaned her bed-chamber, dusted the parlour and sitting-room, and was ready to start afield with plough, cultivator, hay fork, axe, scythe, mowing machine, or hay wagon before her child awoke.

Her Saxon hair was still thick and reddish gold; her features, very Saxon, and with profile almost noble. For all her fifty odd years she was straight and vigorous, and she moved lightly on good-sized, shapely feet which were larger than the Gallic extremities of her late and lamented Philip, but far more capable.

Now, also, the long-absent English colour was staining her fair English skin again, making her firm hands red, flushing her neck and face, and the deep, full bosom where the sweat-wet collar of her blouse lay loose to sun and wind.

As for Jacqueline, when she awoke she had only her breakfast to eat and then go to school; or, if in vacation, she made her own bed, swept and dusted, set the breakfast dishes to soak, wiped them dry, and laid the table for noon dinner. Also, if time allowed, she prepared vegetables and even sometimes mixed dough. But this was optional.

That, and a little sewing and darning, was all that Anne asked of her, or permitted—the penalty being a spanking if caught lugging water or wood, or lifting heavy things.

All hot, mad, and tearful from the warming, Jacqueline would clasp Anne passionately in her thin brown arms; and:

"Oh, mamma," she would cry, "I want to be kissed very fast, now, because I really wanted to help and not just be naughty and disobey!"

And Anne would suffer the child's impassioned caresses, lay aside the shingle, and button up Jacqueline's underclothing with all the imperturbable tranquillity of her English forbears, whose hands once set to an appointed task, never faltered. . . . And in such things is the greatness of England and the salvation of the world.

It had been, and still was, a strange domain that the Continental Congress had granted to the cannoneer ancestor of the late Philip Ardres for being a good soldier in the Revolution, and for serving faithfully and efficiently the big guns of General Knox.

Frontier acres were had for the asking in those days—and Saguenay County, not yet established, lay beyond what were then the northern frontiers of New York State.

Either Congress had been very generous or very ignorant—both, probably, for the grant to the soldier, Raoul Ardres, was a vast acreage of mostly worthless land.

Had it all—or even a tenth part of it—been arable land—fertile soil from which the forest was to be cleared

—the grant would have been munificent. But out of the thousands of acres given to this soldier of the Revolution, scarcely a hundred could be cultivated at all, and only thirty were now tilled. Of the remainder there were acres of wet, flat woodland, full of dozy trees and dark, sluggish, gully-like streams.

The rest was mostly alders—acres and acres and acres of moist, level land which could not be drained, covered by alders and willows as far as the eyes could see—a horizon-wide, limitless waste of grey-stemmed bushes crowned with dark-green foliage under which only moss grew and such herbage as seeks a dusky shelter from the sun.

Save for the smoky blue range of hills on the horizon, and the hilly intervale called Ardres Farm, it was a world of low woods and alders that Jacqueline was born into.

Only at Drifting Bridge, and the Verril Farm to the westward, did anything appear resembling a rolling country. All else was flat, mostly wet, a monotony of grey and green in rain or sun; and, in winter, a continent of deathly white.

There was a grey stretch of water to the north-west; Windy Pond—made eons ago by the natural damming of Drifting River. Drifting River itself was grey where it flowed swiftly or when wind-ruffled; a limpid, transparent black when calm, scarcely moving between its reeds and alders.

However, this grey and green world of Saguenay wore a brighter, tenderer livery where cultivated fields and roadsides varied its delicately sober harmonies.

Jacqueline loved these brilliant, sunny open stretches: but she also loved it all—everything—woods,

alders, swamps—all the world she ever had known was spontaneously loved by this child whose ruling necessity from birth seemed to be affection.

One day after school a fat, tow-headed boy of twelve called out to Jacqueline:

"Hey, Jackie, the Germans are givin' the French a big lickin' over there."

"That's a lie, but what of it?" she retorted cheerfully.

"Well, you're a French girl. Y' orter feel kinda sick to your stummick. I would if I was French."

"I'm American——" Suddenly she remembered that her father had died in France; and she swung her tin dinner-pail and knocked Henry Stumpf flat on the dusty grass.

He passed out for a few moments—moments of agony to Jacqueline, who gathered him into her bare brown arms and shed tears and kissed his pasty visage and implored him not to die.

However, when he came back to earth, and realized what was being done to him, terror seized him, and he struck her tear-wet face and ran.

She nearly got him again with a large pebble, then she smeared the blood from her swelling nose and started homeward.

The following day, however, she grinned at him and said:

"Hello, Henry; how's the war going to-day?"

But he dared not even protrude his German tongue at her.

She was satisfied. It was not for such injuries that she stalked an enemy and contrived ambush and reprisal.

CHAPTER IV

To Jacqueline Ardres the universe was confined within a celestial and terrestrial circle circumscribed by the local horizon. Outside lay dreams and the Unreal.

The sun, the moon, Orion, and Ursus Major ruled the local vault overhead.

To her, Drifting Bridge was the metropolis of the local cosmos—London, Paris, New York, Bagdad, all fused into one capitol of wonder and delight.

Only in the north-west was this cyclorama of empire framed otherwise than by grey-green or naked and silvery crests of alders.

But in that direction a misty silhouette of hills followed the horizon's arc for nearly forty degrees.

This was her only visible glimpse of the Unknown. All else that lay beyond the outer wastes of alders was pure legend to the child. Perhaps this was the stimulus to the seed of an imagination which yearly grew out of all bounds and was becoming a deep-rooted part of reality to her.

At fifteen there was no more to teach her at Drifting Bridge School, and no money to send her elsewhere.

Anne, being a graduate of a State Normal School, carried on the child's education intermittently.

In the parlour the walnut bookcase contained nearly a hundred books of sorts. Many among these the child found readable now—particularly volumes of poetry.

She continued to write poems of her own. At sixteen she had several copy-books full of poems. At that age, too, she began to rhyme. Also she continued to read from her literary works to Anne; but very soon the child realized that they merely puzzled and perplexed her mother.

However, she continued to write rhymed verses in her copy-books; and began to illustrate them—first with pencil, then with crayons from Pilcher's Ten Cent Palace, and finally with water-colours, a box of which she won as a prize in some social gathering that summer.

Meanwhile her mother was trying to teach her Latin and World History.

Midday dinner-hour, and tired moments after supper, were the only intervals available for the intensive culture of Jacqueline.

Anne just managed to keep the farm going; but that was all. There had been no material progress, no money saved, no headway made. On the contrary, deterioration of buildings, tools, and equipment had never been checked. There were debts, too. So there had been no money available to halt disintegration, none for improvements. Fences collapsed, gaps were patched with perishable alders piled up like brush. Shingles rotted, and torn rolls of old roofing paper or squares of rusty tin were nailed over the apertures by Anne.

Long ago the red paint on barn, outbuilding and house had been so dulled and blistered by sun, and so battered by hail, sleet and rain, that scarcely any colour remained to protect the weathered silver of cracked siding and checked clapboard.

Paths and roads through the wilderness of wet woodland and alders had grown up. There had been no time to keep all of them clear. In the alders, however, the cattle did that in a measure; and Anne cut scrub-birch, willow, and aspen for kindling; and there were miles and miles of strange wide pathways wandering through thickets and leading nowhere in particular. One path seemed exactly like the other, level, moist, carpeted with thick soft grass, and walled on either side by the eternal barrier of alders in the depths of which only rare flecks of sunlight ever fell upon the ferns.

At seventeen Jacqueline had her growth, or nearly —and her body and limbs had become firm and hard and supple.

Anne, however, would not let her lift heavy weights or drive a plough; but she was permitted, now, to milk, push a cultivator, hoe corn and potatoes, guide a reaper, prepare food, and do general housework.

Every particle of food that mother and daughter could count on to put into their mouths must be grown by the labour of their hands and the sweat of their bodies.

When that is the case—when one must coax or force common dirt to keep the body from starvation and death—then one's view, knowledge, understanding, attitude toward the soil underfoot, is profoundly different from those myriads of humans who use the earth merely to walk upon.

Anne had to know why soil was sour, and how to sweeten it; and how to warm cold land and how to cool soil too light and hot. She had to understand when to plough, and which way and how deep; when to sow;

when to harvest; what crops should follow one another in rotation; what were the best sequences.

For lack of manure and chemicals she had to learn what the nodules on legumes would do for her; what to plough under, what to cut, what to leave, how much muck and forest mould she could afford to treat with air-slacked lime; why melons went bad in rich soil; why she should not burn dead leaves, and the wild hedges that separated the fields; and why she should leave a row of trees around every boundary.

In haying time Jacqueline was permitted to drive the rig and to mow and spread, but never to pitch and load.

Her heaviest implement was the potato hook, but it was Anne who carried the sacks—Anne, straight, ruddy, Saxon, and abloom again after fifty years of life.

At seventeen Jacqueline had become a slim, sun-tanned, golden thing, so far undistorted and unmarred save for the skin on her hands—water-worn, blistered, needle-pricked, toughened by tool and soil and sun and wind.

Into her life nobody from the outer marches had come to disturb her acquiescence in her natal environment.

Outside of it her imagination revelled and roamed like a child let loose from school; but, childlike, too, returned always and happily to familiar reality and the perpetual need of customary things.

Once a week, however, it was Bagdad—or Drifting Bridge in English—and the Palace of Ten Thousand Delights—known locally as Catlin's Opera House.

Here, Thursday nights, there were movies; and thither went Jacqueline and Anne—even on snow-shoes when necessary—regularly every Thursday night.

But there were other and equally delirious revels in Drifting Bridge. Bagdad was full of brilliant pleasures, such as Socials, Showers, Chicken-suppers, Covered-dish parties, church entertainments, and now and then a lecture by some missionary; and sometimes a reception by The Daughters of Ruth.

At night on Decoration Day, and on the Fourth of July, the illumination of Bagdad was somewhat exciting. Every store and every dwelling lighted up with lamp and candle along Bridge Street. And doubtless other avenues and streets would have been similarly illuminated had there been any. But there was only the village green, out of which Bridge Street ran westward and ended in a clump of alders and a barbed-wire fence.

As for the inhabitants of Bagdad, they were typical; they and their village were replicas in miniature of larger places, and of urban dwellers more numerous.

All virtues and all vices to which humanity attains, or is heir and victim, were theirs.

All human qualities and defects entered into and developed in the several characters with which they started their mundane careers.

There were what is known as "good" individuals and "bad" ones—labelled as such according to the approbation or disapprobation their conduct earned for them in the community.

In Bagdad all the commandments had been broken at some time or other during its metropolitan existence; all would be broken again.

On the contrary, all virtues had been practised in the community, and would continue to be practised while it existed.

Better inclinations fought baser ones, as always will be the case in the human individual; good and evil sat the same old see-saw; gusts of reform swept the place; reaction and communal slackness followed. There were hard years and years of plenty; there were the usual succession of phenomena known as Acts of God —floods, droughts, tempests, accidents by lightning and by negligence; terrible winters at 45 deg. below zero; dreadful summers of 115 deg. in the shade.

In other words, Bagdad and its inhabitants were like every other spot and race of people on the habitable globe, merely modified by the local conditions that obtained in Saguenay County, New York.

No worse, no better than the human average, Drifting Bridge, under a magnifying-glass, quite perfectly resembled any capital on earth under a reducing glass; and Wisdom and Experience, peering through, would have detected no radical differences worth recording.

The original House of Ardres was still standing as the kitchen and garret wing of a larger dwelling erected in 1800.

The little old house, one and a half stories, with high-peaked roof built to shed snow, was still solid enough except for leaky shingles.

The later house—the sort known generally and ignorantly as "colonial," was a dignified homestead, still structurally sound, but with sidings, chimneys, and roof out of repair and scarcely a vestige of paint remaining.

All the rooms had been furnished and still were,

but, for many years, only four had been in use—Anne's bedroom, Jacqueline's, the sitting-room, which also was the dining-room, and the parlour. The latter was used only to receive visitors; but as the Ardres Farm lay four miles south of Drifting Bridge, visitors were rare, even on Sundays.

At seventeen Jacqueline needed so many things to make her presentable that Anne, for the first time, felt the sting of circumstances pierce her very soul, and, for the first time, knew bitterness and was afraid.

There had been three lean years. There was no money, no resources, nothing to do except to keep on working at an endless task which never had given them more than bed, clothing, and daily bread, and which, probably, never would.

Jacqueline was dreadfully shabby from head to heel, outside and underneath—ragged and careless of person as any unwashed gamine in a city alley.

So far the child remained quite unconscious of her condition, and very indifferent to bodily fastidiousness. Nor had Anne, so far, observed any trace of awakening coquetry in her, no symptomatic vanities, no hint of maturity, although Jacqueline had had enthusiastic love affairs with a dozen different boys in Drifting Bridge—red-hot, headlong affairs where often she had taken the initiative and had done at least her share of the courtship.

But hers was ever a friendly soul and an ardent heart, that made advances without wisdom or consideration. Hers was a born necessity for friendship and affection; and, to her, demonstration was natural and caress

impulsive. Rebuff surprised more than it hurt; inconstancy puzzled; and once or twice her innocence had been perplexed and shocked—the latter episode usually terminating in a blaze of wrath, and assault and battery on her part.

Once a boy enraged her while they were dancing together. And after the party Jacqueline stalked him through the moonlight, ambushed him near the schoolhouse, flew at him and pummelled him till his blubbering yells alarmed her; and she left him, reluctantly, to staunch his wounds and yell his fill.

She had mad "crushes" on other girls older than herself—some particular characteristic about them appealing to her—a manner of smiling, perhaps, the way this one dressed or that one wore her hair—infatuations as impulsive and as ardent as those with boys—imagination running riot and generous admiration endowing the object of affection with supernatural attributes of goodness and beauty. But it occurred to her neither to imitate nor envy.

Let down once more to earth after such a "crush," she seemed only to gather new strength from her very disillusion—new capacity to love, to admire, to idealize—a new need to give her heart and to welcome affection offered. . . . But, so far, the natural and innocent vanity of her sex still slept within her.

She came into the house for noon dinner one day in May, looking particularly shabby and unwashed, and carrying a string of bull-heads, sun-fish, chubbs, and small grass-pickerel.

There were fish-scales and blood and mud on her faded gingham skirt. One water-soaked shoe had

burst, exposing a wet stocking thrust through by two toes.

As for her hair, it was an unspeakable mess of tangled gold-brown locks sagging to the sweat-soaked collar of her blouse.

"Mother," she said with a heavenly smile, "I caught every one myself and I cleaned them. They're a present for *you!*"

Anne took the fish, strung on a double alder-switch, and laid them in a pan:

"Now go to the sink and try to clean yourself," she said.

Something—some slight unsteadiness in her mother's voice attracted Jacqueline's attention.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, turning around from the basin of soapy water.

"Nothing. Dinner's—ready."

Anne steadied her voice. Perhaps she was tired. She had broken up some tough clay fallow that morning, and also it had been stony, and the shock of the ploughshare on buried boulders seemed to have shaken her more than usual, mind and body.

Perhaps a tired body and tired nerves and a tired mind were responsible for the faint flash of emotion. Perhaps, in that psychological second, the sight of this dirty, ragged daughter of hers, already seventeen, suddenly concentrated in her all the hopelessness, bitterness, and fear of many a month's silence and self-control.

If so, in Anne's face there was now no further sign of the crisis, no quiver, no shadow.

"Jackie, you do smell dreadfully of those fish," she said.

"Oh, it's the pickerel—they're slimy, mother——"

"Your shoes are so wet that they wheeze and squeak——"

"I'll get some slippers——"

"Dry your feet; take off that skirt and shirt and put on a dressing-gown. . . . And try to comb your hair."

Jacqueline squatted down on the floor, tore shoes and stockings off, hopped up and flew upstairs.

"Take off everything!" called Anne, "and put on your wrapper. You'll be warm enough!"

In two or three minutes Jacqueline came downstairs like a tempest, her hair loosened in a thick cloud, her body enveloped in an old crash bath-robe.

"Asparagus!" she exclaimed, enchanted, "and scallions! Oh, isn't it good to have something green again!"

She slipped a scallion between her lips and crunched it with even, white teeth, gazing rapturously at her mother.

Sometimes she had a quaintly saucy way of calling her mother "Anne," especially when sympathetic and tender.

"Anne," she said, "you're tired. You work too hard!"

"No."

"You *are* tired. Don't answer me back, Anne! You're *tired.* You've been ploughing and *I've* been *fishing!* Why won't you let me plough?"

Anne shook her head and passed over to her daughter a plate of potato soup.

They ate in silence for a while, Jacqueline's brown eyes wandering to the window where, imprisoned, a white butterfly fluttered on the sunlit pane.

When the soup was finished there was a ham steak, fried mush, and the first asparagus of the season.

Jacqueline savoured it daintily, held it aloft, let it droop and melt into her pink mouth.

"That is not the way to eat it," said Anne.

"That is why it is so good," retorted Jacqueline.

"Dangerous logic, Jackie."

"I didn't mean it," said the girl, laughing. "I wouldn't do a wrong thing just because I liked to do it. . . . Besides, I never have wanted to do anything wrong. . . . Not *very* wrong. . . . I *did* punish Sam Franklin——"

"Just keep away from such boys," said Anne; "that's enough. You need not tear them to pieces."

"But he was terrible——"

"If you discover that a boy is low and vicious, keep away from him. There are such boys. Girls, too. Be on your guard and avoid such people."

"I do when I know. I don't notice Sam any more. Or that Beasly boy. And I don't go around with Jessica White."

Anne looked at her daughter across the table:

"Keep your mind clean, Jackie."

"I do. I don't have to try."

"Always tell me everything," continued Anne in a low voice.

"I do."

"Because," said her mother, "evil sometimes doesn't look like evil, and you might not recognize it and it might surprise you off your guard."

"How?"

Anne cut two slices from the custard pie, helped Jacqueline and herself.

When they had eaten, and the two tea-cups were emptied, they went upstairs to brush their teeth—a custom now firmly established—and then Anne entered her daughter's room.

"I'm going to talk to you," she said. "I'm your mother and you'd better hear about certain matters from me than learn them elsewhere. . . . Because you'll learn about them some time——"

"Probably I know already," said Jacqueline.

Anne flushed: "Who told you?"

"Oh, you hear kids talk—and you notice things—and you guess the rest. . . . You mean about how babies are born?"

"About such matters—yes," admitted her mother, reddening.

"Well, I know. . . . I think it's disgusting."

"You are not to think that——"

"I can't help it. . . . Just like calves and kittens! Ugh! Why can't there be eggs? They're not so bad. It isn't so bad to have an egg and brood it——"

"That's nonsense! You talk like a silly child!"

"Well, anyway, I know all about such things, and I think it's all ridiculous, and I don't want to think about them. I'd be ashamed. Don't let's talk about it, mother."

"Very well. . . . But I want you always to tell me anything that you are in doubt about. . . . Now, sit still for a while. I'm going to fill the tub with warm water, and when your dinner is digested I want you to take a bath and let me wash your hair——"

"Oh, mother!"

"It's going to be done!"

"Pat McCann said that Tanya Larisch and I could have his boat this afternoon——"

"You're filthy and fishy and your clothes are wet!"

"I was going to wear my bathing suit——"

"Walk four miles in a bathing suit!"

"No, drive Jim and wear your cloak——"

"And drive back soaking wet?"

"It won't hurt me——"

"You can't. You've got to put on your middy-blouse and your tan shoes, and undress in McCann's barn if you're going to swim and splash. . . . Very well. . . . But take a towel and some soap. Wash your head and dry your hair in the sun, thoroughly. Do you promise, Jackie?"

"I do, Anne darling!" She flung her arms around her mother, strained her in an ecstatic embrace, and flew to the closet where her only other outdoor suit hung.

Very slowly, and as if tired, Anne went downstairs and out to the barn, where she backed old Jim out of his stall and harnessed him to the decrepit buckboard.

The problem of this woman-child of hers was ever weighing heavily and more heavily on her; the eternal problems of food and clothing; of the future always thick with darkness; of her own strength to endure—all these had become steadily increasing burdens which were crushing Anne's heart and mind. As she adjusted and buckled thong and trace and strap, there in the May sunshine before the barn, a sudden surge of fear rose out of hopeless perplexity and swept her till she shivered as though chilled.

How could she labour afield and care for this girl-child of hers?—care for her body, mind, soul?

How was she going to clothe this adolescent, whose age demanded more and more—whose poverty had become almost indecent—who could not continue any longer to go to the village and among people unless properly clothed and cared for?

Either some money must be made and laid aside, and that quickly, or the child would have to remain at home for sheer lack of apparel.

But how would it be with Jacqueline if she were cut off from comrades, from all amusement—a household drudge on a lonely farm, with nothing to break the monotony?

No young mind could stand it and remain healthy; no young body endure it and escape the withering deformity of solitude.

After Jacqueline, in her middy-blouse, and with her bathing suit in her lap, had driven away along the alder-bordered road, Anne found a large pine shingle, used for siding, mixed a little red wagon-paint, and upon the shingle she printed:

BOARDERS TAKEN

FRESH MILK AND EGGS

A. ARDRES

This she nailed to a solitary fir-balsam tree which stood dejectedly by the roadside, in front of where the garden gate had been.

When she had accomplished this she went into the house, upstairs, and opened, one by one, the doors of the three musty bedrooms. They would do. There was a change of sheets for every bed, and a sufficient

number of towels. What more could a boarder want besides pitcher and bowl and a bar of soap?

Anne closed the doors, one after another, went out into the passage way, put both hands over her eyes of English blue, pressed them a moment. But no tear fell, and her full lips scarcely quivered.

She went slowly downstairs. It was Monday; and the clothes boiler was full and steaming.

Outside on the grass robins were very noisy. Once or twice she heard a meadow lark call.

Pure, clear, joyous, the lark's note seemed like the call of Youth itself—the haunting call of her own lost youth.

She stepped to the open door. Her blue eyes were wet, now; she drew the back of her calloused hand across the lashes, and leaned there against the door frame, biting her twitching lip.

Yet no passer-by could have thought her more than a few years past thirty, so straight and firmly moulded her body, so smooth and richly coloured her face, so blue her eye, so thick her reddish hair.

However, it was May, when, in the North, all things living are touched with the magic fire.

It may have been that; or because Anne never had loved a man—never had felt the blush of love, nor its perfumed fire—that her body seemed so pliable and young and her tear-wet face so fresh and virginal there in the afternoon sun of May.

Steam from the tin boiler drifted out of the open door. There was a tiny drop of bright blood on her under lip.

She turned blindly back into the house.

CHAPTER V

It was in May that Anne Ardres nailed up a shingle, offering board and lodging at the Ardres Farm.

During the long, hot summer there had been no inquiries. The dirt road which passed the house was rated in the county as a main-travelled highway. But few travelled it. Northward it continued to Drifting Bridge, and became only a series of linked and atrocious lanes leading nowhere in particular across miles of waste and swamp.

Southward it ran twenty miles to a flag-station on a trolley line which connected with the Mountain River division of the New York Central.

It had been at this flag-station that Philip Ardres began his *étape* towards that stretch of grass and crimson field-blossoms under which, ultimately, he was to repose indefinitely.

Along this main-travelled highway, then, nobody had come to inquire for board at the Ardres Farm. Therefore, there had been no money to do anything for Jacqueline in the way of clothing.

The child, now, really was too unpresentable to go to the village. Clothing she had outgrown was all she could wear that held together. Fortunately, owing to fashion in the outer world, very short skirts were not noticeably unusual—and the poor child's garment might pass for ultra-fashionable had her stockings been less darned and her shoes less battered.

That she herself was at last awake and sensitive to her appearance was now becoming apparent to her mother; for, though she said nothing to Anne, she kept clear of the village except at night, and then went there only on necessary errands.

There was going to be some money, however—or its equivalent—from a small surplus of rye, buckwheat and potatoes; the latter, a new brand called Giant Early, were really enormous and filled the hills.

Frank Dubois, of the Dubois Emporium—the only dry-goods store in Drifting Bridge—required these winter staples and had offered to let Anne take it out in trade upon delivery.

That meant winter clothing for Jacqueline. Meanwhile, her skirts resembled kilts, and she continued aloof from Drifting Bridge, except to drive thither in the buckboard well covered by a faded robe.

One day, early in October, Welch Verril, of the Verril farm—a thin, shabby, sharp-faced little man of forty, drove up to the Ardres gate and called out to Jacqueline:

"Hey, Jack, where's your ma?"

Jacqueline, who was sawing kindling—having been forbidden hatchet or axe—smiled upon Verril in her friendly fashion:

"Mother is in the barn; she'll be back in a minute. . . . How are Connie and Betty?"

Verril, a widower, rested one ragged elbow on his knee and his chin on his thin palm.

"I can't keep track o' them no more," he said dully. "Connie, she's turned sixteen and she runs all over the county wild-like. Betty, she's most ten but she's into everything. You can't do nothin' without a woman."

"They'll be going to school soon."

"I guess so. . . . Say, does your ma want a caaf?"

"I don't know. I guess not."

"Well, I got more'n I can feed. I thought mebbe your ma might kinda like a heifer caaf."

Anne, advancing briskly across the grass, heard their voices and halted. Then she came forward slowly.

"How d' do?" grunted Verril, reddening.

"Good morning," said Anne dryly, recollecting that Verril's last visit was to propose marriage.

"I jest stopped a minute as I was passin'," he said. "I got more cows n'I can feed. 'N' caafs, too. 'N' thinks I, mebbe M'ss Ardress might like a heifer caaf. . . . I dunno. You got seven grade Jerseys, h'ain't you?"

"Yes."

"How many be you milkin'?"

"Four."

"I knowed it. So, thinks I, mebbe 't'won't do no harm to mix a few pails o' ginooine Holstein milk with the few pints you get outen them classy creamers o' yourn."

"I'd like one," said Anne, "but I haven't got the money."

"You got any rye and rye-straw?"

"I need what I haven't sold to Frank Dubois."

"Waal—I gotta build me a garridge. I can take it out in pine logs. I seen what I want down to your east wood-lot."

"They're dozy, I'm afraid."

"Not all on 'em."

"You'll have to take them on the stump, Mr. Verril."

He nodded, absently, hunched forward, staring at

his horse's uncombed tail. Then he turned and looked at Anne out of sharp, sunken little eyes.

"I dunno how I'm to git along," he said, in his thin voice. "Seem's if 'tain't no use for one man to try—what with all them cows 'n' creatures, 'n' farm work, 'n' chores, 'n' children, 'n' hard times, 'n' no woman to help out."

"You'd better hire one," said Anne coolly.

"That kind ain't no reel help," he retorted, with a dogged stare. "Widder-women an' widder-men oughta git hitched up. As fur as I can cal'late, that's the only way they kin git along in this world. What *you* think?"

Anne calmly shook her head, but inwardly she was furious that Jacqueline should hear.

"Waal," said Verril, "some thinks one way an' some thinks diffrunt. . . . Waal, I guess I'll be gettin' on. . . . Goin' down the road a piece. . . . Aimin' to cut me some alder poles. . . . Waal, you send Jack over an' she can pick her out a heifer-caaf. 'N' I'll cut what's right down to your east wood-lot. . . . G' mornin'."

He drove on, southward. Jacqueline resumed the buck-saw; Anne looked at her, still pink with annoyance.

"That Verril," she said, "is a loafer and a waster. He'd rather hunt, and fish, and drink and hang around the village streets than milk and plough and act like a man.

"That's why his cows sicken in winter. He lets his grass burn up and his crops rot. When he married a rich wife and took that farm he could have made money if he'd wanted to.

"He acted like a crazy man. He paid five thousand dollars for one bull. That herd of his was worth thirty thousand dollars, once. It isn't worth three hundred to-day. . . . Jackie?"

"What, mother?"

"Never marry a man who drinks, or who had rather hunt than plough."

"He wants *you* to—doesn't he?"

"He's a fool," said Anne, shortly.

"Doesn't he, mother?"

"Do you think I want two more children and a worthless man to work for when I can't clothe you properly?"

Jacqueline dropped the buck-saw, turned to Anne, and clasped her passionately in both arms.

"You're so pretty, mother—I'm sorry you have to work. I wish you'd let me help——"

"You do!"

"I mean plough and pitch hay and——"

"No. It's better even to marry than do that. . . . You'll have to marry before I give out——"

"Oh, Anne! I want you to stop working——"

"If I stop, Jackie, we both stop living. . . . But—it will be all right. I'm very strong and perfectly well. . . . And you are nearly eighteen, Jackie. You'll have some clothes very soon. . . . You said that Elmer Cresson acted as if he wanted to court you last winter."

"Yes, I let him kiss me and I kissed him back. . . . And—I don't know how it was, but he got so mushy all the time—you know, mother, I like to be kissed once in a while but not all the time. . . . That's how it was. It just wasn't any fun to go with him any more."

Anne said nothing. Elmer was Dr. Cresson's only

son, and Dr. Cresson was the richest man in Drifting Bridge.

Jacqueline looked at her mother, kissed her almost roughly, stepped back, bent over and placed both palms flat on the grass, and calmly turned a perfect handspring.

Anne regarded her without surprise, accustomed to such agile eccentricities.

"It's early," she said. "You could harness Jim and go over and get that calf before dinner."

"Tie her behind?"

"No. Take the box-wagon. There's a calf-crate in Verril's barn. Find one of the hired help—Andy Candler—and get him to crate the calf and lift it into the wagon. And don't *you* try to lift. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Anne," returned Jacqueline, with a ravishing smile that meant another affectionate assault.

But Anne laughed suddenly like a school girl, turned, fled, and bolted the kitchen door; and Jacqueline, still radiant with mischief, turned several more handsprings under the kitchen window, and then danced away to harness old Jim and drive over to the Verril farm.

CHAPTER VI

THE highway to Drifting Bridge is monotonous except in October, and then, sometimes, it is dangerous. It runs for four miles between barriers of alders as dense, level-topped, and symmetrical as clipped hedges.

Therein lies a certain hazard; for woodcock breed there, and frost-driven flights from the far North stop there on their journey South. And in the open season, occasionally, a hail of shot tears through the alders, and across the highway, because men lose all sense of direction and become utterly bewildered by the unbroken miles of thicket on either side of the highway.

The road is a wide dirt road bordered by wild grasses, weeds and wild flowers; and these blossoming green stretches, in turn, are edged by unbroken barriers of alders.

The grey-green alder is a little grim, a little gloomy —not a gay shrub, ever, and always a sombre, even in sunshine and full leaf.

But, in its way, this road to Drifting Bridge is very lovely, with its two broad bands of grass embroidered with wild flowers, and sober double hedges of alders— a road so often drenched in sunshine and haunted by brilliant butterflies.

Such roads, too, are highways for creatures of the wild. Rabbits frisked there in early morning and evening; stately grouse stalked there or huddled down in the golden loam to dust themselves; the red fox knew

it; the humpy woodchuck scuttled through the grassy borders. Often, along it, like some gliding aeroplane, a great bird followed the road, sailing on level wings—hawk or owl or heron.

Summer dusk was the hour for deer there; and in the dying embers of winter sunsets white hares fled from it to the alders, followed by some spectral weasel, invisible against the snow.

Now, in the morning sunshine of a cloudless October day, the road along which Jacqueline drove old Jim, hitched to the box-wagon, was all flanked by masses of azure and gold—myriads of asters, from palest shades of lavender to royal purple—and towering thickets of wild sunflowers.

Already birds had begun to pack for migration—many species in one group—and, by themselves, blackbirds were gathering in vast and restless flocks.

So there was company for Jacqueline as she sat huddled on the board that served as a seat, her elbows set on her knees, her scandalously outgrown skirts revealing a glimmer of skin above the tops of her stockings.

Occasionally she urged Jim to a lumbering sort of trot; then the reins sagged again over the dash, and Jacqueline gazed ahead out of dreamy eyes.

The big, roman-nosed horse, Jim, was growing quite white. The only traces of pristine colour were a multitude of pale freckles sprinkling his hide, making him look as though accidentally besprinkled with liquid yellow mud.

He was a good horse. He never harboured an unkind thought, much less an evil one. He would stand, untied, indefinitely. He would walk perpetu-

ally when once started. He trotted for a few seconds, when requested, but merely to oblige. It was not his gait. Faster than that he never had proceeded. Nothing ever had frightened him. Nothing ever had impaired his appetite. As long as there was anything to eat within reach of his dusty velvet lips he ate, solemnly. When there was nothing left he philosophized.

"Jim," said Jacqueline, "I do wish you'd get on a little bit faster. G'long!—you old poke!"

The burst of modified speed lasted half a minute or so; then they had to pull up for a sulky porcupine that took his time to get out of the way.

It was an hour before they drove across the dark little river, set with glimmery golden reeds, and into the town of Drifting Bridge. And here Jacqueline drew the lap-robe over her pathetic skirt, and continued decorously through the village to a stony road which led to the hill-top Verril Farm.

Out by a row of shambling buildings, two shockingly neglected children, half-naked, greeted Jacqueline —Connie and Betty Verril.

"Oh, Jack!" called the elder, a bare-legged girl of sixteen. "They put a telephone in our house yesterday, and I can talk to any boy in the village. Come on in and I'll show you——"

"Where's Andy Candler?" inquired Jacqueline, looking around the dirty barnyard for the hired man.

"He's down in the bushes looking for hunters. They've been shooting about ten times down there, 'n' pa he won't have trespassers around killing birds he's keeping for himself."

"Who are they?" inquired Jacqueline. "Ross Chase and Catlin?"

"No; these are city folks, I guess. Their dogs look like they were. C'mon in. I'll show you how I can call up any boy you want——"

"No, I only want Andy. I came for a calf——"

"There's Andy now, down there," exclaimed Betty, pointing with one dirty forefinger and scratching her dirty head with the other.

A group of four men disengaged themselves from the birch thicket at the foot of the hill. Two bluish white dogs followed them. Andy's penetrating, nasal voice came up to them from the gully below.

"You see," said Connie, "they're city people, and Andy he's driving them off our land. They're too damn fresh, they are. Andy knows how to fix 'em."

Jacqueline sat in the wagon watching the episode. She saw three brown-clad men, followed by the two dogs, start slowly away westward across the fields. Andy Candler, however, was now mounting the hill toward where she sat. And in a few minutes he came slouching up, red and sweating.

"Well, I fired them fancy hunters off'n our place," he remarked, "shootin' around like they owned the hull farm. I give 'em a piece o' my mind, too; b'gosh, I did. S'z I, 'Don't you see them trespass signs stickin' out on to them birches down yon? Gimme them birds you shot,' s'z I. 'They ain't your'n no more'n our chickens is your'n.' An', b'gosh, they had to fork out three pa'tridges—just like that! 'N' here they be—fat ones——"

He held up three grouse with blood on their feathery

ashen plumage; winked at Jacqueline; picked up a small stick and began to draw the birds, talking all the while:

"What d'yeh think they tried to tell me, Jackie? That they didn't see no trespass signs and that they was kinda nosin' around becuz they was aimin' to buy a likely lookin' place an' settle down. 'Ah,' s'z I, 'why would city folks wanta settle here? I ain't no fool,' s'z I, ' 'n' you g'wan chase yourselves off'n this here land an' be purty dam quick about it,' s'z I. 'N' b'gosh, thar they go with their fancy guns 'n' dawgs 'n' all. 'N' if they come around here again I'll kinda let off a charge of number eight into them birches, 'n' mebbe some on 'em 'll get it in the shins."

He finished his birds; cast a leering glance at the distant and discomfited shooting party; swung the three grouse by their bluish legs; looked up at Jacqueline.

"Waal," he said, with an admiring smirk on his mean features, "come in an' set a spell, Jackie. We allus have time for visitin' with the gals."

"Welch came to our house this morning," explained Jacqueline, in her friendly way, "and he said I might come and get a heifer calf."

"Oh; tradin'?"

"Yes. Mother lets him have pine lumber. Show me the calf-pen, Andy——"

She cast the reins upon Jim's back, sprang out of the wagon, unconscious of her outgrown clothes.

The man was not. He handed the three grouse he carried to Betty, bade her run into the house with them, turned and led the way to the barn.

The barn was filthy beyond description; foul accumulations choked stalls and encrusted stanchions. Alleys and gutters stank, and flooring was deep in dirt.

Many a starved acre might have fattened on what befouled the great cow-barn at Verril Farm. Also, this reeking mess meant a terrible reaction to future tuberculin tests.

The calf-pen was crowded with under-nourished Holstein pure-breeds, bull calves and heifer calves, knee deep in rotting bedding.

"The poor things!" exclaimed Jacqueline, reaching in to let the little creatures nuzzle and lick her fingers. "I should think Welch Verril would want to give such valuable calves better care."

"Hunh!" grunted Andy. "Not him. He ain't no farmer. Connie, here, has heard me say it to his face. All Welch cares for is to go fishin' 'n' gunnin'. He oughta sold out when he could. Nobody would give much for the land 'n' stock now."

"I think it's terrible to have such a big, fine farm and not take care of it," said Jacqueline.

"You marry me, Jack, 'n' you 'n' me'll work it on shares with Welch."

Jacqueline laughed, drew her slim hand away from a calf that was sucking her fingers.

"That one, Andy," she decided, pointing.

"Say, you gotta good eye for cattle," he remarked, letting himself into the reeking pen.

There was a deer-like rush and huddle; then a scatter and wild stampede as he seized the designated heifer and lugged her out by sheer strength.

"Have you a crate?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, there's one back yon—gimme that there halter-strap——"

The calf was bawling desolately; Jacqueline put on the halter; Andy pushed.

"Hey!" he called. "You two over there, pull that there crate out to the wagon!"

Connie and Betty lugged out the crate; the calf was hauled to the wagon, shoved into the crate; missing cleats were nailed fast; then Andy and the three girls lifted crate and calf into the box wagon.

"There's your caaf," said Andy, taking hold of Jacqueline's arm and trying to kiss her. But she squirmed free and sprang to the seat, red with annoyance but laughing.

"Say," said the man, "be you in such a gosh-a-mighty hurry? We got some new cider over to the house——"

"No, thank you, Andy," cried Jacqueline, giving the reins a smart slap. "G'long, you old Jim!"

Jim broke into the heavy trot expected of him, and Jacqueline, without looking back, waved one slim hand in general adieux. Then she drew the flimsy lap-robe over her shameful knees, clucked sharply to Jim, slapped the reins on his freckled back, and got more action.

Behind her, Andy shouted, with both big hands framing his mouth:

"Hey, Jackie! If them city gunners start a-shootin' up your land, Welch will give you a dollar to drive 'em off!"

"Yes, and Ross Chase will give me two dollars!" she cried over her shoulder.

"Two-fifty!" yelled Andy. "I swear to Gawd, Welch will pay!"

Jacqueline tossed her head and her clear laughter floated back on the sunny breeze.

"Two seventy-five!" bellowed Andy.

But either she was too far away to understand the dazzling magnificence of the offer, or she disdained to credit it.

Through the village of Drifting Bridge she drove, tightly swathed in her lap-robe. Here a young girl called to her or greeted her with a friendly gesture; there a dingy youth smirked or called out some rustic pleasantry.

It was nearly eleven o'clock; housewives had finished their marketing and shopping; buckboards, carryalls, and Fords were being driven dinner-ward to the more distant farms; the loafers on the hotel steps had read the last advertisement in yesterday's papers and were beginning to finish the stubbs of their cigars in preparation for a slow migration toward the Post Office. The whirl and tumult of metropolitan life would reach its daily climax when the mail arrived and was sorted, just before noonday dinner.

As Jacqueline crossed the covered bridge, in the semi-dusk of the ancient roofed structure, she saw Ross Chase and his great, bony, red setter slowly coming toward her.

Old Jim's huge hoofs resounded thunderously under the roof.

Jacqueline nodded to the tall, gaunt man who looked up at her out of eyes so light in colour that they seemed nearly white.

Often the girl had shuddered, not knowing why, when she looked into this man's face—the strangest and most silently ominous face she ever had gazed upon.

Ross halted Jim with a gesture. His gun lay across the hollow of his left arm.

"Howdy," he said in a colourless voice.

"Good morning, Mr. Chase."

He said: "I seen some city hunters down the road a piece. . . . How much will Welch give your ma to keep folks off?"

"Two dollars and seventy-five cents—he said—or Andy said—just now——"

"Take three and call it a trade."

"I must ask mother——"

"You tell her I say three and Andy two seventy-five. I don't want no hunters into them alders till *I* get through."

"I'll tell mother."

He gave her a slow stare: "Seen Humphrey yet?"

"No." Bill Humphrey was a game protector.

"You needn't tell him I'm aimin' to hunt them alders o' yourn."

"I'll have to say so if he asks."

"Yeh will? Hunh."

"I'm not going to lie for three dollars."

"How much, then?"

"I won't lie, anyway."

"Hunh. Not f'r a hundred; hey?"

"No."

"'N'r a thousan'?"

"No."

"Well, if you see Humphrey or any other protector, yeh can hide, can't yeh?"

"I don't know."

"Ain't it worth three dollars to keep out o' sight?"

"I don't know. I'll ask mother."

"Well, I'll be over before long. I'll have three dollars in my pocket. . . . Mebbe a leetle more. Hunh? Yass, mebbe three 'n' a spare shillin'. . . . F'r luck. Hunh? . . . Tell your ma."

He turned and strode on toward the village, his big ugly red dog stalking at heel; and once more Jim's great flat feet awoke hollow thunder under the roof of the ancient bridge.

CHAPTER VII

JACQUELINE was driving, now, with a prudent and lively eye on the barriers of alders. From her perch on the wagon seat she could partly overlook the bushes and perhaps see any ominous agitation of the tops. Because, if these city people were somewhere in there looking for woodcock, she intended to warn them before a charge of shot came ripping through the leaves in her direction.

It occurred to her, also, that now might be a good time to sing rather loudly. Under similar circumstances she had done it before.

The last *objet d'art* which her father had acquired, before war and poppies summoned him to pass out of the scheme of things, was a second-hand phonograph and a few rusty records.

A ditty ground out by one of these records, and sung in a whisky-tenor by a once popular entertainer, she selected as a measure for self-protection from reckless gun-fire; and she lifted a pure, agreeable, loud young voice in warning song:

"But when I take my hat, I know
She'll say: 'Good-bye!—but please don't go!
Good-bye!
Don't go—
Good-bye!
Don't go!'

She's such a wayward way with her,
I cannot tear myself away,
And so I stay to play with her
An hour or so
Before I go;
Because I love to hear her say:
' Good-bye!—don't go!
Don't go! ' "

She sang, full-throated, as she drove along, scanning the alder tops apprehensively; now and then slapping down the reins on Jim to hasten their passage through the danger zone.

Two miles farther on she heard several shots fired far to the westward, and ahead—distant shots—and she sang more lustily, and stood up in the bumping wagon to gaze out over the sea of alders.

About twenty minutes later two shots rang out very near; and a man clad in brown shooting garments strode hastily out of the thicket and into the road.

He caught sight of the advancing wagon, held up a warning hand, turned sharply to face the alders again.

"Mark! Right over you! P. J.!" cried a voice from the alders.

Overhead came speeding a big woodcock, just clear of the tops, and winging rapidly eastward. And, bang! went the man's gun.

Old Jim pricked up his freckled ears without otherwise stirring. Jacqueline saw the woodcock collapse in mid-air, plunge sideways and downward and hit the road. A cloud of tiny feathers and down still hung above the bushes.

"Mark! Right!" cried the same voice from the dense cover.

Another woodcock whirred softly through the alder tops; the man in the road fired again, and the bird pitched down into the thicket.

After a little while a bluish-white setter came mincing and wagging out of the bushes, carrying the last bird daintily in his mouth.

The man in the road took it, patted the dog, and pocketed both birds, reloaded, waited, still facing the alders.

After a moment or two another dog broke through the leafy barrier; then two men followed, both carrying guns.

"It's so devilish thick in there you can't see," said the younger of the two men. "We fired at the twitter. Did you knock either of them, Mr. Connor?"

"Both," said the man in the road briefly. Then he motioned Jacqueline to drive forward.

"Much obliged, little lass," he said. "I didn't know we were so near the road. We'll strike in deeper." And, as Jacqueline's wagon came abreast of him: "Are you acquainted in these parts?" he inquired in his hearty voice, and laid a detaining hand on Jim.

"Yes, I am," said Jacqueline.

"Well, then, if we go through the alders east, where do we come out?"

"I don't know. It's all bushes in there."

"Well, there must be some end to them. What's beyond?"

"Only the mountains."

"Why, God bless me, they're miles off!"

"Yes, they are."

"And you tell me that it's all thicket and woods as far as those hills?"

"Yes, only brush and wet woods."

"Do you hear that, Roger?" he demanded, turning toward the two other men. "All thicket, the little lass says. It's a compass we'll be wanting in there. You sometimes carry one, West——"

"I haven't any now," replied the youngest of the trio—a youth of twenty-two or three. He wore no cap on his thick, yellowish hair. His grey eyes met Jacqueline's with indifference. Yet she noticed that he flushed a little.

The man addressed as Roger came forward, now, wading hip-deep through the scratchy mess of tangled weed and brier and wild flowers.

"Perhaps you can tell us," he said to Jacqueline, "whether we're trespassing on this land. We haven't seen any notices so far."

"It's posted along the woods," explained Jacqueline smilingly.

The man addressed as Connor uttered an impatient exclamation:

"We've killed three and a half brace of birds," he remarked humorously, "and now I suppose the landlord will come and take 'em—as he took your partridges, Roger!" And, looking up at Jacqueline: "Who owns this property, anyway?"

"My mother," she replied demurely.

"Lord save us!" exclaimed Connor. "Here, little lady-lass—take your birds"—and he began to pull the balls of brown feathers from his shooting-coat pocket.

Jacqueline was laughing now, without restraint.

"I don't want them," she protested, refusing with

a gesture the offered birds. "I wouldn't be so mean——"

"Well, then, let me pay you for them——" He checked himself; then: "Let us pay you for a full day's sport in your alders! Come, now, name your figure? And think of the lolly-pops you can buy!"

Her short skirts and the thin youth of her and her rounded cheeks of a child were deceiving them. She realized that. She said:

"Our house is only a little way ahead. Why don't you stop and ask my mother about the shooting?"

"That's an idea, too," agreed Connor heartily. "It's a fine covert, this—God alone knows how many woodcock are hidden away in it. Certainly your mother should charge us a day's rent for a day's sport. Drive on, pretty lass, and we'll follow."

"There's room for you all in the wagon," said Jacqueline politely, but her friendly eyes turned again to the boy with blond hair. To her delight he blushed again.

"All right!" cried Connor. "Come on, West! Two men, two calves, and a kind little lady!" And, as they climbed into the wagon: "What may your mother's name be—and yours?"

"My mother is Mrs. Anne Ardres, and I am Jacqueline. . . . I'm not as young as you think."

"Well, then, *Miss* Jacqueline, this other gentleman is Mr. Roger Aylward; and the handsome young gentleman is Mr. J. West Halton; and I'm plain P. J. Connor—which means Patrick and Joseph, if you don't mind me telling you——"

Jacqueline, responsive to his jolly loquacity and twinkling blue eyes, was laughing and regarding all

three men with most friendly interest, particularly the blond boy, who had reddened again at Connor's jests.

"It's only half a mile," she said. And: "*Jim!* You poke! G'long, now!"

"*Your* calf?" inquired Mr. Connor, holding on to the crate as the wagon bounced in a rut.

"No, it's mother's."

"Fine calf, that," remarked Mr. Aylward, knowingly. He really knew nothing about it.

"West, are the dogs following?" called out Connor to the blond youth, who was holding fast to the bouncing tailboard of the wagon, and dangling his gaitered legs.

"They're all right, Mr. Connor."

"Talk rough to 'em if they run too near the wheels. "That's certainly a fine covert, Roger. When the leaves thin there'll be grand snap-shooting in there. And it's a likely country, too, if you use your eyes on it—you and West. . . . Look at the woods over yon, for partridge! And that big pond we skirted with a score of black duck on it—whose pond may it be, pretty lass?"

"Ours."

"Well, then I'll be blessed! And how much land is yours besides?"

"I think there are twenty thousand acres——"

"*Yours!*"

"Mother's."

"God be good to the soul inside me!" exclaimed Mr. Connor. "Twenty thousand acres!" He looked at the alders, the woods. He turned a blue and significant eye upon Mr. Aylward. The latter winked.

Jacqueline, letting Jim go his own gait, turned

around and said to Mr. Connor: "It sounds like a big farm, but really it isn't. We have about seventy acres in grass and fallow pastures, and only thirty under cultivation. All the rest is in woods and alders, and that pond you noticed. It's worth nothing."

Mr. Connor appeared to be so genuinely interested that the girl felt encouraged to go on.

"The trouble is," she continued, "that when my father was killed we had very little money, and mother was obliged to do all the work. Even thirty acres is too much for a woman to work——"

"Work? I don't suppose your mother does the ploughing, does she?"

"Oh, yes. We can't afford help. Mother ploughs and harrows, and she and I sow and drill and plant and fertilize. I help with the harvest all she'll let me. And you see, with cooking, washing, housework, feeding stock, milking, and cultivating the kitchen garden, it is all we can do to manage thirty acres."

Mr. Connor remained silent and his smooth-shaven and somewhat weather-beaten face had become rather grim.

"Who fells the trees for winter fuel?" inquired Aylward curiously.

"Mother. She and I saw them. She splits up the chunks——"

Jacqueline turned again to her driving, for here the road entered a wide, sunny clearing—where some nondescript cows grazed—and began to ascend a hill.

"That's our farm up there," she said, with a gesture of her thin, golden-brown arm.

Amid its cluster of old maples and elms, the decrepit Ardres Farm buildings stood out against a deep blue

sky. All around lay rolling fields of standing corn and stacked buckwheat; and stretches of stubble and grass, bordered in the bluish distance by the inevitable palisades of alders.

As the wagon slowly ascended the hill, cocks were flapping and crowing in the sunshine near the barn; the wash fluttered gaily on a line tied between two old apple trees; and a guinea-fowl was pursuing another with injurious intent, around and around the house, both uttering metallic and lamentable cries.

"Those darned guineas," muttered Jacqueline, turning the horse into the yard.

There was not even the remains of a fence where they drove through into the yard. The wagon continued on as far as the barn.

Here Jacqueline jumped to the ground and turned to her passengers, always with friendly interest:

"Mother will be cooking dinner," she explained. "If you open that side door on the porch you'll see her, and she'll talk to you about the shooting."

The blond boy, carrying his gun, dropped from the tail of the wagon to the grass. He gave Jacqueline an involuntary but perplexed glance, then seemed much occupied with the two bluish-white dogs that were leaping around him.

Mr. Connor got out with his gun; Mr. Aylward followed.

"Thank you for the lift and your pleasant company, my golden-brown lass," said Connor. "West, you help the little lady with the horse. Come on, Roger, and maybe we'll rent a day's shooting—who knows, now!"

"Or a week's," suggested Aylward, under his breath, as they started across the grass toward the house. "Or

the whole season," he added. "What do you think of the looks of this place, P. J.?"

"I'm saying no word, Roger. Say no more yourself till we've had a day in the covert yon."

"It looks amazingly good to me," insisted Aylward, turning to gaze out over the landscape. "And that big pond! I wonder what's in it. We might really do something with an acreage like this——"

"And we might not. Save your breath. Who knows but she'll chase us!—and mind that kitten—don't step on it!"—as the tiny grey creature awoke from slumber on the rickety steps and opened two baby-blue eyes at them. "God bless us, but there's a grand whiff of johnny-cake in the wind."

"I smell frying ham, too," murmured Aylward; and an irresistible desire for it seized his very vitals till he grunted.

"A hearty good smell," repeated Connor; "be quiet now, Roger, till I knock on the door——"

He lifted a square gloved fist to the paintless panel and knocked.

Anne opened the door.

Her sleeves were rolled, her shirt-waist wide at the tanned throat. Over a skirt of faded blue cotton she wore a clean apron.

Her mass of ruddy blond hair was pulled back tight, twisted into a shining knot, and so pegged.

"How d'y'do," she said mechanically. Her pleasant eyes were very blue in the sunshine that slanted across the kitchen.

Connor took off his shooting cap; so did Aylward.

There was a moment's silence—not awkward—but something had checked Mr. Connor's easy loquacity.

"Won't you come in?" said Anne. It was part of the local ritual. After that came: "Take a chair," and the ritual was completed.

Aylward said: "Madam, we're disturbing you, I fear."

"I'm only cooking noon dinner," explained Anne simply.

"Could we stand here and say a word to you and not interrupt your cooking?"

Anne said, "Certainly," and turned the ham in the frying pan with a large fork.

Mr. Connor, so far, had not said a word. He said nothing now; so Aylward spoke again, explaining their intrusion, confessing to seven woodcock, and asked if they might continue shooting at any rental for the day's sport that Mrs. Ardres might care to accept.

"Why, yes," she said; "you may shoot in the alders if you're careful of the cattle."

Aylward thanked her, suggested that she tell them what they owed her, and offered to pay in advance.

But Anne smiled faintly, not looking at them, and shook her head: "I can't take anything."

"Really, madam," insisted Aylward, "we'd feel more comfortable if you would permit us to rent the shooting for one day."

She flushed slightly: "I wouldn't know how much to ask."

"Anything you think proper, madam. And I must say there seem to be lots of woodcock. You ought to ask a good day's rental," he added with conviction.

Anne flushed more deeply, hesitated: "I don't know. Would twenty-five cents apiece be too much? And I could give you noon dinner, too——"

"God bless us!" exclaimed Connor. It was the first time he had spoken, and it startled Anne.

"Perhaps I asked too much," she ventured, turning her clear eyes on Connor.

He said, slowly: "Madam—seventy-five cents is ridiculous for three dinners and a day's shooting in as fine a bit o' bush as ever any dog quartered! And if you'd said twenty-five dollars no man of us could have blinked and not taken shame to himself!"

Anne gazed at Connor as though he had lost his reason.

"Madam," he continued, "our lawful limit is three brace to a gun a day, and three grouse. No doubt we can do it. And there's the three dinners—with this whole house smelling like Heaven's own kitchen!

"Take five dollars apiece and five more for the dinners, and we'll try not to feel ashamed of ourselves for the bargain!"

He opened a wallet, drew out four clean notes, laid them on the kitchen table.

"I *can't* take so much money for nothing!" protested Anne. "It isn't right or decent——"

"Well, then, it is both," retorted Connor; "and your pardon, madam, for disputing your own words, but I can't eat your ham and johnny-cake and shoot your birds for less, nor would any man but a born pickpocket!"

As he rapped out his words Anne's amazement increased. But she always had a touch of that dignity born of racial integrity and reserve, and she looked at both men with composure.

Aylward was laughing a little at Connor's emphasis: "It isn't often that Mr. Connor argues for the other

fellow, madam," he said, much amused, "but the shooting on your place seems to be unusually fine, and"—he cast a frankly interested glance at the frying ham—"I believe you'll lose money on us at dinner."

Anne looked at Connor irresolutely. He gazed straight back into her blue eyes:

"Is that johnny-cake I smell, madam?" he demanded.

"Corn-bread—yes——" She stooped, opened a door in the oven. A rush of fragrance was expelled.

Crouched there she glanced up at Connor, beginning to be a little amused.

"Look at it, Roger!" he exclaimed. "Look at those crisp, gold pans!"

Anne rose, went to the open door.

"Jacqueline!" she called in her rich, clear voice.

Jacqueline, the blond-headed boy, and two dogs formed a group in front of the barn. Jacqueline turned her head:

"All right!" she replied. Then, with a swift, engaging smile at the blond boy: "Dinner's ready. Shall we go in?"

They turned together and walked toward the house, resuming the conversation which Anne's call had interrupted.

"No, it's not lonely in winter here at all," she continued, caressing one of the dogs, which persistently nuzzled her fingers as she walked; "there's lots to do if you have the time—parties and dancing and movies—everything at Drifting Bridge."

"Winter sports, too," he volunteered.

"What kind?"

"Why, skating, skeeing, tobogganing, you know."

"Oh, yes, we skate on Windy Pond. I don't think I know about the rest you mention——"

"Tobogganing? Don't you ever coast?"

"Yes, of course."

"And snow-shoe?"

"Oh, yes. We couldn't go anywhere in deep winter unless we went on snow-shoes. You've no idea how deep the drifts are."

They came up on to the porch; the boy, cap in hand, bowed to Anne, who looked around at him from the range.

"Mother," said Jacqueline, a trifle excited, "I would like to introduce my friend, Mr. J. West Halton, from New York." And, to the young man: "You may wash up in my room. Is that where the other gentlemen have gone, mother?"

"Yes," said Anne. "Show Mr. Halton the way."

Jacqueline, who was leading, turned round to the boy: "It's the only thing in the world I *could* show you, I guess," she said mischievously, "the way to the stairs."

"Why do you say that?"

"You're from New York. What could *I* show *you?*"

They were passing through the sitting-room. He stepped forward to walk beside her. Both were laughing.

"Do you really think you couldn't show a New Yorker anything?"

"Aren't they very, *very* wise?"

"Well, *I'm* not *very* wise."

They halted at the foot of the stairs.

"The other two gentlemen look even wiser than you

do," she said, "particularly the older one—the jolly one —who calls me his lass."

"That's P. J.," said the boy.

"Who?"

"P. J. Connor. You know who he is."

"No."

"Didn't you ever hear of P. J. Connor?"

"No. I never did. I'm so ashamed."

They both laughed. "He's rather well known in the world," remarked the boy.

"Is he? Why?"

"Oil wells."

"Oh. Does he own an oil well?"

"Quite a lot of them. . . . And other trifles—such as railroads, and steamships, and mines, and several towns——"

"But," interrupted Jacqueline, "*he* doesn't have all those things by himself—does he?"

"Yes, he does."

"Oh. I didn't know anybody but a king owned towns." She gazed blankly at young Halton, but it was beyond her comprehension—not even funny.

After a moment: "Those are the stairs," she said, and her engagingly humorous smile flashed out again. "If you'll open the washstand drawer in my room you'll find a perfectly new cake of rose-scented soap. You'll like it because it came from The New York Store in the village. It will make you feel as though you were quite at home."

"You're poking fun at me again! How old are you, anyway? You're a funny kid."

"*You* are funny. All men are, you know. But, somehow, I like them—boys and all."

They both laughed. He was very curious regarding her age.

"How old are you, anyway?" he repeated, with an involuntary glance at her scandalously short dress.

"Don't look at my skirts and I'll tell you."

He glanced at them again, flushed a little. She clasped her hands behind her back and frowned at him.

"You *did* look; and now I've got to tell you I'm only fifteen."

"Are you older?"

"How much older do you think?"

"You're not sixteen! Are you?"

"This is not a sport skirt," she said. "I've outgrown everything I own. We're so darned poor that I have to wait a while. I thought I'd better tell you so you won't think me crazy to dress like a kid. I was seventeen last May."

"Why, you poor child!" he exclaimed. His impulsive hand, half extended, she met with her own, half-way.

"I don't care; it will be all right some day," she said.

For a moment they stood so, and Jacqueline's smile was frankly friendly, and even a little excited.

She said: "If you'd like us to be friends, I'm old enough, you see. . . . I was afraid you might feel like a cradle-snatcher."

"Oh, you funny little thing!" he cried, and came nearer her; and Jacqueline met him half-way, audacious, ardent, her golden head upturned, welcoming the kiss she had already partly offered.

"You *are* sweet," she said. "I liked you when you sat on the wagon and blushed."

"Oh, I say——"

"Listen!" she interrupted, squeezing his hand.

Steps sounded on the landing above; Connor's voice came resonantly. The stairs creaked with the tread of descending feet.

"But, Jacqueline——"

"After dinner behind the barn!"

"Promise?"

"My heart and soap are yours," she laughed, freed her hand, and fled.

CHAPTER VIII

NOONDAY dinner at the Ardres Farm resembled the same function in every farmhouse throughout the State.

The principle of the ceremony was that the women who had laid the cloth and done the cooking should also serve the meal.

This was not a complicated matter, as everything from soup to pie had been placed on the table at once. Anne and Jacqueline rose from time to time to clear away used dishes, or to fetch something from the oven.

From the tureen Anne ladled out potato soup which exhaled a seductive but warning steam. Young Halton burnt his tongue, and Jacqueline laughed.

This dissipated any remaining awkwardness, and also quieted Anne's apprehensions regarding city folks' appreciation of her cooking. For every soup-plate was scraped clean; and Mr. Connor was helped again.

Indeed, the three men seemed to be half starved. Anne's golden-autumn butter melted away by the half-pound on the hot golden johnny-cake; fragrant slices of crisp ham, still sizzling, vanished at an amazing speed; fried potatoes followed by the dishful; a dozen fried eggs accompanied them.

Three times the coffee-pot was emptied.

Connor's lively gaze returned always to a certain custard pie reposing on a platter not far from his elbow.

He said to Anne: "Not since I was a bare-legged

boy, and until this hour, ma'am, have I had what I like to eat, all I want to eat, and cooked the way I want it!"

"Why, it's just simple food," protested Anne; "it's nothing at all——"

"By golly, then, it's what I've dreamed about for forty years; and it's only now that I've got it, praise God!" returned Connor. "That pie, now; I've dreamed of pie like that! Is it a real one, Mrs. Ardres?"

Anne laughed, drew the pie toward her, cut it, and helped Mr. Connor.

"I suppose," she said, "country fare is a little change for people from the city. I don't think you would be contented to eat such things every day."

Connor tasted the pie; an odd expression came over his features, and a slight colour flushed his tanned cheeks.

"Ma'am," he said quietly, "it's like holy food to me. They may joke about it in their comic papers; but since my own mother made pie, only this pie I'm eating now has ever tasted like hers."

Anne flushed too: "I'm glad you like it. You'll have some more, won't you?"

"I will, ma'am—if I miss every bird that jumps this afternoon!"

Aylward laughed. Young Halton said to Jacqueline:

"I'll miss them, anyway, so I might as well have some more pie."

She had been hovering at his elbow, full of frank assiduity, replenishing cup and plate, prettily pressing her hospitality. To which ever he had responded with the appetite of the young and healthy male.

But she had nearly filled him now. Only a great bowl of cracked green hazel-nuts lured him to further gastronomic effort.

Connor said to Anne: "Many a hazel-nut I've cracked on a stone by the brook. . . . I was a ragged, hungry lad sent after the cows. . . . But those are the magic days that come no more, ma'am. . . . They come no more."

She said, faintly smiling: "You have forgotten the reality; you remember only the magic."

"Well, then, that's the greatest mercy God sends us. Blessed are they that forget! Who dwells on past troubles will know worse some dark day. And who can't remember yesterday's happiness, God pity! I was a poor lad once. What did poverty mean then? I was shocking poor in young manhood. I had pleasures too. And I would not forget the times I've laughed, ma'am! And many a time I laughed—I did so. With ten cents in my fist—and pockets too ragged to trust! Well, as I say—those are the days that come no more." He turned abruptly to Jacqueline, his Irish eyes a-twinkle:

"What may *you* be thinking, my golden lass?"

She looked up at him out of sober brown eyes: "I was thinking of what you were saying. And of the goodness of God."

"Is He so good to you, lady-lass?"

"Yes."

Connor said: "It's a long way to heaven, and blessings come by slow freight sometimes. But you tell me you get yours right along, do you?"

"Yes."

"Every day?"

Jacqueline smiled: "I think so; don't you, mother?"

Connor caught Anne's eye, waited for the effort, saw her make it without a tremor.

"Yes," she said, "we have been blessed—in many ways." She did not look at Connor as she spoke.

He said: "It's a grand world and a grand day, ma'am."

"A grand day for a nap," added Aylward; "I can't go into those coverts now. How do you feel, P. J.? I'm not going to do violence to such a dinner."

Connor squared his shoulders: "One cigar," he said, "is a compliment to a dinner—and to you who cooked it, ma'am!"

Anne rose; the others got up. Connor and Aylward walked out to the side porch and seated themselves on the rickety, sun-blistered steps. The two dogs—who must not be fed until the end of the day—came up to be fondled.

Also they were much interested in the kitten who, sprawling in the sun, considered them curiously out of bluish eyes, and gently patted their investigating noses with lazy paw.

Connor, savouring his cigar, leaned back against a supporting post, and his gaze wandered over the stretch of alders below.

Aylward said in a low voice: "For the sort of thing we're considering, P. J., this rather seems to fill the bill."

"Maybe."

"I haven't a doubt that we could acquire it. These people seem to be very poor."

"They're that, I think."

"Twenty thousand acres of cover. . . . And a pond. . . . And a camp ready made."

"What would buy it, Roger?"

"Very little money, I believe. It wouldn't take much to fix up this house, either."

"It's a long way from anywhere," remarked Connor.

"But you're crazy about cock-shooting. Here it is *ad libitum*."

"These are native birds."

"Yes, but look at those scrub birches."

"And if the flight never stops in these parts?" demurred Connor.

"That's a gamble, of course, unless we try it out."

"And why not try it out?" grunted Connor.

"You mean come back here after the first frost north of us?"

"Or—stay where we are."

Aylward reflected: "Of course we could do that."

"If she'll have us," said Connor.

"She will."

"Easy, Roger. God knows how she's feeling after seeing how you eat."

"*Who?*"

"*You,* then. West ate nothing and I less."

They both laughed lazily in the sunshine.

"Where the devil is that Halton boy?" grunted Connor, sitting upright and gazing around.

The Halton boy was walking to and fro all alone behind the barn. He'd been doing so since he left the table.

He was an agreeable youth to look at, loosely knit

but straight and well built. He was twenty-four, but didn't look it. Something unspoiled remained in his features—something smooth and almost girlish about his cheeks and neck, for all the virility of carriage and broad shoulders.

He was rather excited. He hadn't had much experience in adventures. Home environment offered few; and what his business offered he had ignored, so far.

But now he was very curious about this shabby country girl. He had seen country girls, but none like her.

He didn't know whether she was pretty. She was not very clean of person; that he had noticed. Was it the impulse of the moment's caress—her ardent response—the flash of laughter—the whispered assignation, that left him possessed with a sense of vague enchantment?

Of course it was partly masculine vanity, partly curiosity to see how this girl was going to behave, that was inspiring him now. Nearly eighteen! She looked fifteen. And how very musty her clothes were! Noticeably so to his nostrils—a faint, acrid aroma of wood-smoke and kitchen—perhaps of a carelessly washed skin.

But how bright red her mouth seemed! A shade of that same carmine tinted her cheeks under the skin. Eyes, hair, bisque skin, all made a golden brown thing of her—a golden creature.

She had rough little hands—ardent, rough, and small. But her lips were cool velvet—not warm—not very cool—but like a petal. Cool when let alone.

He continued to walk up and down, noticing a

chicken's wing protruding from some freshly turned earth. It was where Jacqueline recently had interred a defunct hen, rather carelessly.

Jacqueline was very busy aiding Anne to clear the table, wash and dry dishes, pots and pans.

"Twenty dollars!" she repeated, in a guarded voice. "Isn't that perfectly wonderful, mother? Just for giving them dinner and letting them shoot in the alders?"

"It is too much," said Anne. "They shouldn't have given me so much."

"Maybe they'll come back to supper. And we can feed their dogs, too. . . . And let them stay all night, and give them breakfast. That would help. But even then—*twenty* dollars! It is a great deal of money for so very little."

She brushed the crumbs from the cloth, shook it out, folded it, laid it away, and flung a red checkered cloth over the table.

"Now, mother, I'm through," she announced.

"What are you going to do with yourself, Jacqueline?"

"Is there anything more you want me to do?"

"Not for a while. But—I don't think I'd bother those gentlemen if I were you——"

"Can't I talk to my friend, J. West Halton?"

"Perhaps they prefer to be by themselves."

"I'm sure *he* doesn't."

"Be *very* sure, Jacqueline."

"Yes, I will."

She washed her hands, dried them carelessly, went out by the rear door through the chicken-yard. Beyond

that she took to her light heels and arrived on flying feet at the rendezvous behind the barn.

The boy had a whirlwind in his arms before he knew it—a hot-cheeked, passionate child whose mouth clung shamelessly to his—all in a flash—and instantly over amid her excited laughter and swift disengaging of her body from his.

"I wondered if you'd wait," she said breathlessly. "I had to help mother. Shall we take a walk in the woods? They're dry. How soon must you start hunting?"

He took her by the waist again, but she was now otherwise minded:

"Don't," she said. "I don't want to be kissed any more——"

"Only one, then——"

"No, not now. I want to talk to you. Have you time?"

He looked at his watch and said he had.

She took his hand: "It's only a step to our woodlot. I do want to talk to you, West. But isn't it strange? I don't seem to know what I want to say——"

Nor can the starved eat much in the beginning.

She looked up at him imploringly as they moved in among the trees.

"Won't you tell me something?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, amused, "what shall I tell you?"

"I don't know. Anything—until I can think what I have to tell you."

"Well," he said, "a fellow knows more about himself than anything else. Would you like to know about me?"

The masculine egotism remained unnoticed by her; only the new charm of him persisted.

"Tell me, West," she said, pressing his hand.

"Well, there isn't much. I live in New York. Yale was my university. Well, that's about all, Jacqueline."

"Do you work?"

"Yes, I do. . . . Yes, I've a place downtown where I work."

"What kind of work?"

"Well, I make pictures."

"Photographs?"

"No; I draw pictures. I'm an illustrator."

"Oh!"

"You understand?"

"Yes; you're an artist."

"That's the idea. It's this way. Some author writes a story and takes it to an editor. If it's accepted for publication the editor sends it to some illustrator with orders for so many drawings. That's my business, Jacqueline."

"What a perfectly wonderful business!"

"It's jolly. You have to work hard. You have a lot of vexations. If you have a rotten story to illustrate it isn't much fun. Sometimes a model leaves you flat in the middle of a serial. That's a bad pickle to be in."

"A—model?" she repeated.

"You know—men and women make a profession of posing for artists. You knew that?"

"Y-es. I didn't know you *had* to have them."

"Oh, yes. You can't fake. You've got to have real people to draw from, and real clothes and costumes too."

They strolled along in silence for a while. All about them were big beeches with foliage turned golden in spots. The sun, burning through here and there, made a golden place of it; and Jacqueline, a golden thing herself, seemed to burn and fuse into the aureate living light as though born of it.

Filtered sunlight turned her shabbiness to a gilded quaintness—made of her rags a design—set her hair afire, her skin smouldering with molten tints.

The boy's arm suddenly encircled her, carrying her hand with his; and she jerked it free and flung it and its fellow around his neck. Her mouth melted to his.

"You're so pretty," he managed to say.

"You're so sweet," she breathed.

As they stood so, embraced in the sunshine, not far away a whistle blew shrilly, three long blasts.

"Hang it," said young Halton, "that's P. J.'s dog-whistle. And he means *me!*"

"Are you going?"

"Why—I suppose so. I wonder if I'm ever going to see you again." There was in his eyes and voice considerable of that masculine sentiment so easily aroused by any attractive girl.

"Anyway," said Jacqueline, with happy tenderness, "I've had a splendid time with you."

He kissed her.

"I feel very blue about never seeing you again," he said. "Aren't you sorry, too?"

"Yes, but we've had each other for half an hour," she replied, with cheerful finality.

"Don't you want it to go on?"

"But, West, we can't have everything——"

"You take it very calmly and cheerfully," he said, with resentment.

"I have to. I'm only too grateful for anything that gives me pleasure. Pleasure doesn't come to me every day, West."

"My having to go and never see you again spoils it all for me," he said.

"*You're* spoiled," she said, laughing. "Probably you're accustomed to pleasure. . . . I want you to kiss me again."

In her clinging embrace of childish passion the boy's head became turned; and he would not let her go until she wrenched herself free.

"Oh, West!" she stammered, and pressed both hands to her breast as though to control her breathing.

"I'll see if I can't get out of shooting with them this afternoon," he said impetuously. "Will you wait here or come with me?"

"Here," she breathed.

He hesitated irresolutely, came toward her, but she moved back, shaking her head.

"All right," he said; "I'll blow three whistle signals if I can't come back. I can't ever forget you, Jacqueline——"

"I won't forget. You gave me too much pleasure."

She watched him through the trees until he disappeared among the sunlit woods beyond.

There was a swamp maple near her; she leaned against it as though a little tired. For a while she remained quite motionless, only her shoulder in contact. After a little she rested her cheek against the cool grey bark.

Two small ragged butterflies, the colour of smoulder-

ing coals of fire, darted in and out of the sunbeams and whirled around her, sometimes alighting on her, sometimes on the bark, sometimes on a brilliant fallen leaf which matched the burnished hue of their wings.

She was wondering whether this boy would come back. The swift pleasure of his voice and touch still enchanted her. It had been another revelation of a wondrous world. God had been kind again. . . . Would always be.

From the distance there came three long blasts of a dog-whistle.

She rested against the tree for a few moments longer. Then she straightened up and began to walk slowly through the ferns toward the house.

Because he was not coming back.

She was not going to see that boy again. . . . Ever. . . . Well—well—the world was very wonderful and full of surprises. There was much happiness in it . . . such as to-day's experience. There would be surprises and pleasures always. . . . To-morrow. . . . Or next week. . . .

She was quite right; there always would be pleasures in the world for her. Always happiness. Always happy resources.

Because they originated within herself.

Her capacity was as exhaustless as the cup of Baucis. And in her veins ran that which perpetually renewed the fruiting of the immortal vine.

She arrived through the chicken-yard and entered the house by the rear door. Her face bore a thoughtful

expression. She continued on into the pantry and helped herself to a cookie.

Anne was coming downstairs carrying broom, duster, mop, a ragged towel, and a pail of dirty water.

"I suppose they've gone hunting," remarked Jacqueline.

"They went into the alders below our hill. Where have you been, Jackie?"

"In the back wood-lot. I said good-bye to my friend West. Afterward I heard him say good-bye again with three whistles. Mother, I don't know what to do with myself this afternoon. I believe I feel lonely for that boy——"

"Don't be sentimental, Jackie!"

"Oh, no. I wish I had my new clothes, though."

"You are going to have them. That pretty sport dress at The Emporium—do you remember? You and I are going to Drifting Bridge this afternoon to buy it."

"With your twenty dollars? Ought you to spend all that for me, Anne darling?"

"Indeed I ought, poor baby! Now, I want you to go and fix up a little—comb your hair, too—and be sure you are all sweet and clean——"

"All right. But I'd better hook up old Jim, first——"

Anne flushed a little: "No; we're going to the village in Mr. Connor's automobile."

"Whose?" exclaimed Jacqueline, delighted. "Where is it?"

"They came to the village in an automobile. It is at the hotel. That Welch Verril drove by while you were in the woods, and Mr. Connor asked him to tell

the driver to come up here and take us to the village. So I want you to look as nice as you can, poor lamb——"

"Oh, I will, mother! I'll fix my hair very carefully. But—mother! Are *they* coming back for supper?"

"They're going to stay and hunt for a week, and board with us——"

"Oh! I'm *glad!*"

"I've been up tidying their rooms. I asked them seven dollars a week, but they—Mr. Connor—insisted that I take seventy-five dollars for themselves and their dogs. It isn't right or decent. But Mr. Connor wouldn't listen. He wouldn't listen. He talked so loudly, and he laughed at everything I tried to say. I don't know whether I like such treatment——"

"Anne, he just wants to be kind to you!"

"I don't wish strangers to overpay me—out of kindness——"

"But maybe he knows better than you do what he ought to pay. Maybe he's just honest——"

"I don't pretend to know what he is," said Anne, almost sharply. "It's more than three men and two dogs ought to pay for a week's board. I don't know what to think—I really don't. Now, run upstairs and comb your hair, Jackie."

Jacqueline, much excited, turned and flew upstairs to her bedroom, and began to fling her outgrown garments from her.

A little while later, Anne came up with clean sheets for the three spare bedrooms.

"Put on a fresh waist and wash skirt, Jackie," she said, passing the open door of Jacqueline's room.

"Have I fresh ones, mother?"

Anne deposited the sheets on a chair in the corridor, went into her daughter's room, found a fresh but ragged waist, a fairly fresh skirt, gazed tragically upon Jacqueline's soiled underclothes and stockings.

"Undress," she said briefly.

"Mother, are you going to make me take a bath?"

Anne, counting out some crisp bank notes on Jacqueline's bed, did not hear her. Presently she said:

"They've paid us in advance. I have nearly a hundred dollars here. Every penny of it must go to you——"

"Anne!"

"Put on clean combinations and stockings—when did you take a bath last?"

"I forgot to take one this week——"

"Oh, Jack! You make mother sick. Hurry and strip. I'll bring the foot-bath and a kettle. You'll have to stand while I scrub you——" She turned and hurried away downstairs.

Suddenly, from the distance, came the mellow warning of an automobile horn.

Jacqueline, already naked, drew the cotton window-curtain aside and looked down. At first all she could see was the kitten asleep on the porch.

Then a very large and very long grey touring car swept up the road and turned into the front yard.

Jacqueline's eyes widened with delight. The kitten, also, regarded it with mild and blue-eyed surprise. It was the largest animal she ever had gazed upon during a life full of perpetual surprises. But in the vast experience of her kitten-lifetime, covering a span of nearly

six whole weeks, nothing in the world ever had harmed this kitten.

So novelty aroused no apprehension, only wonder. And when the automobile stopped, the kitten merely blinked at it pleasantly, yawned once or twice, and presently resumed her sunny cat-nap on the porch.

For kittens, and for such as Jacqueline, God's world was a safe and a happy place to lie asleep in, or to awake from pleasant dreams.

CHAPTER IX

In the west the sun went down, cherry red, tinting the world with delicate pastel shades of mauve and rose where the great honey-coloured moon hung, bewitching earth and sky.

Supper was ready at the Ardres Farm, but no hunters had returned.

Once or twice, softly from the distant greying wastes of misty alders came the report of guns. The Hunter's Moon still held them in her thrall.

Anne, in fresh shirt-waist, black skirt, and apron, came from the kitchen to the side porch, where Jacqueline sat on the steps cradling the kitten.

"Mother, they've just fired another shot near the foot of our hill," said the girl. She looked up happily, then bent her head over the kitten and tickled it till it kicked with its tiny hind feet and pretended to bite.

Anne looked at her daughter with mingled pride and heartache. The amber woollen cloth of the sport suit, the pale yellow waist, brown stockings, brown shoes, had transfigured her to a lovely harmony, more warmly golden than an autumn leaf in the sunset glow.

She looked so tall, seated there with the soft wool skirt at a decent length, her little new tan shoes crossed, and her slim, water-roughened fingers caressing the playful creature in her lap.

Into her hair she had tucked an orange-coloured flower—one of the self-seeded calendulæ that persisted

season after season in what once had been a flower-bed at the corner of the older wing of the house.

Anne looked down at her daughter, at the smooth nape of her neck where the brown hair grew paler, soft as an infant's.

At that instant, *all* that ought to be done for this child—all that she ought to know and have and be, surged up and almost overwhelmed the mother's mind.

For a tragic moment, darkly in the deepening twilight, she saw a desolate, mind-starved, body-starved future—menacing, terrible, hopeless.

She lifted her clear eyes of Saxon blue and stared out across a darkening world. There was dimness of vision; no tremor of the dauntless mouth.

The fight for survival would continue.

Far across the dim valley a light sparkled on the Verril Hill. There was a vague luminosity where the trees hid the village. Mist dimmed the miles of alders, ever mounting, aspiring to the honey-coloured moon, which was growing smaller and more silvery.

Anne went back to the kitchen, lighted three oil-lamps, left one there and carried two to the dining-room, which also was the sitting-room.

As she turned to come out she heard Jacqueline's joyous cry: "Oh, West!"—heard the loud purring of a motor, saw the yard and trees illuminated by the headlights.

The men came stamping across the porch with a metallic rattle of guns and loosened cartridge loops—Connor first—his hearty voice dominating all:

"We're late, ma'am, and we're sorry and ashamed, but the sport was grand! God bless me, but there was

a whirr and a twitter at every rod! . . . Grouse, too, ma'am; we've our limits in cock and grouse—even the gay lad, yon!—look at him now, with his pockets full!"

Young Halton was dragging out grouse and woodcock and handing them to Jacqueline, who, enchanted, stood with both hands full of feathered game.

"I missed a lot of shots," he confided to Jacqueline. "I never saw so many woodcock in my life—everywhere—they went up so fast they got on my nerves. It was blind work—all snap shooting—there are no leaves off yet, and it's pretty thick in there. I did better in the woods on grouse——"

He took the birds from her, gathered them by the legs into one hand, caressed the plumage.

Anne took two other clusters of birds from Aylward and Connor. The latter went out to the veranda, gave directions to his chauffeur, who had deposited several suit-cases, rugs, overcoats, and bundles on the porch.

"Run up here about ten o'clock, Mike," added Connor. "I'll not break my heart with early rising."

The car backed in a demi-tour, circled, glided away into the night.

Anne said: "I haven't any man to help you with your valises, but I can take some of them——"

"Indeed you'll not, ma'am. But if you'll kindly show us our rooms we'll follow. Come on, now, West, and don't be bragging to the lass how you doubled on cock, for you didn't, or I'm a Dutchman! Come on, Roger; up with your dunnage. Now, ma'am, if we may trouble you——"

Anne took a lighted candle, led the way, and mounted the stairs. Connor and Aylward, loaded with

baggage, followed. West, both arms full of luggage, looked around at Jacqueline as he passed her:

"You look ripping pretty to-night," he said under his breath. "I'm terribly glad I could come back."

"Isn't it *wonderful?*" she whispered. She joined both hands and squeezed her interlocked fingers in ecstasy at the prospect of a playmate. All her excitement and delight of him was frank in her flushed face.

"I won't be very long," he said, and began to mount the stairs.

"West!"

"Yes?" He turned to look back.

"I put my scented soap in your room," she whispered with something very near to a giggle.

"Does your heart go with it *this* time, too?"

"Yes."

"Lean up and let me kiss you," he whispered.

She mounted one step, stood on tip-toe, stretched her slim throat and attained his lips.

Then she turned noiselessly and fled, thrilled with mischievous delight.

CHAPTER X

THE weather held. The sun rose out of a sea of fog each morning and set through opalescent mist.

There was no rain during the week; no wind; no slightest hint of frost to start a flight of woodcock out of the far North.

Some trees had turned golden; a few crimson. But as yet scarcely any leaves had fallen, and the dense foliage of the alders remained intact.

But even in so dense a cover, a day's shooting meant the bag limit even to West, an indifferent shot even when his mind was on the business.

Often it was not. Often his thoughts outstripped his feet and roamed far and wide in leisurely pursuit of those dimly brilliant phantoms which haunt the artistically creative mind.

So the boy sauntered through coverts, often with gun unready, preoccupied with the beauty of it all or with his own wide-ranging thoughts.

For West, from birth, had been more or less a dreamer—not the futile variety—but one of those whose minds carry on and finish work already begun or planned before the hands can accomplish it. And all this shooting experience was grist to his mill—the tense attitude of a slavering dog at point, for example; the close, nervous quartering of the beautiful, eager animals; the controlled canine excitement in all this highly trained, highly finished business—their emotion

revealed only in the whipping of their bleeding tails.

Picture after picture of these lithe, handsome creatures, fiercely intent upon the day's business—their long, almost slinking approach when a hot body-scent caught their flaring nostrils; the stealthy, velvet-footed caution; the instant stiffening to point—frozen immobility—statuesque perfection, often with lifted fore-foot and levelled flag.

Then the sudden whirr of the flushed bird—the beating upward through leafy branches—the crack of a gun—a feather floating down.

Every moment framed some new and interesting picture for a young man who made pictures for a living.

And thus, every least incident in every day of his life became professionally significant to him—noonday lunch on the covert's tufted edge of crumpled golden grasses, in the sun—the careless or alert attitudes of his two older companions—the early departure in the misty glory of the morning sun, with leaping dogs nuzzling gloved hands and gun stocks—excited, dancing, pirouetting dogs, at liberty to dash away, rush in circles, gallop off excess of energy before the sober business of the day began.

West's right-hand shooting-pocket was full of loose cartridges; in the left pocket of his shooting coat was a strapped sketch-book. In the upper right-hand pocket he carried an emergency ejector; two buck-shot shells; a tube of vaseline; a bottle of Three-in-One; a collapsible cleaning rod; a worn tip; and a small roll of red flannel.

In his left upper pocket he carried three crayon pencils; one of lead; an eraser; a tiny aluminium box

of moist colour in tubes; six camel's-hair brushes; and a blotter.

This being the youth's equipment, he was quite likely to be sketching the dogs when a covey of grouse roared up through the birches.

West took his sport and his art as they appealed to him; and his mind remained agreeably balanced between the two as he sauntered through the endless miles of thicket, or threaded the maze of blind leads and grassy lanes that traversed the bushy wilderness and led nowhere—save to some fox earth, or a drumming log, or a sweet, cold spring, perhaps.

Sometimes, too, his impressionable but youthfully unstained mind was preoccupied with Jacqueline.

Not so much during the first days, but more frequently toward the end of the week, and for longer intervals at a time.

A lively and natural masculine curiosity, a sense of elation, the smugness of flattered vanity, alternated with uneasy surmise, sober reaction, and sentimental apprehension for the desperate but unavoidable effect on her that his ultimate departure must inflict.

He took her kiss and strenuous caress at a value considerably above market and even above par; was troubled with misgivings, and frankly sorry for her.

But it was too late to modify his behaviour or hers —or the inexperienced passion of her embrace; or her unfeigned delight in him; or the candid offer of a child's devotion flung at him with all the ardour of heart and mind and soul combined.

Often, as he walked slowly behind the quartering dogs—and in touch with his companions only by whistled bird-call—in the golden gloom of the alders

he seemed to see her—slender, delicately brown and gold—laughing at him among the leaves. . . . Or radiant in welcome—swiftly ardent—offering her red-lipped mouth. Or tense and silent; or softly pliant, close whispering in his arms——

Or, in the lamplight of the sitting-room, where the others were gathered for the brief hour before early retirement, curled up on the sofa beside him—to read to him some poem, perhaps, that he had forgotten from school days, but which only recently had been discovered by her. . . . Or a page from "The Field of the Cloth of Gold"; or none of these—only low-voiced, earnest exchange of thought—question—reply—some girlish theory vaguely evolved and offered; grave comment; gay dissertation; or lighter challenge—badinage; nonsense——

The boy sometimes thought of these lamplit things . . . saw the sitting-room, and Jacqueline's mother knitting; and Connor in dry knickers, grey shirt, and slippers, with his cigar gone out, studying something in space unseen by others; and Aylward reading an Albany newspaper three days old.

And he saw, again, their tall shadows on the dingy wall-paper, scarcely moving; and heard the girl's low voice in his ear—felt her nearness on the old sofa—the warmth of her shoulder touching his.

Already he had made dozens and dozens of notes of her—sketches of her head at every angle; of head and body; of full lengths; of fragments; details.

Some closely resembled her; all recalled something of her—some subtle characteristic or occult quality—even a study of her wrist and hand was all Jacqueline—unmistakably Jacqueline and none other.

One aquarelle in particular was charmingly like her—a sketchy, simple, auriferous note in pure wash.

She wanted it, but he wanted it for himself—not certain why—but obdurate in the matter.

The first revelation of the artist in him had subtly excited her to depths that no ardent contact or material emotion had evoked in her.

Listening to him, watching him work, she seemed to catch dim glimpses of glories undreamed-of in colour. —vague hints of splendours of form and beauty unconceived so far. In her virgin soul was quickening the creative instinct, born of a germ, dormant through generations, yet always transmitted; awaking now to life in this girl—the last of the race of Ardres.

It was the transmitted impulse, in abeyance through many generations, which desires beauty; needs it; vaguely begins to realize that it is vital.

And the passionate impulse to create it, long slumbering in the blood of her race, was stirring—awakened by this boy's voice and touch.

Toward the latter part of that week, after an exhausting day's grouse shooting through thorn, slashing, and wet woods, and after the agreeable combination of dry clothing, slippers, and supper, Roger Aylward's head began to nod earlier than usual over the ancient Albany newspaper; and Connor's cigar kept going out, and he was too drowsy to bother with it.

Anne, also, seemed unusually sleepy; and to keep her eyelids from drooping over her knitting became more and more of an effort.

"Madam," said Connor, arousing himself and sitting up straighter on his chair, "your cooking is so

confounded savoury that I'm going to bed to dream that I'm eating that supper all over again."

Anne, now accustomed to his modes of speech, merely smiled without looking up from her work. Connor yawned unfeignedly:

"And that's no crass compliment," he added; "it's truth and tribute. When I was a little lad I had such cooking. Let the fool newspapers have their joke. But I did have that kind of cooking, God rest my mother's soul! Now, after forty odd years, I have the same cooking again. You're making a boy of me once more, ma'am. I didn't think it could be done. But *you're* doing it!"

Anne, looking up at him, saw in his eyes something a little different from a mere jest—or something more than it—and, vaguely conscious of that difference, resumed her knitting.

"Roger," he said, with a terrific yawn, "I'm turning in. Are you?"

"All right. It's only a little after nine."

"That's the proper bed-time for a boy," said Connor; "come on." He glanced around at West, where he sat on the sofa with Jacqueline.

"As for that sleepless old man, yonder," he continued, "let him sit up if he likes. Old men have a long rest coming all too soon to them. We lads need our sleep, Roger. Come, lad; for my eyes are heavy with new youth and the need to dream."

Aylward laid aside his newspaper and got up. Connor made a slight, stiff bow to Anne.

"Good night," she said pleasantly.

"Good night, ma'am," said Connor. "And, if it's not presuming, ma'am, I should venture to remind

you that early hours are as good for sleepy girls a-knitting."

His eyes were twinkling—but with exactly what, Anne found it difficult to analyse.

She looked up at him in friendly amusement and laughed a little, too. For a while she continued to knit; but, a few minutes after the two older men had lighted their candles and mounted the stairs, Anne also rose, folded her wool and needles, glanced across the room at the two young people on the sofa.

"Are you coming up pretty soon, Jackie?" she asked.

West turned round, then rose at once.

"Pretty soon, mother," replied Jacqueline.

"Don't keep Mr. Halton up late. He has had a tiring day——"

"I'm not tired, Mrs. Ardres," he said.

"I have several things to tell him," added Jacqueline.

Anne said good night; her daughter jumped up, kissed her vigorously, and returned to the sofa with a hop-skip-and-a-jump, and stood beside it practising a toe-spin, which abruptly landed her on the sofa's edge, rather dizzy.

West lighted Anne's candle and made a nice bow to her at the foot of the stairs. She looked at him amiably and went on upstairs.

When he returned to the sofa, Jacqueline took him by the arm and pulled herself closer to him.

"West," she said, "I really have something to tell you. It's about myself. Shall I?"

"Tell me, Jack."

"Well, then, in the bookcase drawer over there, I

have ten and a half copy-books full of my poems. *I* wrote them all. Please don't laugh at me?"

"No, of course not."

"The trouble is," she went on, "I don't know whether they are good poems or bad ones. Mother listens when I read my poems to her, but usually she is tired, and I don't think she is interested in poetry.

"When I was younger I tried to read them to the children in school. They laughed at them and wouldn't listen. Would *you* listen—to one or two? Would you, West?"

"Certainly."

"Because I want you to tell me how poems should be made."

"All right."

"And I want you to look at my drawings. I've made some. Some are done in water-colours, too. . . . West, you do like me?"

"You bet I do."

"Then you won't laugh. . . . You'll *tell* me—oh, West, you're so sweet——!"

Her rough embrace choked him a little; then she flew to the bookcase, jerked open the drawer, came back to him with both arms piled full of copy-books and loose sheets of paper—all sorts of scraps—brown wrapping paper, butcher's paper, backs of advertisements and handbills—anything offering a surface on which to draw.

At half-past ten Jacqueline Ardres was still reading aloud from her collected works. And West was growing desperately drowsy.

The so-called "poems" which she first had read to him—her most recent attempts—surprised, touched, and interested him with their effortless fidelity to truth and childish ignorance of form.

There was even a certain beauty in their crass honesty—in her calm unconsciousness of self—in the utter lack of sophistication.

Her drawings, too, were strange and pathetic, without a trace of educated knowledge—helpless, naked, blind aspirations toward some humble truth which her heart and mind discovered and considered beautiful, and were striving to record.

What she had done seemed to him, in its way, pitiable; yet there really was nothing to pity in a girl who, untaught amid this solitude, possessed such mental resources.

In this remote place it was, of course, not possible for her to progress. Those vehicles of the mind —the hands—cannot entirely teach themselves. Any eyes, not blind, can look; but only instruction can teach eyes to see and bring too eager hands under discipline.

Jacqueline, all afire now, continued to recite. The unquenchable enthusiasm of the Ego never wearies. What it has wrought the creative mind never tires of displaying—is not aware when the world tires—does not comprehend that any listener's capacity is limited; that the mild glow of appreciation, compared to the creative conflagration, is always of brief duration, and can consume but little fuel at a time.

It was so with West; he had become saturated; and now the day's exertion was making him somnolent.

For her sake he continued to fix his drowsy attention upon her voice; made generous efforts to keep his senses clear.

All curled up on the sofa, she had leaned her shoulders back against him, and finally dropped her silky brown head on his breast, reading aloud all the while from the first edition of her works. Her excitement, delight, gratitude for such an audience; the heavenly privacy of their shared confidence, possessed her, warmed her, was satisfying her starved soul.

She had finished reading another poem—an odd, glinting, fragmentary glimpse of some homely commonplace—and, fumbling with the copy-book, and without turning: "Tell me, West?" she begged.

"What?" he asked torpidly.

"How to learn to say—all—all that I'm trying to say."

"Study. Take lessons—a course——"

"Where?"

He remained silent, too drowsy to consider.

"Where, West? There is nobody here to teach me."

He breathed something indistinct.

For a while she, also, remained mute, resting against him, running slowly through the much-thumbed leaves of her copy-book, silently reading to herself some scrap here and there.

Finally, as she was about to resume her recitative aloud, she noticed the boy's oddly regular breathing. For a moment she listened; very cautiously turned her face. He was sound asleep.

A second's hurt surprise melted into that swift,

enveloping tenderness that is instinctive in all women at the sight of the human male asleep.

She let him sleep, resting against him unstirring, watching him, wondering sometimes, sometimes curiously intent to study each feature of the unconscious face.

Now, for the first time, to her, he looked alien, unfamiliar—like an arrival from another planet.

This did not seem to be the youth she knew, at whom she had first smiled for blushing, to whom she had drifted so naturally with offered lips—for the sake of the laughter in his boy's eyes, and the girlish curve of his cheek and throat.

Slumber altered him curiously. This sleeper was no boy, but a grown man, with a man's thinner, rougher cheeks and a man's sharper temples—spite of the blond hair disordered there—and with the leanness of a man, too. And there were hard bones and flesh on his shoulders and chest where she was resting, and a hint of grimness to the scarcely parted lips which his regular breathing stirred perceptibly.

Now, out of that happy paradise in which still wandered her virgin heart; and out of which never, so far, had been born anything to trouble her, the first trace of fear crept, formless, indefinable, faintly cold. . . . Symbol serpentine.

If it were born of the altered strangeness of this sleeping face—of her own subtler sense of unfamiliarity with man, where contact with boyhood hitherto had left her without sex consciousness—somehow this sleeper and this contact was disturbing her.

Perhaps the occult retreat of her soul reacted in the slightest of involuntary movements. The strange

sleeper opened his eyes; she saw consciousness, the returning flush; and, suddenly, it was the boy!—her familiar returned again, safe, reassuring, smooth of cheek and throated like a girl.

With a low cry she flung her arms around him and bore him backward, held him at full length in passionate embrace.

"Oh, you are so dear, so sweet," she murmured, "to let me read you all those awful poems till you just had to go to sleep! I'm so sorry; you can go to sleep again now, if you want to—right here, West, and I'll hold you close, very close."

He looked at her out of eyes still confused; blond head lying in her arms, the pallor of sleep still on his features.

"I didn't mean to," he muttered. "Go on and read to me——"

"You are kind. I've read too much. You'll tell me about it sometime? You'll help? Not now. . . ."

She kissed him; took his kiss, looked into his grey eyes; laughed a little; wriggled free of him, one knee resting on the floor.

"When you were asleep," she said, "all at once I began to be lonely, uncomfortable, almost afraid. You looked so different, West."

She rose from the floor beside the sofa, disentangling her knees from his encircling arms.

Looking down at him, presently, she indulged in a hearty and undisguised yawn.

"Are you going to bed?" she inquired, patting her mouth with apologetic finger-tips.

He nodded, swung upright and around, and found his feet.

Drowsiness tampered with his long legs and he stumbled. They laughed. She lighted both candles. They went upstairs slowly, side by side.

On the landing she gave him her hand and lips, in natural surrender.

"Good night, West."

"To-morrow."

"Aren't you going shooting?"—still moving toward her door.

"Not to-morrow."

She smiled faintly, kissed her hand to him on the threshold:

"All day, then," she said; and silently closed her door.

CHAPTER XI

THE weather held. There was no frost and no flight. Long before the three men were awake that morning, Anne and Jacqueline were up; cows milked, stock fed and watered, endless petty household matters accomplished.

Daughter and mother had breakfasted; Jacqueline was beginning to prepare the morning meal for the three men; Anne, preparing to thresh buckwheat, hooked up old Jim to the hay-cart to go after the stacks.

Connor, dressing in his bed-room overhead, and looking out of his window for sign of frost, saw only acres of dew sparkling in the early sunshine, and Anne crossing the grass, carrying a pitchfork.

She was a wholesome picture, with her reddish hair, clear tanned skin and rounded limbs—really a charming figure with the free swing of her symmetrical, compact body so gracefully balanced on narrow ankles and long, shapely feet.

Roger Aylward came into Connor's room, knotting a flowing blue tie over his blue flannel shirt, and looked out of the window over Connor's shoulder.

"Look at yon woman," said Connor, "up with the sun and we still snoring! And now she's off to some man's work—anything! anywhere!—fork or hoe; shovel or plough—and for forty years I've been telling

everyone that that kind of woman is extinct as the dodo!"

Aylward said admiringly: "Probably she's from pioneer stock."

"There's plenty of them, too, that have turned into sick cats! The degeneration of them! And their great-great-grandmothers moulded bullets and loaded flint-locks, with the war-whoop in their ears! Yon woman's a woman. The rest—God knows——"

He became silent as Anne drove out of the yard, standing up in the lurching hay-cart like some girl charioteer of ancient Athens, giving, swaying, balancing from supple limb to body as the wagon made rough weather of it over ditch and furrow.

"It's the buckwheat she's after—the stacks on the hill yonder," grunted Connor. "By Heaven, Roger, if you had to hoe and dig and reap and thresh and cook every durned thing you shoved into your mouth, you'd say grace before bread and kiss every potato you swallowed. You would that, me buck!"

"Very edifying—from a millionaire," remarked Aylward.

"And it's you who knows who grubstaked me, and pans I washed with these two hands, and the pick handles I wore out! If I'm what you call me, I went after it through storm and stress and night and day on me own two legs and no seat to me pants——"

"Well, so did I——"

"*You!*"

"Many a day and all day long I've stood glued to the ticker——"

"And wore your voice to a whisper telephoning your brokers. Are you ashamed when you eat a plate

of buckwheat cakes that yon woman has sweated to harvest and thresh?"

"Quit your homily, P. J., and button your collar, because I'm gaunt inside, and I smell johnny cake."

Buttoning his soft collar, Connor scowled heartily upon his most intimate friend: "Do we shoot to-day?" he demanded.

"Why not explore? And we might pick up a pair of marsh-duck along that pond——"

"Well, you can wander if you like, Roger, but I've made up my mind."

Aylward sat down on the bed's edge: "What's your conclusion, P. J.?"

"Well, then, it's yours, too."

"That we had better consider purchasing this tract?"

"I think so."

"Even without waiting to see whether frost will bring the flight into these coverts?"

"Some ought to drop in. Anyway there's plenty of the home-bred to keep two or three guns always busy."

"Look what there's here, Roger; lashings of cock; and big, fine fat birds at that! Grouse galore in the wet woods and short birches; white hares; cotton-tails. . . . And if we put down pheasant and feed, the place can carry more than ever we'd want to drive. And there's deer sign everywhere; and that was a bear passed the mud by the spring below the east woods. Not that I care, when there are cock a-plenty. *I* don't know a better place for two rickety, decrepit old men to potter about in a month each year of the few God leaves them——"

"Yes, we're aged wrecks and crumbling fast," remarked Aylward, "you and your rosy cheeks, P. J. —I and no grey in my thatch so far. *I* don't envy West. I don't *want* to be that age again! Who was the congenial ass who wrote, 'Make me a boy again just for to-day'? Not *me!* Oh, no. I'm having a better time right now. So are you, P. J."

Connor grinned faintly: "I guess so. What a bunch of hypocrites we men of sixty are! If we've lived right we're better than any boy of thirty—we are that! Only"—he shrugged his powerful shoulders—"a woman won't believe it."

"It's their loss that you and I never married," remarked Aylward. "But now is our dangerous age, P. J., and if they ever guess the truth about a man of fifty-seven we'll have to run for it."

They linked arms and started for the stairs.

"I don't know how far I'd run," reflected Connor; "nor how fast."

"Well, I do, then."

"You judge me from past performances, Roger. You never can tell."

"A fat chance *you'll* ever be trapped!"

"As for trapping, I might turn trapper myself."

"Better not. You know what an old man is likely to catch."

"A skunk?"

"Or pneumonia."

"I know. Well, there's no hurry and no worry, Roger. Maybe I'll look about the world a bit. And maybe not."

Jacqueline, in pink smock and apron, greeted them

gaily from the kitchen: "Breakfast is ready. Is West up yet."

"I heard him thrashing around like a pony in a box stall," said Connor.

A heavenly aroma of fried ham, potatoes, coffee, and corn-bread pervaded the place. Jacqueline waited on table.

West appeared presently, welcomed by Jacqueline with suppressed ardour shining from her velvet eyes and a circumspect, "Good morning."

"Where," inquired Connor of Jacqueline, "has your mother gone?"

"We're going to thresh buckwheat to-day."

"Who?"

"Mother and I—if she'll let me."

"With *flails!*"

"Yes. It costs too much to send for Welch Verril's thresher."

The men ate in silence for a while.

Connor broke silence again: "Your mother is loading buckwheat in the stack, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"Well, little golden lass, I want you, when my car arrives, to go and tell the man who owns the thresher to bring it here. *I'll* pay for it."

Jacqueline gave him a surprised and slightly troubled look: "Mother wouldn't let me. She wouldn't let you do such a thing."

"That she would, little lass, when she understood why. I know the threshing must be done while the weather holds. But I must ask your mother to give over threshing and talk business with Mr. Aylward and me this day. And, as the business is important to

me, I pay for the threshing so it's not left undone till rain falls."

Jacqueline smiled winningly: "I'd rather you spoke to mother first."

"Well, then, I will," said Connor. "I'll just light a pipe and walk over yon. And, Roger! If you had the backbone of a grasshopper you'd bring a fork and pitch buckwheat with me——"

"I can see you pitching it!"

"You shall, then. West, are you shooting?"

West glanced involuntarily at Jacqueline, who glanced innocently out of the window.

"I'll see how I feel after breakfast," said the boy.

Connor and Aylward rose, went to the side porch and lighted their pipes. Jacqueline came round the table and offered her lips to West, daintily.

"Go shooting if you want to," she said.

"Let's take our water-colours and poems and go somewhere."

"You're so sweet, West. I may have to help thresh."

"P. J. won't let you."

She laughed: "I have to obey mother."

"No; she'll have to obey P. J. Everybody does."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps because he's always right. He is, always. He's the most remarkable—but I've told you about him."

She nodded: "To look at him and talk to him you'd never think it," she said. "Just see how he dresses. He's so plain and simple and pleasant—just as nice as a kind neighbour—and always twinkling his eyes at me, and calling me 'little golden lass.'"

"Men say he can be a devil in business, hard as steel, even cruel. . . . I've heard that. I never saw that side of P. J., if there is such a side."

He rose, slipped his arm around Jacqueline's supple waist, and strolled beside her to the window.

"About that threshing machine and talking business to your mother," he said. "I'll tell you what I think, Jacqueline. I've heard P. J. and Roger Aylward talking, and I know they like this place. And I believe they might wish to make some arrangement with your mother to lease it during the season for the shooting."

"Oh, West," she exclaimed, "how wonderful if they would!"

"You see," continued the boy, "P. J. is crazy about woodcock shooting. And I don't believe, even in his celebrated boyhood days, he ever had better cock shooting, or even as good.

"This region isn't so very far from New York. He can come up at night, have his car meet him in the morning, and be shooting by ten o'clock. And that is a powerful inducement to P. J."

"How wonderful it would be for us," repeated the girl, in a sort of ecstasy of hope. "You may not realize it, West," she added naïvely, "but we haven't so very much to live on. We're not exactly poor, because we have the farm and stock; but, somehow, we never can seem to lay aside any money. So you see how happy mother would be to let Mr. Connor rent the shooting."

She laughed, hugged his arm closer to her waist: "And perhaps you'll come back again if Mr. Connor does. Will you?"

"Would you be very sorry if I didn't, Jackie?"

"Yes."

"Would you weep?" he asked jestingly, but watched her reply.

"Probably."

"How long would you mourn me?"

"How long? Well, I don't know."

"Would you be inconsolable?"—still in the jesting tone.

She looked up seriously, then smiled.

"What would you do if I never came back?" he persisted.

"Why, go on living," she replied, laughing. "You wouldn't expect me to die, would you?"

"Yes, I would—of a broken heart."

Her clear laughter was uncontrolled, now.

"You don't really love me, do you, Jack?"

"Yes, I do——"

"I mean, you're not *in love* with me."

"What's the difference?"

"Considerable."

"Oh. Are you in love with *me?* Or do you love me? Or do you like me, West?"

And she laughed before he could answer—whatever he might have said on impulse—for she was a lovely and glowing thing there in the sunshine, yielding and warmly golden in his arms. And her eyes and her laugh and her scarlet mouth, and the clinging passion of her embrace might combine to carry him off his long and sturdy legs.

Yet, somehow, he was certain that neither in her mind nor heart did love lodge—love for him—real love—the love of a woman for a man.

Somehow he seemed to know that this girl had made of him something to be happy with—created him, out of the necessity of her own lonely soul, to be adored while with her, to be remembered without unhappiness after he had gone.

He realized that all real happiness is born within one, and must come from within; and that, in this wise, for her, he had been born out of the desire and joy of her own heart.

And that, when he had gone, in this girl's heart both desire and joy would remain, and again some day would fashion for her another—any boy who might please her—but re-born, re-created out of her own love for love, and her eternal necessity for it.

He picked up one little, roughened hand; silently examined it. It was a hand never made for him. . . . Yet, in some flash of emotion—some sudden flare of passion which to her meant loving, not love—he might lose his balance—might believe, in that instant, that this slim, water-roughened, uncared-for little hand might rest indefinitely in his.

And, even while thinking: "That *would* be a mess," he reflected. . . . Being clean of heart and touchingly austere of mind; and conscious that no alternative could concern himself.

Something of this was in the curve of the boy's cheek; in the girlish contour of his throat; in his clear, greyish-blue eyes that, at times, were crystalline and starry, like a child's.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'll come back if P. J. rents the shooting for a term of years. I do like you, Jacqueline. You're so soft and friendly and winning —and you've such an engaging mind——"

"Oh!"

"You have, indeed!"

"Do you really think so?"

"Certainly. You never bore me. I went to sleep because I was dog-tired. Come on, Jackie; get your paints and copy-books and we'll go off somewhere."

"Yes, but I must clear the table——"

"I'll help——"

"All right. Carry everything back to the kitchen. It won't take so long to wash and dry and lay the table for noonday dinner."

They both worked like beavers, hurrying to and fro between sitting-room and kitchen, getting into each other's way, colliding, laughing, spilling things.

Amid the rising steam she passed him plates and platters to wipe dry; and he performed his part, whistling gaily and occasionally breaking into song, which entranced her, his voice being quite an agreeable baritone.

Hers was clear and sweet; she sang her favourite phonograph record song—"Good-bye—don't go!"—which he quickly picked up; and they sang it together while laying the table for noon dinner.

There were pots and pans to set on the range; stock and vegetables to prepare for soup; things to start soaking; other things to prepare for bake-pan and griddle—an endless complication, it seemed to him, but out of which emerged order when she set her efficient hand to it.

She shook down the fire; he filled the range with coal; she set the dampers; he kissed her.

"Now," she said, "if you'll draw me some water I'll

be ready to go to the North Pole with you! Or anywhere else."

He said: "Would you go as far as heaven with me, Jacqueline?"

"Yes. . . . Or as far as hell."

No doubt she would have—if she could have been back by bed-time.

CHAPTER XII

CONNOR, in knickers and soft shirt, looking sturdy and neat in his fresh tweeds, cast away the remains of a cigar, picked up a pitchfork, and invited Roger Aylward to accompany him and help load buckwheat.

Aylward declining, and continuing to cut the pages of a paper-backed novel, Connor walked out across the grass, got over the fence, sauntered along a dead-furrow to the crest of the hill.

From here, gazing down, he discovered Anne, old Jim, and the wagon—the latter full of buckwheat; Jim partly full; Anne rebuilding standing stacks which had begun to disintegrate.

Anne did not notice his approach. Her reddish hair had become loosened by exertion; her fair, sunburnt skin was wet with perspiration; her waist, sleeveless and laid wide nearly to the breast, was soaked.

As Connor came leisurely across the stubble she finished her binding, rose up and drove a fork into the stack, swung it skyward and over, so that it fell on top of the stacks on the wagon and lay snug in its place.

He halted. She was working with her shapely back toward him, spearing, lifting, swinging sheaf after sheaf to the top of the load.

"Ma'am," he said abruptly, "you need a man on top of that load."

She turned around after she had fastened the wet

waist at her breast. When she saw the pitchfork in his hand she smiled.

"You're thinking I'm too old," he said, "and it's that makes you stand there and smile."

"Old?" she repeated, still smiling. "How old do you suppose I am, Mr. Connor?"

"Well, you look under thirty, ma'am—and isn't that what matters?"

She laughed, looked at him with slight embarrassment as he set one carefully shod foot on the hub, hoisted himself to the seat, drove his fork in among the sheaves, scrambled to the top of the load.

"Now, ma'am," he said grimly, "I take what you toss. And the next load *I* toss and you take."

Still amused but uncertain, she swung up a sheaf. He took it neatly on his fork, half-way, laid it in its place.

"When you were in the cradle, ma'am, I was doing this," he said.

"Oh, no, you are mistaken, Mr. Connor——"

"Well, then, I should have been doing it," he returned, catching another sheaf and swinging it into place. "And by the same token, ma'am, we've enough here now. Toss up your fork and give me your hand, and you'll land atop like a bird."

He caught her fork; drove both deep into the red stalks, leaned over and caught both her hands as she stepped from the hub to the seat, and drew her up beside him.

"Now, ma'am, you're thinking I can't drive," he said, gathering the reins. "I don't know what you think of me, anyhow," he added, turning old Jim in a wide and careful circle.

"I think you drive carefully."

"I do that. There's a lashing of caution in the Scotch-Irish, and my forbears were that. Now, ma'am, where's the bars—ah! I see my way. Well, ma'am, I have to confess I've taken a liberty. Will you forgive me?"

"What liberty?"

"You're Scotch-Irish, too, then—you're that wary to forgive what you don't know about!"

Anne laughed and Connor's features were grim, but his eyes twinkled.

"Well, then," he said, "I sent that golden lass of yours to fetch the threshing machine."

Anne's cheeks reddened: "Why did you do that?" she asked in consternation.

"Because I've business to talk with you, ma'am; and grain can't wait while fair skies hold——"

She interrupted: "Mr. Connor, I can't afford to hire Welch Verril's machine——"

"One moment, ma'am; if we do no business together, I pay for the trouble I cause; if we do—and I'm thinking we shall—then you can buy the danged old machine and never feel the expense."

"Mr. Connor."

"Well, ma'am?"

"I shall have to speak plainly; I have no money to buy a threshing machine or to rent one either."

"Well, then, I pay for it if you and I do no business together——"

"You don't understand!"

"You *won't* understand!"

She turned where she was seated on the wine-red

straw; his features were obstinate and grim, and her own flushed brightly with annoyance.

"Do you suppose I will accept aid from anybody, however kindly meant?" she demanded.

"God bless us both, I'm asking *yours,* ma'am! I want to drive a hard bargain with you—short of cheating you—for I fear law and jail—I do that! And women, too, I fear! And never married nor looked twice at other than a child of your blessed sex, ma'am!"

Vehemence had turned his face very red, but he drove carefully through the gap in the fence, across the yard and into the barn.

Anne, still warm with resentment, rose to her knees, to her feet; pulled out her pitchfork and began to toss over the sheaves to the barn floor below.

Connor got up deliberately and freed his fork.

"Anywhere?" he asked.

"Yes," said Anne shortly.

For a while there was no sound in the barn except the thud of sheaves falling and an occasional patient snort from old Jim in the rising dust.

When the last sheaf was out of the wagon, Anne dropped her fork and took the reins; and Connor took them out of her hands.

"I can talk driving," he said, "but you've got me scared and I'll find no word to say if I look at you."

He backed the wagon out of the barn, wheeled, turned Jim's head afield.

Both were standing as he drove through the bars.

"Ma'am," he said, not looking at her, "I'll not disguise what's in my mind. And in Mr. Aylward's, too.

We're here to buy your twenty thousand acres of thicket."

After a few moments he turned his ruddy face and Anne gave him a dazed look.

"Buy?" she repeated.

"Yes, ma'am."

Incredulous, silent, she rested one hand on the upright beside her as the wagon bumped over the furrows. Connor drew rein in the stubble beside a row of stacks. Anne started to descend, but, as though suddenly tired, remained seated on the edge of the wagon.

Connor, already on the ground, fished out his pipe, filled and lighted it, and came slowly over to where Anne was seated with feet drooping and balanced between both arms.

"How much would the alder land be worth the acre?" he asked casually.

She gave him a vacant look out of her blue eyes.

"What's the tax, then?"

"Nothing—a little road work. The land is no good. It can't be drained. It is useless."

"You're the fine, smart bargainer," he said sarcastically. "Here I come to buy your acreage and drive the devil's bargain if I can, and you tell me the land is worthless!"

"It *is*."

"God bless us, that's for you to deny, then!" he retorted.

"How can I? It's nothing but brush and swamp——"

"There's a lake——"

"A pond, and what good is it?"

"They pay money for ponds, ma'am!"

Anne was silent. She seemed fatigued—reaction from the shock of Fortune's knocking on her door, perhaps—where only bleak winds had rattled it as long as she remembered.

She sat on the wagon's edge, resting on both work-worn hands, her symmetrical head drooping a little.

"Ma'am?"

She looked up dully.

"Would two dollars the brush-acre suit us?"

She couldn't answer—couldn't think, somehow.

Connor said: "That's forty thousand for the covert and pond. I was a timber-looker once in my life—I've been all things, mostly, first and last. Now, there's dozy timber in your wood-lots, too, ma'am. And there's fir-balsam and swamp maple and black ash and white. Set that down to fire-wood at ten a cord cut. But for fear of jail, ma'am, I have to admit clear pine and white, and three to five markets to the log—not to cheat you. And there's some first growth oak—God knows what's in the heart of it!—and there's beech and soft maple and hickory on the ridges—two to three foot caliper—and maybe some over. . . . And here's the farm, ma'am——"

Anne's confused eyes cleared and she straightened up with a jerk of her head.

"You'll not take it amiss, ma'am, if I say I've seen better farms. I have so. I've seen better buildings in my time—better machinery, better stock, better soil. There's thirty acres tilled and a hundred fallow—or less. Yes, ma'am, I know. What is your price, ma'am—everything outside the brush—and a clear title?"

"I don't know——" she seemed scarcely able to articulate.

"Well," said Connor carelessly, "I figured it with Roger. He took pencil; I worked it out in my head; and we came close together—we did that—for the farm, fifteen thousand; and fifteen more for the woods. It gives us seventy thousand all told. If you hold out for seventy-five I'll be robbed! I will that. . . . And I'll not pay for the survey—not a penny! Shall we say seventy-five thousand dollars?"

Things got greyish, then dark, then cleared a little in Anne's eyes. She took hold of an upright; passed her arm around it. Suddenly her blue eyes were blind with tears, and she bowed her head on her arm.

Connor shoved both hands into his coat pockets, walked a little way along the slope and stood gazing out over the domain of Ardres, as though already it were his.

A light wind blew the smoke from his pipe away against a sky intensely blue. There was another smoky thread wavering in the western sky—a string of wild duck circling high over Windy Pond.

For a long while Connor stood there surveying the miles of alders. Only God could number the woodcock in those viewless and leafy retreats. What a domain! Almost worthless except to such as he; but, to him, absolutely what he required to play with during the remainder of his life.

He turned and came back across the wine-red stubble.

"I'll say all that's in my mind, ma'am," he said. "And it's this: that you stay and look after us till the building and all is done and the last workman cleared out. And you shall set your own salary, ma'am, and you'll have what hired help you need. Just cook for

us; look after us in woman-wise fashion. I'll not deny you're a grand cook, and should ask salary according—and whatever you ask, believe me, ma'am, our food will taste as sweet and we'll lie as snug abed, and thank God for all!"

Anne had stanched the tears with her apron. She felt strangely weak and tremulous—not inclined to trust her legs on the ground.

Connor, enjoying his pipe, leaned back beside her against the wagon.

"It's strange," he mused aloud, "what a man will pay for his fancy. When I was a poor young man I was a grocer in a little town. And one day a customer lent me a gun and took me woodcock shooting. The first time ever, ma'am. I killed ten birds. I'd never been so happy. And I never forgot it. No, ma'am. I'd dream of woodcock and willow swale and alder. I would that! And ever it's been in my mind to buy a shooting of my own where woodcock forgather. And other game, too. But woodcock first of all. And I freely confess, ma'am, that I've tried out many a boasted covert in my time. But never a covert like this. I'm honest; after the first day's sport I knew I wanted to buy. There's a rough man yonder on the hill—the Verril Farm, I think you call it—and had he been civil I might have talked business to him—there being cock and grouse on his place—and the coverts promising. . . . But he drove us off. I thank God he did."

After a silence Anne turned her head and looked at him. He looked back at her keenly, a little grim.

"I—didn't know I was—so tired," she said.

"It's the heart in you that's tired, ma'am. You shall hearten up, now—what with the farm off your shoulders.

When the title passes it's cash. You shall take no worry of it—if you'll trust me."

"I—d-do."

"That's fine, then!" said Connor heartily. "I've the car; Roger and I will chase over to the county seat and clear up all the rubbish. Take no thought, ma'am. Give me the deed when the time comes. Is all clear?"

"The title? Yes."

"Mortgage? Anything?"

"No."

"And—will you stay and help us till we're running?"

"Yes."

"It may take two years."

She nodded, smiled, but her lips trembled.

"Well, now, it's all fixed and fine, ma'am," said Connor vivaciously. "And it's a grand bargain; it is so. You'll not send me to jail, will you, even if I've been sharp with you? Would you do that, ma'am?"

Anne laughed. After a moment she released the prop and slid to the ground.

"Sure," cried Connor, "I shouldn't stand here gossiping when the skies hold and they've gone for the machine at Verril's!" And he seized a fork and tossed a truss of buckwheat on to the wagon.

And when the wagon was half loaded: "It's your turn atop!" he insisted; and made her mount to the top of the pile and take and place what he tossed up to her.

"Grand gleaning for pheasant," he said. "By the same token I'll put down a few thousand in the spring. I will that, ma'am."

CHAPTER XIII

ROGER AYLWARD, washing up before noonday dinner, heard somebody enter his room. Out of the corner of his eye he saw it was Connor, and went on scrubbing his face.

"I've bought the place and got *her* to run it," said Connor abruptly.

Aylward lifted a dripping and surprised face from the wash bowl.

"It's a grand place," said Connor. "She and I were pitching buckwheat——"

"Yes, but——"

"And she's a grand woman," he added emphatically. "Make no mistake, Roger; you're thinking it's the shooting and the johnny cake and the rest that beguile me. No. Her cooking has no influence on my judgment when I say she's a grand woman. And a proud one. And stands on her two feet. And she looks the world square in the eye. She does that."

"Yes, but——"

"Once there was no rarity of such women. They're gone these hundred years. And their descendants are a brood of scuts—barring a few. She's one of the few. My mother was one. . . . But the old race of women who stood on their two legs and looked the world in the eye—it's ended, Roger. And real cooking went with it; and real children. Real children—they're gone,

too . . . barring the few . . . like the little golden lass below."

Aylward rubbed his face and hair with a scanty towel.

"What do you have to pay?" he asked, much interested.

"Everything included—seventy-five thousand. Cash when the title passes."

Aylward laughed: "Your grand woman knows how to drive a grand bargain, I notice."

"She does *not*, then!"

"Well——"

"Never mind; I can pay for my fun; and let it go at that. . . . And I've the whole thing in my mind's eye, Roger. I take the house as it is and I call in an architect to make it sound as a bell, with heating and plumbing up to date.

"I lay out ten acres of lawn around it. I want flowers—the kind I remember forty years and more ago. I want cows in the cow-barn, horses in the horse-barn, pigs in the pig-house, chickens in the runs. I do so. And I want ducks and geese and guineas and a peacock to sit on the wall—did I tell you I want a wall around the place—the ten home acres? Well, I do; and I want miles of game-proof fence nine feet high around the whole estate."

"So far," remarked Aylward, "you've sketched in over a hundred thousand dollars."

"Have I so? Well, here goes more, then, for I'll have a pheasantry and two good men; and there'll be patrols on the fence-line. I want trout in yon lake, too—if I have to drain it or dynamite it first. Put that down in your head, Roger, along with the new garage,

ice-house, grain barracks, tool-house, artesian water supply, four cottages, boat-house, root-cellar—have I missed anything?"

"I don't think so," said Aylward, laughing.

"Well, I have, then. I want miles of roads. . . . How much have I spent, now?"

"About half a million."

"Half a million," repeated Connor, "on a bog full of bushes. Well, some would spend it on cards, some on horses, and others on women—or what they call women. I'll sink mine in a swamp. It's the cleanest way to be rid of it."

He went into his own room to wash—a ruddy, sturdy figure in his baggy tweeds and smart tan shoes; and his step was quick and springy as a lad's on a pleasant errand.

Aylward came in and sat down on the bed's edge.

"God knows it's time you had a little fun, P. J.," he said.

"I've always had fun," returned Connor, with a snap of his jaw. "I had it when the Beasly crowd went after me in Mexico. I had it every time I spent a dollar to make ten thousand more. Fun? I had it when the Senate called me up and when I talked back to the House. Every damned thing that's out to blackjack big business has handed me fun to last a lifetime. I've had it in coal, I've had it in oil, I've had it in mines, in railroads. Fun? I've had a-plenty. I'm sick of it. I want to stop laughing. I'm tired, Roger. And I'm longing for the peace and rest that this place is to give me some quiet day, please God. You'll say naught at table about this business?"

"No."

"She's a grand woman. . . . But like a child at heart. For all her quiet face and the calm blue eyes of her she's a real woman and the dickering upset her. I drove a hard bargain and I jewed her down——"

"What! You said that——"

"Ah, what does it matter what I said! Did you ever know me to be trimmed in a bargain? Huh! I showed her no mercy. I said to her: 'Not a penny more! No, ma'am! That's my last word; take it or leave it!' I did so."

As he finished drying his ruddy face, Aylward caught a glimpse of his eyes, and laughed.

Young Halton, passing the corridor, looked in on them.

"Where have you been, my gay young buck?" inquired Connor, brushing his thick, short hair with vigour.

"Jackie and I went over in the car to Verril's to get the thresher. They're on the way here, now. We saw a doe in the alders."

"Listen to that, now," said Connor. "Did I say it's a grand place, Roger?"

"Yes; and there's a grand odour of johnny cake wafting up the stairs," replied the other, rising. They all went down together like hungry schoolboys, and Jacqueline came from the kitchen, laughing, to tell them dinner was not quite ready.

While they waited, Andy Candler drove Verril's threshing machine into the yard, and with it came Welch Verril and Nick Larisch—the latter an extra and always ready to pick up any kind of dollar in any kind of way.

Connor went out to the side porch.

"Aha!" he said, recognizing in Andy the man who had driven him off the Verril land. "You seem to be handy at driving horses, too!"

Andy leered at him: "Where's Mrs. Ardres?" he asked sullenly.

"Cooking dinner. I'll tell you where to drive——"

"I ain't takin' no orders from you."

Connor smiled grimly: "Talk easy, my lad, till you know whom you're talking to." And, to Verril, who regarded him, mouth agape: "There are two loads in the barn. Thresh them. Then take your machine over to the field. Your men will have to carry in the stacks by hand."

"Say, neighbour," drawled Andy, "who's payin' for this here fancy threshin'?"

"I am, my boy."

"You know how much it's agoin' to cost yeh?"

"Three for the machine and one-fifty apiece for help," said Connor dryly. "Take it or leave it."

It was the prevailing wage in the district. They had nothing to say. Andy spat on the grass, jerked the reins sulkily, and drove on toward the barn.

During dinner the chug-chug-pfut! pfut! pfut! of the threshing machine became audible.

Anne, seated at last, glanced up at Connor.

"It's high time, ma'am," he said; "there's a change in the air, and we'll see scud and a sick moon to-night——"

"Frost?" inquired West, interested.

"A white one. Did you note the horizon an hour ago, ma'am?"

"I did," said Anne. "The blue had that silvery look."

"Yes; and it's a battered bit of tin the moon will look like this night. Ma'am, I was not born blind when I was born a country boy. There'll be birds stirring north of us before morning."

"A flight!" exclaimed Aylward.

"The first dribble, Roger. Three days will the white frost lie and melt to dew; then on the fourth day 'twill lie white and harder on the north side of the house. And on the fifth will come a black frost and hard; and, with it, the flight—may God forgive me for playing prophet—but I was born so."

West laughed, but Anne's blue eyes rested on Connor with a sort of fascination. Never before had she been conscious of power in any man. Never before had she had reason to regard herself as inferior to any man, whether in mind or strength of body, or in capability or in determination.

But, from the day that this man had entered her door, she was vaguely conscious of power, even under his unvarying courtesy and kindness; and in his lively moments of expansion, his gaiety, and vehemence—always, under it all, she felt the latent power of the man; invisibly vast; terrific as the thunderous silence biding beyond horizons.

And this day she had witnessed something of that power. In an hour he had taken from her her land and farm, all that had been hers that morning.

In an hour, with a few pleasant words, he had taken her predestined future from her and made for her a new one so amazing that her stunned mind had not yet accepted or comprehended it.

Within the hour this man who had come to her door a week ago had changed the face of the world for her; had made a new earth and a new heaven, and bade her enter and abide.

She was very tired; she never before had realized how tired she had become. Weak of body and limb and tired of mind—weary of work and thought and hope—and, suddenly, this man told her she might rest. . . . And, so far, she did not know how to—only that she was deadly tired and that she need think no more—need only learn to rest.

She ate little; kept her gaze on her plate unless addressed. Jacqueline chatted gaily with West—matters of interest to them both regarding her first drawing lesson superintended that morning by him.

"I made the strangest-looking cow," she said vivaciously; "I can draw a better one when I don't copy a real one. Mother, it was Blanche—but you'd never recognize her except by the brown spots I put on with water-colour. And West made the loveliest picture of me—just as I sat copying that old cow——"

"West," said Connor, "make a good picture of Mrs. Ardres for me——"

Anne looked up, startled.

"And maybe it will help when I'm starving for good food in New York." He added blandly: "Forgive me, ma'am, if your picture comforts me with thoughts of johnny cake—I'll be obliged to you for another slice of ham——"

Anne laughed; but she trembled a little when she touched things. Under this new strangeness of soul-deep relief new emotions were stirring. For the first time, but vaguely yet, she had begun to feel something

of a security which she never before had known in all her life, something so heavenly that it made her feel a trifle faint and tremulous.

"God," said Connor, "is notoriously good to the Irish; but the Scotch-Irish He's spoiled entirely. They want their own way, ma'am, and feel hurt if they don't get it. Would you sit to this artist-lad for your picture, now? It's a starving man's last request."

Anne blushed with embarrassment, tried to smile, but strange tears were very near her eyes and she was tremulous, oddly tired, not in control of voice or movement.

Perhaps Connor noticed the slightest quiver of her lip. Something probably checked his banter, for he diverted it abruptly to Jacqueline:

"Now, my gay and golden lass," he said, "show me the cow you made, and if it's like a cow at all I'll give you a box of paints and brushes. I will that; and as soon as I go to New York!"

Anne rose, resting one hand on her chair, and stood so while Jacqueline danced away upstairs to find her portrait of Blanche, and the men went out to the kitchen porch.

She looked wearily at the dishes; it did not seem physically possible for her to clear the table, wash these plates and platters, even with the aid of Jacqueline.

She moved toward the kitchen, rested a moment against the door, feeling almost faint—she who never had fainted in all her life.

"I'm coming in a minute, mother!" called out Jacqueline, as she hurried out to the porch, the cow-drawing fluttering in her hand.

"Here it is!" she said gaily, thrusting it upon

Connor. "It's no good. I don't deserve any paints from New York."

"God bless us!" exclaimed Connor, removing his cigar, which he had just lighted. "Here's an elegant cow, to be sure! Drawn to the very life—look at it, Roger!—with all the spots on her like real spots, and the ears and tail of her as if they'd twitch and switch while you looked!"

"You're making fun of me!" laughed Jacqueline.

"Fun, is it? Well, I guess not. There's no fun for me paying God knows what for a big, fine, expensive box of imported paints and Russian sable brushes——"

"Mr. *Connor!*"

"Or maybe the brushes are made of Chinchilla or Alaska seal, or some other expensive pelt——"

"Camel's hair!" she explained excitedly.

"Think of it," said Connor, in an awed voice. "Ships of the Desert! Make a note of it, Roger. Send a few live camels to our golden lass, so she can keep herself in paint-brushes——"

Jacqueline's laughter rang out as she turned to West, to Aylward, and back to Connor, enjoying their appreciation of this delightful jest. Then, leaving Blanche's portrait in Connor's hand, she hastened into the house, calling:

"I'm coming, mother! Mr. Connor is so funny—I'll tell you what he just said——"

She halted in the kitchen where Anne was seated, her hands limp in her lap.

"Mother!" she said, astonished.

"I'm tired, Jackie. Will you do a little of mother's work——?"

"Are you ill, darling?"

"No—just very tired—somehow. Come here."

Jacqueline went to her and embraced her cautiously but tenderly.

"Jackie, you and I are going to be very happy," whispered Anne, controlling her voice with difficulty.

"But we *are*, darling——"

"Yes. But we're not to be poor any more. And mother need not work in the fields, so hard, any more——"

"Oh, Anne!"

In the straining silence of their embrace, Anne dropped her face on her daughter's breast, and Jacqueline felt, through her thin waist, the wet warmth of tears.

"Oh, Anne, Anne——" she breathed, her red lips crushed against her mother's hair.

"I can't—tell you—now," murmured Anne. "To-night, in bed together." She lifted her head and wiped her eyes with her apron: "I'm better, Jackie. . . . We ought to clear the table——"

West had taken his gun and a few shells and had gone out to the barn, over which a hawk was hanging—a small-sized bird with powerful, rounded wings and a prominent fan-shaped tail—one of the three really bloody marauders that the farmer need dread.

Aylward, watching him restlessly, spoke to Connor about taking the dogs for a run, "to take the conceit out of them on some old cock-grouse," he explained.

"Go on," nodded Connor; "I'm comfortable."

"Don't you feel like a shot or two? We'll not go far."

"If I do I'll find you."

Aylward got up: "I'll take a stroll in the south woods. Near that spring where the 'drummer' tricked us. I'll be listening for your signal shots, P. J."

He rose, went into the house, reappeared with his gun, went out to the barn where the dogs reposed in a box stall, and presently was visible with the capering Beltons, headed for the woods beyond.

An hour later Connor knocked out his pipe, passed a square hand over his preoccupied face, sat so, in silence, gazing out over the waste of alders.

Jacqueline came out, impetuous, vivacious, bubbling with vital energy, as usual.

"*Where* is West?" she exclaimed, gazing about her.

"He went after a hawk," said Connor, "over behind the barn somewhere. Is your mother busy?"

"She's in the sitting-room, sewing."

Connor offered no comment.

Jacqueline jumped to the grass and started on a run for that vague region known to every country child as "behind the barn." Bound thither she scattered the chickens into flight and vanished from sight.

Connor sat back in his rocking chair, idly caressing the bowl of his pipe, which still was warm. In his keen eyes there was a remote softness as though what he gazed upon was not of the world.

For a long while he did not stir. A few bold chickens wandered up, hopped upon the veranda, and looked at him. The kitten watched them and dozed alternately.

It was evident that the buckwheat in the barn had been threshed, because, distantly now, came the staccato noise of the thresher across the northern fields.

Connor looked up at the sky. There was no blemish there, so far, but the blue seemed less intense and more silvery.

"Like half the lid of an old tin can will the moon look this night," he thought.

He filled his pipe again, but did not light it. After a while he put it into his pocket, squared his shoulders, sat a few moments longer, then got up with a grunt—not of effort but of comment upon his own thoughts.

He stood a moment, looking into the kitchen, then at the dim corner of the sitting-room beyond, where only the cheap sofa was visible.

He went in. The kitchen was clean and neat. A pot simmered on the range; the cheap clock ticked on the shelf.

At the sitting-room door he stopped. Anne sat in her accustomed chair, but she was not sewing. Her elbows were on the little yellow oak table, and her face was buried in her arms.

At first he thought she must be asleep. When he realized she was not, he gave a slight, involuntary start, then walked solidly into the room like a brave man marching to execution.

Anne heard him; lifted her flushed face in confusion.

"Ma'am," he said in a strained voice, over-loud and strange, "if you're not minded to talk business I'll not talk it. It's for you to say."

She seemed still a little startled—vividly confused that he should discover her still reddened with recent tears.

"I'll take a chair—if I may be so bold?" he said.

"Yes——"

He seated himself. For an instant something in his eyes resembled fear—a flash of it—and passed.

"Ma'am," he said, "there'll be a frost in the North this night."

"Yes."

"And a flight. And to-morrow I'll be afield all day. And the day after I leave."

"Oh."

"Yes, ma'am. I've business in the city; I have that."

"Then—you will wish to talk business now," said Anne steadily.

"I do."

She looked at him in silence.

"Ma'am?"

"Yes, Mr. Connor."

"I've a matter of a bank or two in New York . . . if you would wish to trust me. It's no small cheque that's coming to you. I've drawn it. Here it is, ma'am."

He laid the cheque upon the table.

"But the—the deed——" she faltered, "the title——"

"Oh, then, if it's not clear I'll clear it, never fear, ma'am. Send it on and I'll have it recorded when I come here again. But I was thinking, maybe 'twould be convenient for you to have your cheque deposited and your account in shape to draw against. I've a matter of two or three cheque-books on me——" he fished out two and laid them on the table. "And they'll send you your pass-book."

Anne crimsoned to her hair. She said: "I don't know how to draw a cheque."

"Do you not, ma'am? Well, then, here's the way —no trick in it at all——" He produced and opened his own cheque-book, fumbled in his waistcoat, found a fountain-pen. Anne bent over closer as he wrote.

"Here," he said, "I number my cheque—and here I date it. And here I write the name of the person I wish to pay; and here I write out the dollars and cents I need to pay. And down here, too, only in figures—like this. . . . And here I sign my name——"

He signed. "Is there a bank in the village?"

"Yes."

"I've drawn this to your order for a thousand dollars. It's yours."

"But why?"

"It's for what we call the goodwill, ma'am. It's the custom," he said gravely. "I pay you a thousand dollars for the name and goodwill. I've a right, now, to call my place The Ardres Farms."

"But you can, anyway——"

"No, ma'am. I'm a business man. I'll not ignore custom. Now, ma'am, take my pen and write as I tell you, here, on the back of this cheque."

Now, again, Anne felt the hidden pressure of this man's power—felt it around her, subtly enveloping her, compelling, determined, resistless.

She took the pen, wrote as he directed, making the cheque payable to the Drifting Bridge Bank for her account. He explained it briefly, advised her always to keep a few hundred balance in the local bank; pocketed his cheque-book and fountain-pen, and sat silent with lowered head and elbows resting on his knees.

Presently, without looking at her, he took the first

cheque he had drawn in full payment for the house and acreage, and, opening a bill-folder, placed it there.

"I'll be so bold as to look after your business in town, ma'am," he said.

"Thank you——"

"If you think fit to trust me——"

He lifted his head and looked at her across the table.

Then, suddenly, Anne could endure no more; and laid her head between her arms there on the cheap little table.

Her sewing fell to the floor.

After a long silence Connor placed a firm, square, powerful hand on her clasped hands, over which her hot tears fell and rolled down.

After another and longer silence, he said: "Ma'am, if you'll have me, I'll be good to you. . . . And to our golden lass. I knew you'd done for me when I first laid eyes on you. . . . Where you stood in the steam of the cook-stove—with your blue eyes so calm and clear, and the glory of your bright hair. There were women like you once. . . . Not now. . . . I'm old and ugly, ma'am. But I feel as young as a lad when I'm telling you this. Only for dread it would seem ridiculous to you, ma'am, I'd say the truth . . . that it may sound strange to you in a man of my years to speak of—of love. It's the first time ever it happened to me; but I knew what it must be. I knew it when I laid eyes on you. So—it's *that*. And I want you, ma'am. What I want I go after. But never did I want any woman until I saw you. And I want no other; and never shall. No other, ma'am, than you."

Presently, in the silence, Anne raised her head, freed her hands from his, used the hem of her apron on

her reddened eyes. For a while she was busied so, then rested one elbow on the table and sat with bowed head propped, thinking, eyes closed.

When she had thought it out she looked up, level-eyed; but the faintest ghost of a smile touched her lips; and she slowly stretched the other arm across the table, and let her right hand lie in both of his.

CHAPTER XIV

A BATTERED half-moon glimmered in the sky. Across its tarnished disk, scud flew. There seemed to be wind enough aloft, but none below. Not a leaf stirred in the foggy moonlight.

Aylward prowled outside with his cigar, watching weather signs in the sky, sniffing for a taint of frost.

Heavy mist lay over the wilderness of alders and blotted out the woods.

West, late that afternoon, had gone to the village in the car and purchased a hammock.

It now hung diagonally across the western end of the veranda. Jacqueline lay in it, enchanted. West, astride a chair, gave the hammock gentle pushes now and then, while he listened to Jacqueline's chatter and watched the glimmer of Aylward's cigar across the grass.

In the lamp-lit sitting-room Anne was bending over her sewing, the table between her and Connor. She seemed composed but rather pale. Sometimes she turned her lowered head and glanced at him; and always, as she resumed her needle, a faint smile touched her lips and made the lowered curve of her cheek softly lovely.

And Connor continued talking to her as he never before had talked to anybody—rambling along vivaciously about men and affairs—the first time ever he had unlocked his safe-deposit mind and padlocked

lips to any woman—never even so unguardedly to any man.

Dammed up in him were the saturnine revelations of a lifetime; and a lifetime it would take to rid himself of the grim accumulation to this woman, the stirring record of his battle for power which he had thought to bury with him at the end.

It was a stirring record of determination and persistency, tragic or splendid by turns; sometimes ruthless, perhaps, yet never mean, never small, never destructive.

It made no difference to him how much of it she understood; all he needed now was that she should listen.

She listened, sewing tranquilly, her pale profile and red-gold hair bathed in lamplight, her lowered eyes still striving to pierce this vast and cosmic vision of which he and she and this room, and the house, and the whole world under sky were becoming a magic part.

Except that she was ever increasingly conscious of this man's personal power, and knew herself to be held by it, guided, guarded by it, all else still remained unanalysed and unreal. Yet already she was aware that something within her which never yet had known rest, was resting now—stunned, perhaps; almost stupefied; but at rest, somehow.

Aylward came in from outer darkness, saying there would be a flight that night. He sat down, yawned over day before yesterday's paper, made a sleepy remark or two; and presently said good night and took himself off to bed.

Anne lifted her eyes and met Connor's gaze in the

first silent confidence of their shared secret. Both laughed.

"Shall I tell him to-night?" asked Connor, in a guarded voice.

She shook her head.

"To-morrow, then?"

"No," she breathed. "I'd wish him to see me once, well dressed, before you tell him."

"Whatever you say—but I'm that proud of you just as you are——"

A sudden flush dyed Anne's cheeks. But she said nothing; so it rested as it was between them.

"And our golden lass?" he ventured. "Will you tell her to-night?"

"After you've gone I'll tell her."

"Anne?"

"Yes, P. J.," she said calmly, but her colour deepened.

He crossed his arms on the table-top; she looked up from her sewing.

He said: "Had we been lad and lass together I would have had you all these years. I'll not wait now."

"How long will you wait?" she asked, simply.

"You shall tell me—for my days are speeding, Anne."

"Mine, too. . . . I know."

She thought for a while, one hand framing cheek and chin. Once, lifting her eyes, she smiled a little:

"I've always been so poor—I'm trying to think. But I don't know how to plan."

"It's clothes," he said; "I knew it!"

"It's—everything."

"Everything! Why, that's nothing! Why, dear lass, there's your car, and there's Albany for a start and a pinch; and there's New York—the whole blessed city and Fifth Avenue wide open to welcome you—you and our little golden one!"

The vision seemed to stun her for a few moments; and there came into her blue eyes a hint of fear. Then slowly they grew beautiful with a brilliancy that astonished him.

"Anne," he said, "there's kindness in your mind."

"Dreams," she said.

"Kind ones, then. And you'll not have me wait too long while the days speed by me. Will you, now?"

She said: "Jacqueline and I can go to Albany and find something to travel in to New York."

"There speaks a real woman!" said Connor emphatically.

Anne's brows bent inward as she considered: "Nick Larisch's daughter, Tanya, could come here and keep house for you, and remain until I returned. And Tessie Wessels would come and look after the stock. Those two."

She looked up; laughed at him: "If you are really in such a hurry."

"Anne," he said, "there never was another like you. Not since Washington was President. There were real women then. There's one left. . . . You'll start to-morrow?"

"The day after. I have to get Tanya and Mrs. Wessels and show them what to do. I can't go away and leave you to starve, P. J.," she added with gentle amusement, almost maternal.

"Well, then," he said, "if that's all to hinder you, I'll do the cooking myself."

But she only laughed at him; and there was a little defiance and even a little malice in her amusement. And something unconsciously deeper, to which the depths in him responded—the instinctive taking over of dependent man by woman.

He understood what had happened to him. The sceptre had passed to her. He let it pass with a sigh like a tired lad content.

"If you are going to shoot to-morrow," murmured Anne, "you ought not to sit up late."

"I'm not sleepy," he remonstrated, astonished.

"You will be to-morrow morning," she said gently.

And so the sceptre passed.

He sat perfectly still for a moment; watched her placid face for a few moments longer. Then he got up.

"All right," he said; and walked round to her chair.

He was bending over her; and finally she looked up at him. And then, after a little while, she rested her folded hands against his shoulder; accepted her first kiss since her Philip had journeyed to the wars.

"I'm not sleepy," he repeated almost plaintively.

"Yes, you are, P. J." Her hands now rested between his.

"How about *you?*" he demanded.

"I'm going up in a few minutes."

"Well, why can't I——"

"No," she said decisively.

"Well, all right then."

She smilingly returned the pressure of his clasp,

smilingly watched his unwilling progress to the stairs, gave him a last look softly bright.

For a while she sat motionless, idle hands limp in her lap, and gaze fixed on space.

An immense sense of fatigue was invading her. As in a dream she heard her own voice calling to Jacqueline in warning of the hour; heard her daughter's voice in gay remonstrance from the porch; rose; moved as one who walks asleep; and so started to ascend a shadowy stairs that never seemed to end. . . .

Outside in the foggy lustre of the moon, Jacqueline, lying in the hammock, extended one arm over the edge.

"West," she said, "I want you."

"Don't you wish me to swing you?"

She made no reply, but her extended arm beckoned.

He got up from the chair; she made room for him; drew his head to her shoulder.

"Funny sweetheart," she said, "funny, funny sweetheart."

"Why?"

"I don't know; you *are*." She was caressing his hair or perversely rumpling it. Once she gently tweaked his nose, then both ears, which he endured with apparent indifference.

"West!"

"Unh?"

"Are you asleep? This is a petting party!"

He laughed.

"*What* a lover!" she exclaimed.

After he had considered the remark he leaned over and kissed her.

"Pooh," she murmured. But, as he moved away, she caught him in a swift embrace, sudden, passionate.

"When you go away," she said, "what shall I do?"

"Will you cry?"

"I think so."

"You'll be laughing again in an hour, Jack."

"Not unless there's something worth laughing at," she said, so candidly that he also laughed until she shook him fiercely and kissed him mute.

"I'll miss you," she insisted.

"You'll let some boy kiss you before I've been gone a day," he retorted.

"That depends. What the dickens are you giggling at, West?" she demanded, shaking him.

"You! You've just *got* to kiss and be kissed, Jackie—haven't you?"

After a hostile silence: "I like people," she admitted. And, as he said nothing: "I do love to be petted—if I like the boy." She strained him ardently in her arms.

"That's the trouble," he said.

"Trouble?"

"Certainly. A man isn't flattered when any fellow can kiss his girl."

"Flattered?"

"Yes. It's no feather in his cap."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if I were the only fellow who could kiss you I'd have reason to feel flattered."

She considered that. "But—if you are not here, West——"

"I understand," he said, with enough disdain to hurt her.

"But, West, I need friends. And if I like them I show I do. I want them to know it. I—I need——" She caught at her breast, pressing with spread fingers, inarticulate lips parted.

After a moment she sighed deeply; her hand relaxed, and she looked at him out of smiling eyes.

"I don't know how to say what I feel," she murmured. "There seems to be something from God in everything, that makes me love, and want love. Don't you feel that way?"

"I don't know. Not towards everybody."

"Haven't you had many sweethearts?"

"Some."

"I have, too. You get tired of them though. But there's always another."

"You're a fickle youngster."

"No. I like them till they do something I don't like. Some are mushy and want to pet you too much. Some haven't any sense. Some act mean or crazy, or seem to get tired of you. So you get tired, too. And some are—are bad. . . . You know. Those are some of the things that make you change."

"What about me?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, West!"—she embraced him strenuously.

"How soon are you going to tire of me?" he insisted.

"I don't know."

"But you're sure to tire, sooner or later, aren't you?"

"I don't know."

"Think it over, then."

"You mean *now?*"

"Yes, *now*. Make up your mind as to how soon you are likely to become fed up on me."

"West! I can't!"

"Are you a little fed up already?"

Her fervent embrace answered him.

Suddenly she relaxed, pushed him away; rolled over flat on her back again.

"That reminds me," she said, rather loudly, "that Tanya Larisch told me she saw you on the road yesterday, and that you talked to her."

"I passed a girl on the road yesterday," he said. "She wore a red silk handkerchief round her head."

"That was Tanya. Her father's Polack. *Did* you flirt with her?"

"What?"

"She says you did."

He laughed.

"You *talked* to her anyway. Didn't you?" persisted Jacqueline.

"Yes, I did. . . . She looked so picturesque——"

"Do you think Tanya is very pretty?"

"She is, you know——"

"What did you two talk about?" demanded Jacqueline, turning on her side so she could look into the boy's face.

"I told her I'd like to sketch her sometime——"

"What did she say?"

"She just laughed. I don't remember what she said."

"West!" She gave him a dark look.

"Well, what's on your mind?"

"Did you kiss Tanya Larisch?"

"No, I didn't. Anyway, what difference does——"

"But I don't *want* you to!" she said violently.

He looked into her cloudy eyes and laughed outright. "Oh, I get you now," he said. "*You* require a harem, but you don't want me to have one."

"What's a harem? Oh, yes; I remember." She considered the matter with brooding gaze on him; came to a conclusion: "If I had you to pet me like this all the time I wouldn't need anybody else—except mother. . . . I mean I'd like other people, but I wouldn't let them love me—*this* way."

"Yes, you would; you're boy crazy," he retorted brutally.

She considered that, too, unblushingly, and with ever darkening gaze.

"You'd better watch out, too," he added.

"Why?"

He made no reply.

"Watch out?" she repeated. A vague idea of what he meant suddenly enraged her, and she caught his shoulders in a nervous grip and bent over him with eyes ablaze.

"You rotten—you rotten thing!" she stammered, shaking him. "Do you think I'm that kind of girl? Do you? *Do* you?"

She loosened a clutching hand and struck him on the mouth—and, blind with fury, struck him again—and crouched there panting and aflame.

He had never moved. From his cut lip her second blow had spread a smear of blood across his mouth and right cheek.

As her vision cleared and she saw it, terror seized her.

"West!" she gasped, "I'm sorry!"

As he lay there looking up at her, the blood slowly welling up and running over his face, suddenly she realized he was smiling. In the instant she had him in her arms, kissing his eyes, his hair, his throat, his bleeding mouth, out of her senses with grief and passion, unconscious of everything save what she had done. The foggy moonlight fell across them, silvering, welding them into one.

Her lips and face were smeared red like his when she sat up in the luminous dark. After a while she loosened her hand from his, slipped over the edge of the hammock and tiptoed into the house.

Presently she returned with a clean wet towel, leaned over him, wiped his face, then wiped her own clean.

Neither had spoken. She seated herself sideways on the hammock's edge, bent down and laid her cheek on his shoulder. For a long while they rested so, unstirring.

"West," she breathed.

He opened his eyes.

"I don't know what time it is. We'd better go in," she whispered.

CHAPTER XV

THE sun had risen over the alders! There was a pinkish glimmer on the ceiling of the dusky room where West lay sound asleep.

In the stillness of the house his door opened; Jacqueline stepped in; went noiselessly to him; knelt down beside the bed.

"West!" she whispered.

He awoke, confused; lay gazing at her, blinking.

"West," she said in a guarded voice, "I'm going away to-morrow, very early. Shall I see you to-day?"

He yawned: "Where are you going?"

"To Albany with mother, and then with her to New York. She told me just now."

He was collecting his sleepy wits. "That's funny," he said.

"Yes. I don't know just why mother is going. We've never been to New York. But something astonishing has happened to us. Mr. Connor has bought our farm."

"*Bought* it!"

"Yes, mother just told me. We're not poor, now. I think we're going to New York to buy things."

The boy lay on his side looking at her. "*Bought* it," he repeated. "That's like P. J. Connor, too. I hope he paid your mother well for it."

"I don't know. Probably. Mother said we are not to be poor any more. I didn't mind that—so much—

except on mother's account. I thought I'd come right up and tell you."

"Where are you going to live, now?" he asked curiously.

"Mother says in New York part of the year, and part of the year here. I don't quite understand."

"Probably," he said, "P. J. wants your mother to come here and cook for him when he's shooting."

"I think so. Tell me, West, are you going to be away all day? There's a white frost."

"There'll be a flight," he exclaimed. He lifted himself on one elbow and looked out of the window.

"Whew! It's like snow," he remarked; "there's certain to be flight birds in the birches——"

Something in her eyes checked him; then he laughed.

She forced a smile: "You'll want to be shooting all day, won't you?"

"How long are you to be away, Jackie?"

"I don't know. Perhaps a whole month."

"Well, I'm not going to shoot *all* day, then. We'll make a date and you bring lunch for us both."

"Yes," she said happily, "at noon. Where will you be?"

"I'll shake them and go over to where those four grassy lanes meet in the alders—you know!—where that little spring brook crosses, where we saw the tiny trout on the white sand bottom——"

"Green Crossing—I know. Are you sure you can find it?"

"Yes, I know how. And we'll have the rest of the day and evening——"

"Oh, West, I *wanted* to!"

"Are you going to miss me, kiddie?"

"I don't want to go away from you. But I've got to."

"Not even to go to New York? And you've never seen it?"

"I'm foolish, I suppose, but I'd rather be here with you."

He kissed her and lay looking at her and smiling, his masculine vanity charmingly soothed.

"You young devil," he said; "you'll join some petting party the first chance you get!" But he expected her to deny it.

At that she became ardently affectionate, even tearful, holding him in both arms very tightly, her face pressed to him. She said:

"Whatever *I* do, I don't want *you* to love any other girl while I'm away."

"Well, then, promise me——"

"No, I won't promise."

"Aren't you the least bit in love with me, Jack?"

"I—don't know. I like to love you—this way."

"Aren't you *in* love—a little—with me?"

"I don't know how it feels to be . . . I've been this way before," she admitted naïvely.

"And will be again. Is that it?" he jeered.

"I—perhaps. I'm always fond of *somebody*."

"If you were in *love* with me you wouldn't think of anybody else, Jack."

"I don't, while I have you. . . . But if we can't have each other—I'll be very lonely. And I couldn't promise you that it wouldn't happen again—if I liked somebody."

Pride and vanity were hurt, yet at that instant he was nearer to really caring for this girl than ever before.

And there was a little anger, too, in what he felt; but, boylike, he did the obvious; he laughed.

"All right," he said, "we're not in love, then; that's plain; and we'll let it go at that. Now, you beat it, Jackie; I'm going to dress."

She got up from her knees, looked down at him.

"A boy like you——" she began; reddened; checked herself.

"Well, what about a boy like me?"

"A boy like you wouldn't ever *really* love a girl like me. . . . I mean, for always . . . and want her for—always."

The finality of the inflection demanded no answer. He made none.

There was a pause; she laughed; bent swiftly and kissed him; went lightly out, closing the door behind her.

West bathed and dressed with a sober face, irritably conscious of a revulsion in him from the mere idea of marriage. It was the natural recoil of any boy from a first glimpse of the commonplace in love. Good heavens, no! Not with a girl of that sort. Not with a princess, even. Not with any woman on earth—for a good long while.

As he started to lather his face, stretching his throat before the cloudy little mirror, all the beauty of his cheek and neck were revealed—the almost girlish charm of them—and, in his clear eyes, a strangely youthful austerity—clear, level-eyed, incorruptible.

"Gee!" he murmured, "I'd better be careful!" He meant that she should not mistake his intentions. As for anything else, he looked at his bruised lip and smiled, entertaining no further apprehension concerning

her conduct. In regard to his own he had no doubts at any time.

Homo solus aut deus aut dæmon.

Connor came stamping out of his bedroom and down the stairs; Aylward appeared a moment later; the oven's incense filled the house.

The roses had returned to Anne's cheeks, brilliant ones when she came from the kitchen, followed by Jacqueline bearing breakfast dishes piping hot.

"What's this I hear, Mrs. Ardres, about your leaving us to-morrow?" demanded Aylward.

Anne smiled.

"And how long will you be away, ma'am?" inquired Connor so guilelessly that Anne blushed for him. Which delighted him, and he twinkled at Jacqueline, who was healthily busy with ham and eggs and buckwheat cakes.

"Little golden lass," he said, "when you're in New York what will be the first thing you'll buy in a shop, I wonder?"

She sighed happily, shook her head, poured more syrup upon her buckwheat cakes.

"The first thing ever you buy, my lass," he said, "I pay for. And I don't care what it may be—from a lollypop to an automobile!"

"Mr. *Connor!*"

"I mean it. Your mother hears me. So do these gay gentlemen. My word's my word. No enemy, even, can deny me that much. What I say I've said. And now, God help me, what are you going to buy?"

Jacqueline, enchanted, yet incredulous, looked at her mother.

"Thank you, Mr. Connor, but I don't seem to need anything."

"D'you hear that?" demanded Connor, looking hard at Anne. "She's your own daughter, ma'am, and never a doubt! My God! no wonder I swindled you out of your farm and all!—and how you've lived alive in a world of wolves so long is beyond me. It is that, ma'am!"

Anne's laughter was a little confused under his banter; the tormenting twinkle in his eyes disconcerted her. But the hint of reproach in her glance seemed only to spur him on to veiled remarks, apocryphal innuendo, open audacity understood only by her and him.

He was in amazing spirits; he jested with Jacqueline, joked with Aylward, poked fun at West. He drank three cups of coffee and inquired for more eggs.

The horn of the car arriving from the village brought the three men to their feet.

"He'll be back for you, ma'am, when you're ready," cried Connor. "And I'll say this to you now, ma'am; if the cook you fetch back can't cook, I'll fry her with cornmeal for the two dogs—I will so!"

He went stamping out to the veranda. Aylward followed. West, still reacting, merely nodded to Jacqueline as he passed her, and picked up his gun-case.

"Will you be there at noon?" she asked in a low voice.

"If you like," he said coolly, and continued on out.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was a flight from the extreme North. The compact, hard-bodied birds, speedier and smaller than those native bred, went out of the birches and brake like jack-snipe. If both barrels missed, they kept going, and there was no second opportunity.

There was nothing on soft territory that morning; flight-birds and natives alike were lying up in the scrub-birch among endless wastes of withered fern and brake.

On shadowy, northern edges frost still lay in snowy patches. The air was cool and crystal clear; the sun glittered in a pale blue sky. Everywhere the alders and birches were saturated with that nameless fragrance which the first frost releases, pungent odours of blighted brake and decaying wood; the aroma distilled from withering grasses, ripening leaves.

From club-mosses under foot the greenish haze of pollen dust drifted in clouds. Everywhere those harbingers of winter, the lovely little chain-moths, were fluttering feebly in the underbrush. Owl-white catocalæ flashed into flight amid the birches; geometrids, their marvellously pencilled wings spread flat on tree-trunks, flopped away erratically when disturbed. And, surest of all wintry omens, slate-grey juncos in tiny flocks rose out of the open and flitted ahead; only to settle again in the bronzing sweet-fern.

Here was the perfect day for woodcock. Everywhere leaves were winnowing down through patches of wood-

land. And everywhere through the falling glory of the birches woodcock were whirring up, often not waiting for the cautious dogs, whose nervous approach was now becoming more cat-like than ever.

Inside one square-cut clump of birches, both dogs, low crouching, stood motionless save for the slavering quiver of their jaws.

Connor backed them, just inside; Aylward went forward, edging on the left; West, a little ahead on the right, waited with gun poised.

There came the soft crash of Connor's step, a silky whir as the first bird went out like a rocket, the dry report of Aylward's gun.

Up darted two more woodcock; Connor's gun cracked twice. The light, double thud of dead birds striking dead leaves echoed the shots.

Then, with a roar, a great cock-grouse burst through, low on the right; West banging away with both barrels. The next moment, distant against the turquoise sky, a big grouse soared up on bowed wings and slanted down triumphantly, bound for the far horizon.

"Rottener and rottener," remarked the boy, reloading.

Almost from under his advancing feet a jack-snipe flashed up and went twisting away in corkscrew flight, darting skyward finally. Out of the crystal heights of ether its flat, petulant squak-squak! came plainly to their ears.

"Why the devil didn't you dust him?" inquired Connor.

Aylward laughed as he took the retrieved cock from the dogs. But West didn't mind their sarcasms; his

painter's brain was becoming surcharged with the sombre riot of colour everywhere; the ever-changing grace of the dogs; the swift, perpetual series of pictures which every advancing step surprised.

The constant succession of these charming pictures, with ever-changing grouping and lovely revelations of colour, preoccupied him, began to obsess him.

Also, it was nearly noon.

He said to Connor that he'd had enough and was going over toward Green Crossing to lunch and make a sketch or two.

Connor gaily reviled him, but the boy tossed his gun to his shoulder, turned toward the left, and went away at a swinging stride through sunshine and dripping foliage.

Save for the murmur of falling leaves and the querulous mewing of a high-turning hawk, it was very still in the October sun.

Now and again he stopped, occupied by the beauty of the world.

Once, coming out of an artist-trance, he became aware of a man standing still in the golden dusk, staring at him.

It startled him, this silent presence in the thicket. He moved forward toward the man, and, coming near, bade him good morning.

Then West noticed a gaunt red dog, very tall, standing in a clump of fern and staring at him. He saw, too, that the man carried a gun.

He was tall and bony, a sort of clay-colour all over, skin, hair, clothing—even his pale eyes were a livid hue.

The man's features were regular, almost dignified

in their immobility, but there was something stealthy—vaguely cruel—in the eyes which subtly repelled the boy.

The man said: "You been shootin' over east?"

"Yes. But I have to tell you that it won't do for you to shoot here."

"Hey?"

"This is private property."

"Waal, don't worry, son. I got a right here."

"What is your name? Mine is West Halton."

"Yeh? Waal, I'm Ross Chase. An' how d'yeh like that?"

"Who gave you shooting rights on this land?"

"Waal, if you wanta know, son, ask M's Ardres," said Chase, staring at him steadily.

"This land doesn't belong to Mrs. Ardres," said West.

"Hey?"

"This property has been bought by P. J. Connor. He and his friend, Mr. Aylward, are shooting over yonder, now. If you want to know more about it, go and talk to Mr. Connor." As West spoke, the gathering evil in Chase's visage became alarming.

"Say," he said harshly, "you aimin' to drive *me* off'n this land?"

"I've told you," said West, "that you're trespassing. And in case you don't know what kind of man P. J. Connor is, take good advice and clear out."

For just a second, West thought that Chase meant to kill him—saw the jerk of the gun, the white glare in the eyes—but the spasm of impulse passed, and the long, heavy fowling-piece fell back across the hollow of the man's left arm.

The shock left West speechless; then rage possessed him. He waited to steady his voice. Also he freed his gun. He said:

"You seem to be rather a murderous sort of person, Mr. Chase. I remember, now, I've heard unpleasant things about you. People seem to be afraid of you in this region. Yes, I know who you are, now."

He walked up to Chase and looked him smilingly in the eyes:

"Mr. Connor doesn't want any trouble with you, or anybody. And the best way to avoid trouble is to keep away from this property. And don't ever throw any of your dirty looks at Mr. Connor, and don't start jerking your gun around. He thinks quicker than I do, and acts quicker still."

Chase, deathly pale, swallowed once or twice. After a moment, slowly, he spat; wiped his lips with the back of a bony hand, leered at West, sent another stream of tobacco juice over the dead leaves, wheeled leisurely, and leisurely walked away into the thicket, followed in sullen silence by his lank red dog.

When the last distant sound of his departing progress had died away, West shouldered his gun, turned, and strode westward.

He was still nervously stirred by the encounter, still preoccupied by that clay-coloured visage—the most oddly repellent face he ever had gazed at. How two pale, human eyes could express such latent wickedness, such depraved cruelty, amazed him. In character rôles on the dramatic stage, in exaggerated and romantic fiction, in the extravagance of caricature, never had he felt so convinced of innate human wickedness as in the

immobile regularity of this tall man's features, where those pale eyes looked out upon the world.

Finally the very grotesquerie of it all annoyed and wearied the boy, and he forced himself to think of something else.

When he came out into a wide, grassy lane running between barriers of alders, not very far ahead he saw open sunshine and a wider grassy clearing. And when, at length, he strode into Green Crossing, there was Jacqueline on the grass near the little spring brook, with her covered basket beside her, her sketch-book on her knees, seriously absorbed in water-colours.

She waved her brush at West as he came into view, sucked it reflectively, studied her wet pad, then, placing both on the grass, jumped up to greet him.

First she spat the water-colour from her lips, then, winding her thin golden arms around his neck, kissed him impetuously.

They seated themselves; he laid aside his gun and picked up her sketching-block, while she opened the lunch-basket.

"Those birch-trees and alders!" she exclaimed. "I don't know how to draw them at all. That's a terrible sketch, West."

"The colour isn't bad."

"Oh, it's all muddled up like an omelette. I get too impatient; I don't let it dry. You told me how to let my washes dry. But I'm always in a hurry to go on——"

She handed him a fried-egg sandwich and helped herself to another. He unscrewed the thermos jug, poured out coffee for two, piping hot.

He spoke casually of having met Ross Chase in the alders.

"He has no business in there," said Jacqueline.

"No; I told him so; but it seemed to annoy him."

"He's a terrible man," said Jacqueline. "He does terrible things."

"What kind of things?"

"I don't know. You hear people talk. Welch Verril put him off his land once; and one morning Welch went after his cattle in the birches, and three heifers lay there dead and a cow had her ears and tail cut off."

The revolting cruelty of it turned West hot in the face.

"Did Chase do that?"

"Nobody could prove it. But who else would do it? And he *is* cruel; he makes dumb creatures suffer just because he likes to see them. Dent Catlin told it on him——"

"Who is Catlin?"

"He hunts with Ross Chase; he's a humpback; but it doesn't stop him from hunting and doing what he's a mind to. He's after the girls, too, all the time——"

"Who?"

"Dent Catlin. And Ross, too. They're terrible. But girls won't notice them—except some of those out in the back country, they say. I don't know whether I ought to tell you—but one of those Polack girls out back, somewhere, had a baby. And the Polack man went looking for Ross Chase and Dent—he didn't know which. And they found him out on the east marsh in the tamaracks, dead—kicked to death, they say."

"Well," demanded the boy, astonished, "wasn't anything done about it?"

"There was some talk."

"Weren't they arrested?"

"No."

"Isn't there any law in this region?" asked the boy.

"I don't know. Anyway, they didn't do anything to Ross. People are afraid of him. *I* am. Last summer he and Dent began to hang around me and Tanya Larisch. Sometimes when we'd gone up Drifting River fishing they'd come up in a boat and try to talk to us and sit around—you know!—but it scared me, and I made Tanya come home. I don't like that man—Ross Chase, I mean."

"He seems to be an unpleasant character," remarked West, reaching for a chunk of raisin cake.

The lunch-basket was nearly empty; Jacqueline took the last piece of cake. They shared what remained of the coffee, then lay back on the grass in the sun, replete, content, watching a single little cloud, white as snow, in the blue vault above.

He said lazily: "The birches are full of flight-birds."

"Did you get any?"

"Two and a half brace. I missed a grouse with both barrels."

She laughed. Presently, stretched beside him, she searched for his hand, found it, covered it with her own.

For a while they lay there in silence. Very high in the sky a vast flock of blackbirds passed over, headed south.

"Winter," he murmured.

She yawned, pink-mouthed: "I wonder where we'll be?"

"On earth still, I hope."

"Oh, yes, I hope so. I'm not expecting to die."

They laughed, so confident is youth, so alien, so impossible, is death.

"Just to think," she said, "that to-morrow mother and I will be in Albany! And two days after that we'll be in New York."

He said: "It's so funny, your going off that way so suddenly. It sounds to me like some of P. J.'s schemes."

"Does he do schemes?"

"Yes, if he likes you, he does all sorts of nice things to amuse you. I was pegging away at my work in town and P. J. dined at our house one evening and heard dad say that I needed a rest. And the next day he called me up at my studio and asked me to go on this shooting trip. That's the sort of thing he does."

"Oh!"

"And P. J. likes you, Jack; and perhaps he has arranged this trip with your mother."

"I guess so. Mother told me we were to use one of his automobiles as long as we're in New York."

"You see!" exclaimed the boy. "That's just like P. J. Do you know where you're going to stay in New York?"

"Mother says at a hotel called the Royal Standard."

"That's the biggest, most magnificent, and newest hotel in town," he said, surprised. "It's just one vast, gilded palace."

She squeezed his hand excitedly; lay picturing to herself the approaching splendours. "Like the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold,'" she murmured. "I'm going to see such things now. I hope mother will get me a gold dress——"

His laughter silenced her, she jerked his hand and pinched it to stop him.

"I was joking; I'm not so ignorant. If you laugh I'll bite——" She rolled over like a flash and set her white teeth to his cheek.

"Ouch!" he protested.

She hesitated, nipped the skin, then kissed it, and threw one arm across him.

After a silence: "Perhaps your father and mother would not be much pleased to know you had a girl like me for a sweetheart."

The idea of any such propinquity had never occurred to him. It seemed grotesque to couple the thought of his parents with this girl beside him.

"Will you tell me what your mother is like?" she asked innocently.

But he found no phrase—no medium of expression by which an understanding of such a woman as his mother could be conveyed to this child of remote places. Jacqueline couldn't comprehend.

"Will you tell me, West?"

"Well, my mother is tall, rather fair, with grey hair and—well, handsome. My father is taller. He has darker eyes, white hair, and a white moustache. And he laughs at everybody—he's very jolly. He knew Mr. Connor when P. J. was very poor. P. J. and my father are devoted friends; but they're not a bit alike . . . not at all."

"I don't suppose," said Jacqueline, "that your father and mother ever were poor."

"I—believe not."

"They never had to work, then."

"Well—my mother never did," he said, smiling at the thought. "My father was interested in banking. That is one kind of work. But he has retired now."

Instinct left Jacqueline reticent. She made no further inquiries; and even her imagination could not evoke what manner of folk the parents of her lover *pro tempore* might be—only that they were beyond her ken, inaccessible to her mind's uttermost efforts—remote beings more vague even than the mighty phantoms who bore vast banners upon the "Field of the Cloth of Gold."

And still, strangely, the child in her heart entertained no awe of the boy's parents—no consciousness of her own inferiority—no misgiving regarding herself in her relations with this blond lad lying beside her.

When, that morning, she had said that such a boy as he would not seriously consider such a girl as she, no thought of social inequality troubled her. It was what she considered the mental abyss between them—her comparative ignorance and lack of education—and his venerable twenty-three or -four years, and his accumulated wisdom and incalculable experience, that had humbled her and made plain to her the utter hopelessness even of any such idea. Besides, she was not in love with him more than she had been with other idealized boys. It was but play—temporary pleasure with a brand-new playmate, when she stopped to consider—but to this play-hour, as heretofore, she gave

herself with all the impulse, candour, confidence, and ardour that she always did. For hers was an inborn necessity for love—the offer of it, the taking, the self-surrender. And this boy satisfied the imperishable need.

Really, nothing of love's permanency, nor any lesser calculation, nor, indeed, any virginal desire for what, locally, was known as "settlin'-down-'n'marryin'," ever, so far, had interested the girl.

She simply had never considered it as applied to herself—had never thought of it as a possible and perpetual solution of her need of love. So far there had been plenty of new boys to choose from, when the lad she was "going with" proved tiresome or corrupt.

Thinking idly of this as she lay there—she had been considering her separation from this boy—and, as in her maiden mind she reviewed the eligibles in the region—imperceptibly there crept over her the first vague uneasiness concerning these other potential beaux.

Now, slightly troubled, she reviewed the future aspirants again in her mind, and, for the first time, compared them, one by one, to the boy beside her.

Here, all at once, was a problem that never before had troubled her—a masculine standard already set, already attained by her, and to which she had become accustomed. And the utter impossibility of matching West's qualities with any local specimen of youth began to dismay her.

A faint sense of irritation possessed her. Here was a situation unforeseen. She began to realize that she

never would feel the need of affection for, or from, any of these youths of whom she had been smilingly thinking. . . . No!

To visualize them—any of them!—was already chilling her. It annoyed her even to think of them while West was lying there beside her.

After a while her right arm, lying across him, curled round his neck. He woke up, turned partly towards her, his blue eyes still cloudy with slumber.

"I'll tell you something," she said; "I'm not going to kiss any boy while we're separated. I'm not going to love anybody else. If I can't have you for a sweetheart I'll do without."

"What's the idea?" he said, laughing and rubbing his eyes.

"Just that. I've been thinking; and now I know I like you even when you're away."

She regarded him, frowned, said with controlled vehemence:

"That's all I seem to want—to love *you!* I wish I never had kissed any other boy. I don't see how I could have, now."

He was laughing but flattered.

"You'll change your mind," he said. "You like to be kissed and petted."

"Yes, I *did.* I'll have mother when you are away."

"But that's different."

"No—not so different. I couldn't love anybody else, now, except mother. I don't want anybody except her and you." She drew him to her with sudden passion: "West, I *can't* love anybody else! I've just found it out."

Under all the glow of flattered vanity he felt a little uneasy.

She was very pretty in her flushed ardour, and her seriousness added a new and engaging charm—something hitherto lacking, even in her full tenderness of possession.

There was a depth in her dark eyes, now, into which he had not gazed before; something unfamiliar, almost mature, almost tragic—a new tenseness of her features, an altered *something* which vaguely dignified the face lying so close to his against his shoulder.

"You know," he said with boyish directness, not meant to be brutal, "it wouldn't do for us to take each other too seriously."

"How, West?"

"I mean—we're playing at love. You're so sweet, Jack." He kissed her; laughed, then lay silent, watching the new expression in her eyes.

Probably she did not know it was there—was not conscious what stealthy and subtle Thing had invaded her—that age-old crook with his shabby kit of tricks—keys to unlock every emotion, weapons to wound, salve to heal, live coals from hell, and a tiny flask—a drop or two of celestial anodyne—enough to blind and deafen once or twice before the end—Love!—breaking in with his sorry cracksman's kit, and slyly peeping out of her dreaming eyes at the boy who held her in his arms.

She freed herself and sat up, presently, unconscious yet of any murder done to her peace of mind.

He, equally unconscious, sat up, too, and pulled the sketch-book from his shooting-coat pocket.

"You don't mind keeping quite still for a few minutes, do you, Jackie?"

"No," she said absently.

After a moment or two he started his sketch.

She sat quite motionless, her changed eyes wistfully remote.

There was no sound in the stillness save the interminable rustle of dropping leaves.

CHAPTER XVII

It had been the finest day's woodcock shooting that Connor ever had known.

Never had he felt so well, never happier, than he was feeling that evening in the sitting-room. Anne sat just across the table, sewing in the lamplight; Aylward dozed in a rocker over an obsolete newspaper; Jacqueline and West foregathered on the sofa, exchanging valueless opinions and confidences with all the omniscience and solemnity of the young.

Anne's and Jacqueline's scanty luggage was ready packed; Mrs. Wessels, the grass-widow, had appeared, washed dishes, and gone to bed; Tanya Larisch would come in the morning to help out; and Mr. Connor's car would be on hand early to carry Anne and Jacqueline to the train.

Connor said to Anne, in a guarded voice: "If you stay too long away I'll not be happy."

She smiled over her needle.

"I'm like a lad again," he murmured, "to-morrow is a year away. Have you ever thought of Europe, Anne?"

She gave him a startled look.

"We'll do that, too," he nodded. "It's for you to say. Everything is for you to say."

She drew in a deep, uneven breath.

"Why not next month? You and I and our golden lass? My Anne——" He touched her hand. But

Anne remained inarticulate. And he went on: "Why not, then? They'll be building the house here all winter, and half of next summer. I've heard enough noise to last me, my dear. I'll put a good stout man in charge here when we leave. Anne, it's a grand idea. You and I and our golden lass, taking our leisure and our pleasure in pretty, gentle places till our own home nest is ready for us——"

"Hush," motioned Anne, flushing brightly as Aylward's first snore woke him up in his rocker.

"I can't keep awake," he apologized; "are you turning in, P. J.?"

"I'll sit up a bit, Roger; but turn in, you; and a hearty sleep to the best wing-shot in Saguenay County!"

"That's *you,*" returned Aylward, with a sleepy smile. He made his adieux, lighted his candle, and rambled off upstairs, yawning.

Connor glanced over his shoulder toward the sofa, but the young people were deeply absorbed in a sketch which West was making. Jacqueline's chin rested on the boy's shoulder.

"Anne," said Connor under his breath, "the remaining hours in my life are not so many that I take patiently a whole month's separation. I give you a week in New York before I follow you. It's the best I can do."

She looked round at him, the pretty colour still in her cheeks; then bent again over her needle.

"Are you thinking I'm an old fool?" he asked grimly.

"I'm thinking you seem very young, P. J.," she murmured.

"You have all that's young in me, Anne—and that's the love I bear you. And that's as young as a lad's first love. It is so."

She blushed.

"I'll shoot here another week," he added. "Is that enough time wasted away from you?"

"Is it enough for *you?*"

"It's a week too much. And to think I hear myself say *that!*—and the best cock-shooting ever I saw in all my life! Anne?"

"Yes, P. J."

"I want you to spend money, and I know you'll not do it unless I'm there to bully you! If I'm not down in a week you'll have no more bought than a new apron! Would you anger me, Anne?"

Anne's low laughter answered him.

"Mind," he said, "if you've not bought out Fifth Avenue in one week's time, I'll buy it for you when I come. I never worked for money. It came. I worked to build up. I worked for power. And money came. I never loved it. I never had a kind thought for it till now. It's your servant—that's all money means to me. Something to pleasure *you!*"

Anne's face had become grave, almost beautiful.

After a few minutes' sewing she folded her work, rose, gave him her hand in good night, looked at the young people who were too absorbed to notice her, turned away slowly towards the stairs. Connor followed.

On the landing above she turned and looked down. He ascended the stairs like a boy, took her in his arms and kissed her. After a very long moment they turned away toward their bedrooms. There were tears in

Anne's eyes as she opened her door and went in without looking back at him. She never before had been in love.

Listening, she heard his door close. Then slowly she sank down on her knees beside her bed and hid her face in her arms. From outside, in the thickening darkness, came a monotonous murmur of rain.

CHAPTER XVIII

In the sitting-room Jacqueline's rounded chin still rested on the boy's shoulder, as her eyes intently followed his pencil.

"It's raining," remarked West, glancing up over his shoulder at the smeared window. Their lips encountered, lingered in a kiss. "All the leaves will be off to-morrow," he added, resuming his sketch.

"How long are you going to stay here?" demanded Jacqueline.

"I supposed we all were leaving in a day or two," he replied, "but P. J. says we're to remain another week for the flight."

"You told me *you* were going."

"I've decided to stay."

Jacqueline considered his profile with darkening gaze.

"Do you want to stay, West?"

"Yes, I do."

"I'd rather you didn't remain after I'm gone," she remarked gloomily.

"Why?"

"I have very well founded reasons."

"*Why?*" he insisted curiously.

"You *said* you were going, didn't you? So I supposed you'd keep your word. Or I'd have made different arrangements."

"But what difference does it make to *you?*" he demanded.

After a silence he looked around at her again and the dusky hostility in her eyes surprised him.

"It's that Tanya," she said. "I wouldn't have asked her to help if I had known *you* were to stay."

"What on earth——"

"I don't want to leave you and Tanya together in this house," she said doggedly.

That delighted him—or might have, had she not looked so dangerous.

"Are you going to have petting parties with her?" she demanded. "You'd better look out for that kind of girl."

Jacqueline's lowering brow disturbed yet flattered him.

"Is she so dangerous?" he asked smilingly.

Jacqueline said: "When I come back I'll find out. I told her to let you alone. She's my friend; but I'm not sure about her."

He laughed: "Don't you suppose I can take care of myself—and of Tanya, too? Anyway——"

"Anyway—what?"

"Aren't you perfectly free to start something with the next fellow, Jackie? Well, I am, too."

"I'm not going to start anything with anybody."

"Yes, but you're free to if——"

"Am I? Well, I won't do it! And if you do I won't like it. I'll tell you that right now, West; I won't stand it!"

"You mean I'm not free to——"

"I won't stand it, I tell you!" she interrupted fiercely.

"What would you do about it, Jackie?"

She gave him a sombre glance:

"Do? I don't know. I'd want to kill Tanya; I know that much."

"Why not go for *me?*"

"No. . . . No! But Tanya had better look out. Oh, West—*don't,* please!" She caught his hand, held it desperately. Her mouth had begun to quiver, and it disconcerted him to see her eyes suddenly brilliant with tears.

"For heaven's sake, Jack," he said, "I didn't think you took it that way!"

"I didn't think so either. But I do. I couldn't stand it."

"We're not in *love,* you know——"

"*I* am! I *am!* Oh, I am in love! I am, I am——"

"That's nonsense——"

"It isn't! I don't know how I got this way with you," she added desolately; and looked about her through her tears—looked at familiar objects without seeing—looked blindly at the lamp, the book-case, the shadows on the wall-paper—all only a dancing glimmer through her tears.

He said, much embarrassed: "You know as well as I do we're not likely to see each other again after this. We can't take this too seriously."

She nodded, admitting this, the tears still flowing. Presently she wiped them away with her fingers.

"You wouldn't ever want to marry me, would you?" she managed to say.

"I don't want to marry anybody," he replied, chilled.

"Well, then, I don't care—if there's no other girl. I won't ever marry, either. We can just be in love always, can't we, West?"

"But we won't see each other. Besides, *you've* always got to have some fellow to pet you," he added with a touch of scorn, "haven't you, Jack?"

"I don't seem to want any, now. Perhaps I will. I don't know—I don't know," she said drearily.

"You'll flirt after I'm gone. You know you will. Won't you?"

"Oh, West, I want *you!*" She began to cry again, sitting bolt upright beside him, with the tearful effrontery of a child, and staring at him out of streaming eyes:

"Oh, this hurts—here!" She spread her fingers over one immature breast. "I've never been in love with a boy like this! I didn't know it hurt—I didn't —I didn't——"

"You've got to stop this crying," he said; "there's nothing to cry about, anyway——"

"But it hurts—it hurts——"

"*What* hurts?"

"Because I'm going away and you don't love me——"

"I *do!*"

"Oh, West, please, *please* don't forget me! Please don't, West—please don't forget!"

"I'm not going to," he said in a subdued and altered voice, conscious of emotions stirring responsive to hers. He put one arm around her—was swiftly imprisoned in her impulsive embrace—drawn down close beside her, his head against hers.

With a sob she passed one thin arm under his head

and around it, drawing his lips to hers. Through the monotone of the rain the cheap clock in the kitchen ticked loudly. Presently it struck, twice. After a long time:

"We'd better go up," he breathed; "it's nearly two o'clock. Get up, Jack!"

"I want to sleep this way. I'm tired," she murmured.

"We can't sleep here. Or together, anyway. You'd better get up."

"I won't."

After a short silence: "You're leaving early in the morning. You'll be dead," he said.

"I'll die if you make me go to bed."

"Jackie, you've *got* to get up——"

"Please!"

"And I tell you this isn't any good—for either of us——"

"Why?"

"Well, if you haven't sense enough to know, I'll not try to explain. But you'd better not behave this way with any other fellow—that's all I'll say."

Jacqueline lay silent for so long that at last he lifted himself on one arm to look down at her. The girl gazed back at him out of depthless eyes—a strange questioning gaze—otherwise her face was totally expressionless.

He freed himself, got up, shook himself, extended both hands and drew her to her feet. Then he lighted both candles.

As he handed hers to her he noticed how pale she had become. Then he turned down the lamp-wick and blew out the flickering flame.

They went upstairs together; she was turning away

in silence when he drew her back. Her lips were chilly, unresponsive; her hand rested listlessly in his.

"Did I say anything to offend you, Jacqueline?" he asked.

"No."

"Or—hurt you?"

She shook her head.

"Then——"

"I'm tired. I'm very tired, now."

"Do you still love me a little?"

She nodded, not looking up. After a while she lifted tragic eyes:

"I didn't know," she said; "I didn't understand. You don't think I'm a bad girl, do you?"

He was the more uncomfortable of the two. He said:

"You're all right, of course. We'd better quit petting, anyway."

"Yes. . . . I didn't mean to. . . . I never thought that just loving you—just loving you——"

Suddenly the humiliation of it—her ignorance—overwhelmed her; she turned sharply away and entered her room with candle-flame streaming in the draught—like a tiny blazing soul in flight.

The boy, too, was profoundly disturbed. As he turned away to his room he looked white and tired and grim—grimmer for the throat and cheek's pure contours—whiter for the clear austere blue eyes still so boyishly unmarred.

He entered his bedroom, set the candle on the washstand, scowled at it.

"I'm a blithering fool," he said, "if ever I kiss that girl again."

He sat down on the bed's edge and began to undress. Before he had finished his face had softened a little.

"Poor kid!" he thought, blowing out his candle and rolling over into bed.

He was still sound asleep when Anne and Jacqueline finished their breakfast with Connor, climbed into Connor's car and sped away southward in the gilded mist of an early October morning. Connor waved his square, powerful hand in good-bye; Tanya, at the kitchen door, fluttered her scarlet handkerchief; and Tessie Wessels called out good-bye from the hen house, as the big grey car passed.

Then Tanya bound her black hair with the scarlet kerchief and went back to her chores; Tessie fetched in more new-laid eggs; Connor sat down on the veranda to smoke his pipe, digest breakfast, look at the leafless alders, and think of Anne of the ruddy hair.

That day the three men shot flight-birds to their heart's content; and came wearily back to the house through the nipping chill of twilight, dogs and masters dead beat.

The sky had cleared ominously; a killing frost threatened. And the frost came before dawn, a black and vicious frost, covering the whole land with a thin skin of iron.

All that day, too, the three men were abroad amid a bewildering flight of northern woodcock. The sky grew silvery, duller, greyer, thicker toward noon. Flurries of snow closed the day; but at midnight it was raining again, heavily.

For three days, and all day and all night, it poured rain. On the third day, Aylward slopped through the alders as far as Windy Pond and managed to knock over three black duck. Connor played chess with West and wrote a letter to Anne every afternoon.

"Why don't you write to our golden lass?" suggested Connor. "She's been good and kind company to you; she has that."

West seemed surprised at the suggestion.

They were alone in the sitting-room, the kitchen door closed, and Aylward had vaselined his gun and had gone out again into the rain.

The little flat travelling chess-board which Connor always carried with him lay open on the yellow oak table.

Connor pulled a bishop out of a hole and pegged him down close to West's defensive diagonal of pawns.

"Do you mean that, P. J.?" inquired the boy.

"I do," replied Connor.

"I can take him——"

Suddenly the peril of the situation dawned on the boy. After a long and scowling study: "It's mate, whatever I do, isn't it?" he asked.

Connor nodded.

West studied the hopeless matter for a while, then he looked up and smiled.

"I resign," he said amiably.

Connor relighted his pipe.

"West," he said, "I've something on my mind."

"What is it, P. J.?"

For a while Connor smoked in silence, his keen eyes considering the chess-board.

"Well," he said, "it's this, then. Thirty years have your father and I been friends. We're not alike. I'm a plain man. But we're friends. I was a poor lad and born so. You father was born to better things. But we're friends. He gave me my first chance. I was a clerk in a hotel; I was so. But I'd a nose for oil. I went to your father without a cent in me pants. He listened; he staked me; he stood by me in storm and stress. He's a wise man who knows a real man when he sees one."

He considered the chess-men, smoked in silence for a while.

"West," he said, "neither fashion nor Fifth Avenue has ever come between your father and me. Our walks in life lie in different directions. But often we come across the grass to shake hands. We do so. I saw your mother a bride. I saw you the day you were born. I have eaten at your father's table and I have slept under his roof. And so, all things considering, I've this to say to your father's son: that you're clean bred to the bone. You've a heart to feel and a mind to understand. And it's this I'd say to you, lad: I marry a wife in a month, and Anne Ardres is her name."

West gazed at him in astonishment.

Connor said: "Had she never been born, never would I have taken woman to wife on earth. And you may ram that into your pipe and smoke it, lad.

"But it's more than that I've got to say. It's this: the little golden lass is my daughter. If she'd been born of my own blood she'd be no more to me, I think. She's a child, still, in her ways; and again she's more than a child. I love her. And with God's help and

her mother's, I'll make of her what's in her to make. I will *that*—so help me, God."

After a silence: "I want you to stand her friend," said Connor.

"Yes," said the boy, "of course."

Connor said: "I'm a plain man. Excepting your father, my friends are plain men. Some among them have children of your age and Jacqueline's. But those young people will not be of your breeding. I want my daughter to have such a friend as you—as I had such a friend as your father. I want my daughter to *know* what the best education and manners really are—and what are the finer aspirations of the mind; and what is the true worth of men and the true measure of them! Lest she hear only of money-getting and influence and power—and the chase for pleasure, and all the damned foolery of the day. For the children of a plain man who has risen to wealth seldom have any thought save of pleasure and spending. And if they are ambitious it is to get money as their father did—or power—that's the goal!—power! To do what? Make the other wolf sweat his hide? Jam a bill through a cowardly bunch of crooks in the State Legislature? Lobby a trade through Congress? Or is it power to stone a woman to death with diamonds? Or tell some foreign nation where it gets off?"

He sat rubbing his pipe with his square fingers, thinking.

"I want my little daughter to have a friend who cares for none of these things," he said slowly. "I want her to have a friend whose ambitions are to attain the pleasure, treasure and power of the mind. I know what I am; what I have done. And I know what I

might have been; what I might have done; and what I have missed."

He leaned over, picked out the chess-men, folded the board, pocketed the game. Then he looked at West.

"Can Jacqueline count on your friendship, as I counted on your father's?"

"Yes, always, P. J.," said the boy.

Connor nodded: "I'll take her to Europe with us. I'll bring her back as brand new as I can. We'll have our friends, Anne and I. Plain people. . . . And their children will be Jackie's friends. . . . Good children. . . . But I want one man like *you*. I want you to help my little daughter to keep her head level, her mind clear, and her heart free of the false gods we money-getters and power-chasers worship. West, I want my daughter to *understand* when she listens to music or looks at a picture, or reads great words written by the only really Great—the makers of those true and beautiful and gentle things which cleanse the mind, cause no grief, do wrong to none, and please God."

CHAPTER XIX

SILVERY, translucent clouds drenching the world with rain. No wind. An interminable perpendicular downpour. Scarcely a leaf on alder, birch, and willow. Woods carpeted with vast wet mats of autumn leaves.

Everywhere against the sky stark branches interlaced dripping twigs. No foliage remained except bronzed clusters on beach and oak. The air was heavy with musty odours of over-ripeness; the acrid scent of decay; penetrating effluvia of witch-hazel in bloom where thickets bordered woods glimmering with the abnormal yellow flowers.

Abnormal—that is the word. Decay is abnormal. So is Death.

In the beginning of Life on Earth there was no Death. Life was born in perpetuity. Death came to the planet ages later.

Roger Aylward, and finally Connor, unable to endure inaction indoors, began to haunt the reedy reaches of Windy Pond, where black duck and mallard and an occasional driving squall of buffle-head and teal gave them a few shots and much excitement.

West always had the resources of brush and pencil; and he declined to oil his gun and slop around in hip-boots and slicker.

Still life never had interested him much, but occasionally he plugged away at it as a matter of discipline and practice. Remembered examples of the Old

Masters' unequalled industry prodded him to effort sometimes—recollections of numberless galleries and museums where hung acres of details in red chalk, india ink, crayon—and the microscopic patience of the Dutch with their painted flowers, and the Italians' exploring pencil amid folds of drapery and the anatomy of some long dead model's fingers or feet.

It rained and rained; and West made conscientious pencil drawings of uninteresting indoor details, or sat on the kitchen porch and perpetrated sloppy aquarelles of ghostly naked trees looming in pearl-tinted obscurity.

Tanya, gracefully active in the kitchen, came occasionally to the door to watch him—laugh at him perhaps—resting against the door-frame, one hand bracketed on her hip.

Or, sometimes, in the sitting-room, where West had set up his pad, she drifted casually across his line of sight with feather duster or broom—always obvious—not to be unnoticed—and, to that degree, vaguely an interference with devotional concentration on the inanimate.

Tessie Wessels, too recently grass-widowed to trouble man for a while, shuffled about her chores and cooking in a sort of slovenly gloom. But Tanya's too supple body and restless feet were always in motion—or in suspended motion—never settling permanently to the domestic matters for which she had been hired—never resting even when tasks were done.

Sometimes she would crank up the phonograph and listen to the rusty records, hands on her hips, swaying to the rhythm, humming the air, perhaps; or, if it were a dancing measure, sometimes, all alone, she would swing one foot rather high, or pirouette; or gravely,

by herself, perform the monotonous steps of some vapid two-step.

Toward the middle of the week the dampness gave Tessie Wessels a toothache, and she went about with her face tied up and smelling of some penetrating remedy.

Connor and Aylward had luncheon put up and went away with their slickers, boots, and greased guns.

West, rather sick of still life and discipline, loitered before the bookcase in the sitting-room, taking out volumes, looking through musty pages, finding nothing of much interest.

Mrs. Wessels finished her chores and retired to lie down, somewhere, and cherish a hot brick wrapped in flannel.

Tanya's tasks, also, were finished. For a time she loitered in the pantry, eating at random. After a little while, however, she came to the sitting-room door and leaned against it, watching West sketching a pile of books.

"You promised to draw me," she said, swinging one restless foot to and fro.

He glanced up and she smiled at him.

"You're always busy," he said.

"I'm not now. Take my picture."

"All right."

He continued to sketch the heap of books; Tanya came forward in her loose-jointed, graceful way; stood behind him, watching, her hands resting on the back of his chair.

"All right," he repeated. "Stand over there by the table. Sit on it and let your feet dangle. And you can

let your hair fall and tie that red kerchief around it. You look like a gipsy, anyway."

The girl laughed and loosened her dark, thick hair and bound her brow with the scarlet kerchief.

West stripped off the pencil sketch. On the clean surface of the pad he sketched in with a few light strokes the girl as she sat there on the table looking at him with her faintly disturbing smile. Clever work—without eraser, and scarcely a line to be refined or corrected —one of those happy first-shot things born of unnumbered and forgotten days of plodding—not ever born of accident alone.

Then his colours—clear wash and no body-colour even squeezed out—just clean, limpid, crisply edged wash, flooding the paper from full and sopping brushes —drying out with an edge before the next limpid flood was loosed.

The sitting-room was dry from the sheet-iron stove where wood smouldered. Washes dried quickly; neither the boy nor the girl was in a hurry.

Once or twice Tanya slipped from the table to her feet and came over to observe progress. Her facsimile pleased her—the smile on her lips, the soft cloudy mass of hair, the brilliant note of the kerchief, all thrilled and excited her.

"I'm not as pretty as that," she said. "Am I?"

"I guess you are," he replied, sucking a brush to a point and touching it to the vermilion on his porcelain palette.

She bent lower to watch the work, resting one hand on his shoulder to steady herself. Her face was so close to his that her loosened hair touched his cheek.

He suggested that she resume the pose, and she went

back to the table and vaulted to the top. Whether she meant it or not, there was a delicate effrontery in her every movement—a sort of challenge in her supple self-confidence—subtle provocation in her litheness.

"Rain, rain, rain," she repeated, swinging her feet. "I'm sure I don't know what to do with myself when the work's done. You want a piece of pie?"

"No, I don't."

"A cookie and jam?"

"No."

"What *do* you want?"

"Nothing."

She smiled: "Don't you even want to kiss me?"

They both laughed; but he suddenly thought of Jacqueline and frowned slightly over his work.

His work was going simply, logically, and charmingly. No muddles, no puddles, no mistakes, so far, to be met and neutralized with sponge or blotter or a full brush of clear water. All was incisive, clean, clear and crisp.

"You've got a sweetheart, haven't you?" asked Tanya, artlessly curious.

"Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered."

"*Why?*"

"I don't know," she repeated, laughing; "I was just wondering. You like Jacqueline, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you kiss her?"

"Well, now, if I ever did I wouldn't tell you," he said bluntly.

"Why not? You don't think you're the first man she ever kissed, do you?" Tanya laughed without

restraint, rocking her supple body and swinging her legs.

"Every fellow in Drifting Bridge has kissed Jackie Ardres," she said; "and I bet you have, too, dozens of times."

"How many men have ever kissed *you?*" he asked with malice.

"How do you know anybody ever has?" she retorted.

He looked up into her brilliant eyes. Something disturbing sparkled there—and, on the full lips, slightly parted, there was something almost threatening.

"Do you like a petting party?" she asked, with unnatural innocence.

"Sometimes. Do you?"

"Doesn't it depend?"

"I don't know. Any pretty girl is all right, I guess."

"Is *that* what you think? Well, I don't like *everybody.*"

"What kind do you like?" he asked, dipping his brush into Payne's Grey and tinting a saucer of water.

"Maybe I'd like you."

"Shall we try?" he said, lightly forgetting Jacqueline.

"I'll try anything once."

They laughed and he went on with his painting. But presently she slid off the table and came to observe his work and to rest her cheek and tangled hair close to his. He turned and looked at her after a while, and she slipped her arm around his neck. Their kiss disconcerted him so utterly that he lost confidence in himself—turned a troubled face to his work and strove to compose and concentrate a confused mind on it. But now the

subconscious was already aware of new and subtle menaces—aware that there was in this girl something inborn, exotic—an unfamiliar and perfumed threat—part of her—part of her breath, her skin, her restlessness, her eyes, and of the lithe, loose-jointed grace of her.

The boy got up, walked irresolutely to the window, threw it up as though for air; but rain drove in and he closed it.

Then he turned and looked at Tanya; and his visage had become sharper, almost pinched, yet accented by the pure lines of cheek and throat and the austere beauty of his eyes.

"No more petting," he said mechanically.

She laughed and tossed her veil of hair aside.

"Why not?" she asked.

He made her no answer—which was one, however, that she seemed to understand—for she laughed again and set one knee on a chair and leaned over the back of it, gazing at him.

"I want you to kiss me," she said. "Will you?"

"Oh, I'll do it occasionally," he replied, with a careless glance at his painting.

"Don't you *like* to, West?"

"Yes—rather. A fellow gets fed up, you know——"

But Tanya threw back her head and laughed and laughed.

"Are you going to pose?" he demanded, with sulky directness.

She sauntered over to the table, leaped lightly to the top, and confronted him demurely.

They finished the picture in a silence that had something sullen in it, and something ominous.

Afterward Tanya set the phonograph going and per-

suaded him to dance with her. For a while they got on all right, but there was something about her restlessness that communicated itself. He felt it, too; was beginning to be possessed by it; felt self-confidence swaying uncertainly with self-control—let himself go for an instant, savagely; and, at the instant almost, flung her blindly aside, and went out to the porch, where rain fell through early twilight.

For a while he stood there, the rain sometimes spattering and spraying his hot face, busied with his ideals, his notions, his standards, folkways, traditions, inculcated creeds, inherited inhibitions.

Inner meditation sharpened his features; the blue clarity of his eyes, self-searching, abated nothing in austerity for all the confusion and pulse and clamour in the void within him.

Tanya came out and rested warmly against him, her waist moulded finally by his encircling arm.

"They're out late," she said.

"They're waiting for the twilight flight of mallard. They'll make decoys out of turf; and they'll prop up dead ducks with Y-shaped twigs and set them afloat in the shallows. You see; they'll bring back a good bag of ducks, Tanya."

"Like Ross Chase does," murmured the girl.

"There's a fellow who needs watching every minute," said West bluntly.

"He's cruel," murmured the girl. "He got mad at his bird-dog once, and he hung it and cut it down, and hung it and cut it down until it died. And he kills chickens in an awful way—and draws partridges *alive*——"

"What!"

"They say so. Dent Catlin says so. If a bird's only wounded he bites its head to kill it. But—there's something about him—he's so terrible and strong. Some girls don't mind him—they say——"

"He's a dirty beast of a man."

"Yes. But they say he can get all the girls he wants. Jackie and I are afraid of him. You're strong, too, aren't you, West?"

"I don't know."

"*I* know." She laughed. "I thought you'd break me in two for a second—in there——"

"I'm sorry."

"I didn't care."

He remained silent, staring into the thickening dusk. After a while he withdrew his arm from her waist.

"They're coming back," he said. "You'd better start supper, Tanya."

Presently Connor and Aylward loomed through the rain, burdened with guns, cartridge sacks, and two great bunches of dead ducks.

"A grand day, lad!" cried Connor, lifting a strung mass of mallard, teal, and black-duck and letting them fall on the veranda.

"Windy Pond's alive with duck," added Aylward. "This certainly is a great place you've bought, P. J. And if you fence it, stock it, and patrol it, you'll have what you've most wanted all your life."

Connor said: "I've wanted something more than that, too; and, please God, I'll have my desire before many days are dead and gone on me."

"What's that?" asked Aylward innocently.

"You'll know that, too, one day next week," said Connor absently. And, to West: "Where's the gipsy-

lass and our supper, now? God be praised for the grand day we've had, and I thank Him for the roof and bread we shall enjoy this night! Here, Roger; hang up your ducks on the pegs above—against things astir to-night. Oh, Lord above, how tired and happy am I this wet and weary night! What the devil are you doing to my gun, West?"

"I'll carry it up for you——"

"Well, then, you will not. When I feel too old for that, my lad, just bury me deep and say he was ripe for scrapping. Come on, Roger, till we strip and rub and get into slippers, and ready for a hot dish of anything God sends us. Is there a letter for me, West?"

"Two."

Connor's wet, red face became transfigured.

"In your room," added the boy. "They're post-marked Albany."

Connor, radiant, laid one soaked glove on Aylward's shoulder. They entered the house together.

West, standing alone in darkness, stared into the falling rain.

CHAPTER XX

In her quaint, Spencerian script of a school-marm, Anne wrote to her prospective, as in duty bound:

"Dear P. J.,—We arrived safely in Albany at ten minutes after eleven last Friday forenoon and found pleasant accommodations at the Hôtel Thendara.

"It is indeed a beautiful hotel and conveniently situated, commanding a view of the main street and of the stately Capitol.

"Complying with your kind instructions, we have been shopping every day. We have purchased some necessary and beautiful things.

"According to the itinerary which you have requested us to follow, we shall leave Albany to-day at one o'clock, afternoon, for New York, and I shall write to you from there upon our arrival.

"Jacqueline and I are well, and not at all fatigued by the excitement. Jacqueline is writing to you.

"In closing I desire to thank you for your very great kindness to us and to assure you of our heartfelt appreciation. I shall endeavour all my life to make myself worthy of the honour you do me and of the unexampled trust you have been pleased to bestow upon

"Ever your grateful and affectionate,

"Anne."

Connor read Anne's first letter to him with strange

emotions. Every word of it became imprinted on his heart. Somehow he seemed to know that, if this quaint, prim, neatly written double page was not in any sense an ardent communication, nevertheless it was a love-letter; and that Anne Ardres had so meant it.

After a while he opened Jacqueline's letter and read it; an excited, exclamatory, breathless rush of gratitude, penned rapidly and well splashed and scratched. In it was a sealed note for West.

The boy read this note by candle-light as he was undressing. Everybody was abed, the house deathly still save for the interminable murmur of the rain. His lips were still hot from a reckless embrace of Tanya—his mind still shocked by it, his pulses still racing as he tore open Jacqueline's letter:

"West, I love you," it ran on breathlessly, "and I never will be petted by anybody else, for oh! what strange pain and anxiety is in my heart, and what strange pleasures fill me at thoughts of you. And I want to tell you that I really am good, whatever you thought of the way I acted with you; only I wasn't thinking, and all I meant was that I love you and wanted you to understand.

"I suppose you never would wish to marry an uneducated country girl, and your father and mother wouldn't like it, anyway. So all I can do is to promise you to be good always, and never to let any other man pet me, and love you all my life. Oh, love me, please, West, because I must have love—just as I need air and food and my mother, and it's just born in me to love everything, like the Farm, and you, and the alders, and the sun and moon and clouds.

"Isn't the goodness of God wonderful? Some days I can't help thinking of it all the time, even when I'm shopping with mother, or sitting in this gorgeous dining-room and eating rare delicacies, or asleep in my brass bedstead, and listening to the strangely exciting noises in the city. Because, everywhere is manifest the goodness of God, and I am so filled with love of all things that my heart sometimes is nearly bursting.

"And, oh, West!—such heavenly music they play while we are at dinner—think of it! And such lovely dresses the ladies wear, though you can almost see their breasts in front and the end of their spines behind. I like it, but mother doesn't.

"We are ready packed for our journey to New York. How heavenly! Please, dear West, love me in your thoughts as I do you, and don't forget me, and please don't pet Tanya, because I couldn't bear it and I don't know what I'd do.

"Please, *please* love me.—Your sweetheart,

"JACQUELINE."

CHAPTER XXI

TWICE it had snowed and melted. Then, about the first of November, set in that golden tide called Indian Summer.

Now, under blue skies and in a flood of winter sunshine, the Ardres Farm swarmed with workmen and sub-contractors, which three chartered village buses carried to and from the farm, morning and evening.

The entire place was in confusion; carpenters stripped off defective siding and nailed new siding on; slaters chipped and fitted and hammered on the roof; bricklayers mended chimneys and erected new ones from the cellar up; heavy teams drew trucks loaded with heating and plumbing apparatus; a cement mixer rattled and creaked all day long, where men mixed and shovelled; ditchers were busy with spade and pick and bar, laying pipes for a surface disposal plant; two great concrete water-towers were under construction; a very young landscape-engineer directed dozens of ploughs and drags and dump-carts; masons already were shaping and laying field-stone into a massive square wall.

Indoors the house had not yet been stripped for plasterers, floor-layers, and mantel setters. That was work reserved for winter, when much of the outside labour must cease.

Connor had gone to New York with Roger Aylward, who could remain no longer. But before they went, Connor asked West to remain and keep an eye on the

place until he could find exactly the general superintendent he wanted.

It was a request which the boy could not ignore, considering the older man's kindness and hospitality. And yet West most desperately wished to leave.

But there was nothing to do except to accept cordially the brief responsibility.

"It's the trespassers I'm thinking of, too," Connor had remarked, "so keep an eye on the coverts, West, and send the men to drive out any law-breakers till I can find the man for the job and let him recruit his own patrols."

Aylward now knew of Mrs. Ardres's engagement to his life-long friend. He had been very decent about it—never a quiver or false slip, or any hint of coldness or doubt.

But alone in his bed-room he faced the matter with dismay—almost with despair—for the invasion of a life's intimacy by any woman had been the last thing he ever had feared.

And *this* woman! Well—it astounded him. And yet he realized that if it had to be any woman in Connor's life it must have been such a woman as this. Never had there been any other possibility; he really understood that. And, very painfully and by degrees. he began to understand, too, that this behaviour of P. J.'s was logical—was utterly characteristic of this man whose tremendous power and unguessed wealth never had been prostituted for social advancement—never for material gain of any baser sort. Power—vast power—and its employment in vast creative and constructive enterprises—this always had been P. J. Connor's ambition; and the lesser, meaner, petty

human intrigues and lickspittle ambitions remained as unnoticed as rubbish under his feet.

So Connor and Aylward had been gone, now, nearly two weeks; the hill-top, where stood the cluster of buildings known as The Ardres Farm, resounded all day long with the racket of construction.

Tessie Wessels cooked and looked after the stock; Tanya Larisch did housework, helped generally, flirted with every man on the place, from contractor to ditcher, and, in the deserted darkness of evening, drifted gracefully across West's horizon in her supple, loose-jointed way.

And the boy had managed to develop a fever—an intermittent one—but enough to disorganize clear thinking. For of all fevers to which youth may become a prey, the most insidious is that which troubles the chastity of the mind.

It is the sorry inexperience of youth that sometimes confuses the lesser inclination with Love, or discovers that it may become independent of it—a sort of Love *sui generis*—a kind that depends upon propinquity, curiosity, and opportunity.

West was no good for Tanya; she no good at all for him. She was a little animal, with a brain the size of a button, and a smooth, tense, and colourful skin full of exotic vitality. And there was nothing in her to govern this except the innate wariness and inborn conservatism of the human female.

Entirely sensual, she had perfect self-control, but seemed possessed to make men lose theirs. Few escape experience with that sort of girl. West was having his. And such are the temporary aberrations in the

brain of youth that, at moments, he fancied himself in love with Tanya—all the while knowing what she was, seeing, hearing, in bodily contact with what she was.

Clear of her he felt repulsion, yet sooner or later went restlessly in search of her. Alone at night he weathered the usual tempests of self-contempt, boyish remorse; resolved to keep away from her—keep out of range of her eyes and voice—keep clear of the careless swing of her skirts, the touch of her—clear of her flushed face and her unbound hair—her kiss——

Posing for him, even, she remained dangerous; and his drawing was an effort; all steady application impossible.

There were men enough, now, at Ardres Farm, to keep Tanya's tawny eyes busy; and she did not neglect them, though mainly bent on the undoing of West.

Her supple, silk skin, sensitive to every emotion, functioned as a sort of lesser brain—emotions serving her as thoughts. Allied with instinct, and perhaps with that sixth feminine sense which is a combination of premonition, clairvoyance, and a blind divination of the nearness of things, Tanya got on very well without a brain—as do the vast majority of her sex.

It is not by instinct a predatory sex, even when parasitical. In the last analysis of its simplest and primary emotions it is a sex with a purely mechanical urge to perpetuate its species under sufficient guarantees. That is all.

And in all its most devious, dazzling and occult complexities it remains an essentially simple sex—as transparent as protoplasm. Because all its hydra-headed eccentricities, all its kaleidoscopic metamorphoses are

unconsciously born of that single imperative functional necessity—the necessity of the domestic hen—fertilization, production, and incubation of the egg.

They are the exceptions of that sex who do not find the procedure arduous rather than gay. For in the normal woman the sexual instinct is neither easily aroused nor of long duration; and very soon becomes merely a necessary part of a routine recommended by civilization and divinely patronized.

And even in the abnormal minority, which always is considerable, deep, deep underlying all frivolity of indiscretion and transgression is the parent cell of that single and ruling instinct, though aborted and giving rise to phenomena neither approved by civilization nor blessed by clergy.

Of the minority was Tanya Larisch. And, of men, all are born alike; only some are more so; and a few labour under reservations.

Of these latter, West was one.

The ceaseless racket of hammering, the rasp and crushing grind of the cement-mixer, sawing, scraping of trowels, drove West out of the house by day, except during meals.

Only at night could he endure the house; and then usually he fell a prey to the beguiling of Tanya—and did his share of it, too; and suffered agonies of self-scorn upstairs by candle-light, and hated himself and her, and strove to put her from his mind, and wanted her.

Sometimes she followed him afield, tip-toeing through the alders to locate him by the dry crack of his gun, where grouse gathered for nanny-berries.

Once or twice she brought his luncheon in a daintily covered basket—luncheon for two—and sat with him on the bronzed grass in sunny rides where a few late flies buzzed and a ghostly geometrid winged an uncertain way across the ghosts of standing golden-rod.

One day he had killed a brace of grouse and a pair of snow-shoe hares, parti-coloured at that season. When Tanya found him with her lunch-basket he had set up a little field easel and was sketching in oil.

"Hello," he said uneasily, "you needn't have brought me anything."

"It's nice," she said, and displayed a cold partridge. "Anyway, didn't you want to see me, West?"

"Oh, certainly. Don't put your hand on my shoulder; you're joggling my arm." He continued to touch in his sky and three tiny clouds sailing through it. The girl watched for a while, then very cautiously touched his cheek with velvet lips and retreated to a sunny spot where she spread a napkin and unpacked her basket.

"I was just dying to be with you," she remarked.

As he offered no response she sighed lightly, smiled, uncorked the thermos bottle, tasted a thimble-cup of coffee.

Probably he sniffed the aroma, for he set his brushes in the thumb-hole of his palette, laid it under the slim easel, and walked toward her. She was eating, but she requested a kiss.

"No," he said, "your mouth is too shiny. What's in that packet?"

It proved to be cheese and pie, and he laid it aside and accepted half a partridge.

"Aren't you glad I brought you a lunch?" she inquired.

"Yes, I'm much obliged. I'm sick of that noise up at the house."

"I don't mind it," she said; "it's kind of company for me."

"Noises for company?"

"Well, if you'd lived all your life on a swampy farm in the woods——"

"Sure, I understand," he said, as sympathetically as he could with his mouth full.

"It's lonesome," she mused, picking a partridge wing with clever fingers. "Pa hasn't even got a phonograph. Gosh! it's quiet at night."

"Well, you're in the village most of the time."

"Yes, I am. Sometimes I can't get there in winter. And oh, West, you ought to hear the wind. And the trees groan all night when it's freezing. The woods are full of noises that you don't like when you're in bed. And when pa's drunk I get scared. It's scary sometimes."

"Poor kid," he said.

"Oh, well——" She laughed and hurled a leg-bone into the alders and helped herself to a wedge of pie. "What was that letter you got yesterday, West? I meant to ask you before."

Her easy intrusion into his privacy was characteristic of the native-born and not impudently intended.

The boy understood that, but it always nettled him.

He said: "It was from Mr. Connor."

"Oh," she cried, with vivid interest, "did he tell you all about the wedding?"

"He did not," returned West dryly.

"What did he say?"

"Well, if you really must be told, Tanya, Mr. Connor said that he meant to run up here before they sailed and take a look at the work. And I'll be glad when he comes and brings a superintendent; I'm tired of the noise and I want to get back and begin work."

Tanya reflected as she bit into her wedge of peach-pie, her eyes levelled at West.

"When is Mr. Connor coming?"

"He didn't say what day."

"Is his new wife coming with him?"

"I don't think so."

"Jacqueline, either?"

"No," said West shortly; "he wrote that he was coming alone and would remain only over night."

Tanya continued to devour her pie.

After a little silence: "You still like Jackie?" she inquired very softly.

"Yes, I do."

"You don't love her."

"I don't *love* anybody——"

"You love me—sometimes." She looked at him sideways and laughed. "Yes, you do, West."

"What makes you so blamed sure?"

"You act like you do—when you kiss me."

"Do I? Well, I'm not going to do it any more——"

"You always say that."

"You'll see I mean it——"

"Well, then, I'll have to kiss you, I suppose——"

"No; I'm through." His direct brutality of a boy merely made her laugh again, and continue laughing as he rolled over out of her reach and lay propped on one elbow sullenly regarding her.

"That's all bunk," he said, "this petting business. When you begin it you begin to kid yourself till it gets a hold on you—like smoking, or opium. What's the good of it, Tanya?"

"*I* like it—with *you*."

"Yes, or with some other fellow."

"No," she protested passionately, "only with you, West. I never acted that way with anybody except you. The minute I kiss you I feel in love again——"

"What about that fellow in the village—that banker's son——"

"What fellow?" she asked, reddening.

He remembered the boy's name and she saw he knew it; but how much more she could not surmise.

"It's a lie, anyway," she said, "whoever told you—whatever they said. I don't say you're the first boy I ever petted. But I wish you were."

"You'd better make me the last," he said bluntly.

"Why?"

His silence was significant.

"I don't care," she said.

"You'd better."

"I don't—with you. You're going away, anyway."

"Yes, when P. J. comes. So we'd better agree on no more petting——"

"Oh, West, how heartless!"

"I'm *not!* That's the trouble. I believe you know it, too. I'm not going to kiss you again, Tanya——"

"You shall!"

She sprang lithely to her feet and he got up instantly.

"Look here," he said, "you make me ridiculous—any man looks ridiculous——"

She kissed him passionately; he took her in his arms,

crushed her to him, suddenly flung her aside and walked leisurely away.

She was laughing rather breathlessly, certain of his return. In her cheeks was a flush of triumph as she watched him walk away into the alders, recede from her view, farther and farther, until lost to sight.

Entirely at ease concerning him and his return, she cast a malicious glance at his gun, at the easel and the palette under it.

For perhaps ten minutes she stood there gazing into the depths of the alders, listening with a half-smile curving her too-full lips.

Then, suddenly, she heard him behind her on the dry grass—or thought she did—and turned, still smiling. And looked into the darkly terrible eyes of Jacqueline.

A Jacqueline she never before had beheld—this slender, fresh, curled, clean-groomed girl in delicate, exquisitely fitted attire; a slim and perfect thing of the city, but with Jacqueline's face—her face, even with the darkly blazing eyes and the carmine lips distorted, inarticulate with all the primitive fury of the age-old Ardres race.

Almost with a single movement Jacqueline stripped from her body her waist and jacket and skirt, and flung her hat after them on the grass. And stood there in the sun, half-naked, a golden, sinuous thing—the very incarnation of feline murder.

Before Tanya could cry out, Jacqueline enveloped her in a storm of raging blows, beating her face and head and body, raining down all the strength of her wrath with little clenched hands battering madly at this woman who had betrayed her.

Again and again, Tanya, taller and stronger, hurled

her away—bit at her, faced her with blood-striped face and bared teeth, only to be carried by storm, hurled back, driven back, bewildered, half-stunned, then at last, frightened—staggering back with a cry, turning, fleeing through the alders in utter horror of what impended.

Panting, her curled hair tumbled about her naked shoulders, and with clenched fists still poised, Jacqueline stood on the trampled grass, her blazing eyes fixed on the alders.

There were red welts, darkening bruises, scratches on her arms and chest, but her face remained unmarked save by rage.

This faded, and her features whitened; and presently she drew a desperate breath, moistened her lips in silence, struggled again with her breath, forced it under control.

Reaction began; her limbs became unsteady. She managed to draw on her skirt, blouse, jacket; put up her hair, pull the new hat over it.

Buttoning her waist with trembling fingers, her sickening eyes noticed the easel. Then she saw his gun.

Grief, terrible, shattering, overwhelmed her in the horror of this home-coming—racked her for a while as blindly, through tears, she groped and fumbled over her person to complete her dressing.

She had gone nearly half-way to the house when she saw him coming toward her on the ride. And lost the last vestige of her colour.

"What have you been doing to Tanya?" he demanded harshly. "She's all over blood and torn to rags and half crazed with fright. I couldn't

stop her; she's gone on home. What did you do it for?"

Jacqueline tremblingly bit her lip, looked at him, found her voice:

"I—I told you I'd try to kill her if you loved her. I tried. . . . Now, it's all over. . . . It's all over."

"I should think it was, you little beast!" he returned almost savagely. "Do you think you own me?"

"I thought you did love me a little. And *she* lied to me."

"I told you it wasn't real love!"

"W-what is it, then?" she stammered.

"Nothing—silliness. We could have been decent friends if this damned petting business hadn't spoiled it. Gone too far and spoiled it. . . . I don't know what I said to you before you left. . . . Perhaps I have lied to you; I don't remember. If I did I'm sorry and ashamed; but it was all foolishness, anyway."

"O-h!" she whispered, and laid both hands on her lips.

"Well, wasn't it—when I'm not in love, nor you either, and there's no question of—of anything more——"

Her eyes disconcerted him—the depthless pain in them.

She said: "Tanya promised me, but she lied. Did you love her, West?"

"No, I don't love anybody," he said, exasperated. "I don't mean that I didn't pet her——"

"Is—is she—bad?"

"No," he retorted violently, "as far as I know she isn't. I'm sick of all this—I'm sick of it, I tell you. I thought it was going to be all right with you. You

said so when you left. And you come back here unexpectedly and fly at Tanya like a wild cat and act as if you meant to kill her."

"I did mean to."

"Jacqueline, are you crazy?"

She shook her head wearily: "I don't know—I don't know anything any more."

She swayed where she stood. West came up and drew her arm through his. Slowly, in silence, they went together toward the house.

CHAPTER XXII

THE three buses loaded with workmen and contractors had gone back to Drifting River; everywhere, in the early twilight, arrested confusion reigned where an armoury of stacked tools glistened under a long open-faced shanty; where bulky engines loomed motionless, partly covered by canvas; where ploughed acres of future lawn, partly graded and with pegged cords still marking panels, sloped away from the house.

Windows already were lighted; smoke rose from the kitchen and sitting-room chimneys; a lantern glimmered in the barn where Mrs. Wessels was finishing up outside chores.

In the sitting-room West sat gloomily reading the newspaper which Connor had brought from New York. Upstairs, Connor knocked at Jacqueline's bedroom door, and stepped inside as she bade him come in. Jacqueline was sitting on the bed, but got up when he entered.

"Where is Tanya, little lass?" he inquired in his gay and hearty way. "It's dark already and she's not here."

"She won't come," said Jacqueline curtly.

"Won't come?" he repeated, giving her a keen, surprised look.

"No," said Jacqueline; "I punished her down in the alders and I guess she's gone home."

After an astonished silence: "Punished Tanya?" he asked.

"Yes, Tanya Larisch."

"Why?"

"She lied to me."

Another silence; then: "What did she lie about, little lass?"

"Please don't ask me."

"No, then. And how did you punish her?"

"I beat her."

"*Beat* her?"

"Yes."

"With what, then?"

"With my fists."

"God bless us," murmured Connor, staring at her. In the twilight of the room he could not see her face—could distinguish only her slender form against the window. He went slowly toward her and took her into his arms. She huddled against him, closer, pressing her cheek against his breast.

If Connor came to any conclusion at all, possibly what he finally said indicated it: "Well, little golden lass, you know *whose* arms are hungry for you. My own little golden lassie. There—don't be shivering, now. There—there, my bonnie one. Quiet, now—quiet, little heart of you! Quiet does it—so—so, little lass."

Tears came and swept her soul. When they were over, all was washed clean, washed out of her, and the soul shining through her glimmering eyes.

Connor kissed her and she kissed him with fervour; took one of his square hands in hers and clung to it. After a little while she released his hand and lighted a

candle; and turned suddenly shy, inclined to avoid his gaze.

"Well, now," he said, with a hint of a laugh in his voice, "this same battle you survived has never left a mark on you—nor on your new frock, lassie."

"I took off my clothes."

"What!"

"I promised mother not to soil them. I took them off."

"Stripped to do battle!" he exclaimed in a stifled voice.

"No, I had on my shirt and drawers and stockings——"

His laughter drowned her voice; his ruddy face glistened with the tears of it.

And now, finally, she also saw the humour of it—or it may be his laughter infected her, for she began to laugh, too; and she went to the looking-glass, still laughing, to examine her features for scars of combat.

Then she let down and combed out her artificially curled hair, and did it up very smartly, still standing. On the cheap pine bureau lay one of Connor's many gifts to her—a gold vanity case; but there was nothing in it except a powder puff. This she used on her nose only; serious, dainty, intent, oblivious to Connor's reflected mirth in her mirror.

"Well, then," said he, "now that you've won the battle of Ardres Farm, who's to give us a bite and a sup this night?"

"Tessie and I."

"You?"

"Certainly. I'll put on a smock and help."

"Mind, now, what your mother will say if you soil your new dress——"

"I promise not to——" She had completed her toilet at the wash-bowl; was drying her hands; came to him, still drying them, and offered her lips.

"I love you so," she said.

"I love *you,* darling. I always did—before even I set my two eyes on your mother; I did so. And when I saw her, then I was in love before I could wink an eye—in love with you both, little golden lass. Ah, but you know it well, you mischievous little scut!—you do so, now!"

Jacqueline laughed, flung the towel on the bed, took his arm in both of hers.

"Come on," she said happily.

But in the corridor he left her and continued on to his bedroom; and Jacqueline ran downstairs to the kitchen where Tessie Wessels was getting supper, and tied a big, blue-checked apron over her gown.

"Where the dickens is that Tanya?" inquired Tessie plaintively, "leaving me to do all the chores and get supper——"

"I beat her up. She isn't coming back," said Jacqueline tranquilly; but refused any further information, or blocked it with the formula: "Ask Tanya if you want to know."

For now, in Jacqueline, the primitive Ardresienne had subsided—had receded—through phantom generations—back to the armed ghost of him who rode in gilded mail amid a yellow blaze that day so long ago. All the red and gold fury of her was gone with the grief and rage of shock and battle.

The tear-drenched, rage-racked soul of her had been

cleansed again; born again into the world where the goodness of God glimmered everywhere once more in the eternal and wondrous miracle of familiar things.

And Jacqueline was hungry. She peeped into the sitting-room. There sat her recreant, huddled moodily upon the sofa, sulking over the pages of an open book.

"West?" she called softly.

He raised his head and gave her a sullen glance.

"What are you reading?"

"I don't know"—he looked down at the page—"that 'Cloth of Gold' book of yours."

"I'm helping with supper," she said; "we'll read it aloud afterward."

He grunted.

Whatever that male grunt meant it did not impair Jacqueline's cheerfulness. She sang in a low voice as she helped Tessie. Presently she went into the sitting-room, spread and set the table, humming to herself all the while her favourite phonographic air, "Good-bye—don't go!——" and casting amiable glances at the recreant one from time to time as deftly and swiftly she prepared things for the evening meal.

Once, the unpleasant idea flashed into her mind that he missed Tanya.

"Do you?" she demanded, with a dangerous look.

"Do I—what?" he growled.

"Miss Tanya?"

"Well, if I did it's none of your business."

Jacqueline looked at him a moment, then laughed.

"She'll find out whose business it is if she comes back," she remarked. "And I know what it is about her you like."

"Is that so?"

"Shall I tell you?"—pausing, a platter in each hand. "It's the way she pigeon-kisses—boys have told me—and its's disgusting—if you like it, *you're* disgusting, too. You don't, do you, West?"

"I'm not going to discuss——"

"You don't need to. I love you anyway. And no matter how much I ever shall love other people I'll never kiss anybody but you and mother and Daddy P. J. And you're a *pig* if you do."

Appropriately he grunted. She went on with the table setting.

Presently: "Do you like my new clothes, West?"

He pretended he hadn't noticed them.

"They're all right," he admitted.

"My hair—do you like it this way?"

Secretly it had enchanted him, but he shrugged his indifference.

"My hands," she said, "are red and rough, but I've been manicured, and I have a fitted dressing-case full of gold flasks and crystal flasks with lotions and scents in them. Mother and I are going to wear kid gloves at night full of cold cream and other things. Did you ever have a shampoo or a massage, West?"

"I have a shampoo sometimes."

"Isn't it wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Mother and I went to a beauty parlour on Fifth Avenue, and the things they did to us!—West, these are permanent curls in my hair—and oh, you should see mother! She's just beautiful—so *young!*"

"She is that," said Connor from the foot of the stairs, where he had halted to listen and readjust his tie. "But which is the prettier, mother or daughter,

that's for West and me to argue. Little golden one, where's our supper?"

"All ready," cried Jacqueline, dancing away into the kitchen, whence, presently, she and the grass-widow returned bearing smoking dishes and urns.

When all had been served and were busy: "Now," said Connor, "will you believe me, lassie, when I say that the food at the Royal Standard can't compare with your mother's cooking? And yours, too, by the same token, for this is grand johnny-cake—it is that!"

"You ought to have seen mother's wedding," said Jacqueline to West; "it was too beautiful for words to describe. Perhaps it could be done in a poem. I'll try. It was in daddy's house—you know his great big house, of course? Well, all his friends were there—millions of ladies and gentlemen—and millions and millions of flowers, West—and oh, I forgot to tell you, I saw your father and your mother!—and daddy introduced me—I'd been told what to say, and not to say, 'I'm pleased to meet you.'" She threw back her curly head and laughed and laughed until even the gloomy brow of the recreant one cleared a little.

When she was able to resume food and conversation again: "Mother made a perfectly beautiful bride," she rattled on, "and I wore the most wonderful clothes——"

"Nobody says anything about me," remarked Connor, reaching for more fried ham.

"Oh, Daddy P. J.! You were *sweet!*"

"What's that?" he demanded indignantly.

"You were! And handsome and so red and scared——"

"I was that, lass. And it was your mother who was the cool one—calm and soft spoken, with that in her

face like an angel unafraid—and all those awful eyes on us—God bless us and keep us from any more weddings ever again—only yours, golden lassie——"

"Oh, I'll never have one," said Jacqueline gaily—but she glanced covertly at West and smiled with adorable significance when she caught his reluctant eye.

"What's that, now?" demanded Connor. "No wedding for you? And why not?"

Jacqueline, her mouth full of pancake and syrup, answered calmly but with difficulty: "I'm engaged not to marry. But I don't care."

"Well, then, *I* do," retorted Connor, amused. "And you'll just cut loose of any sparking and philandering young man you've ever made eyes at in Drifting River! You will that, my lass. For we sail Saturday, and it's a long time you'll be, and full of many a new notion, before you ever see these parts again!"

"You said we were coming back next summer!" insisted Jacqueline, disturbed.

"I said your mother and I were coming."

"But what about me, daddy?"

"Maybe one of those foreign, gilt-edged schools where they teach queens how to wear crowns——"

"Daddy!"

"Ah, now, quit your quizzing till your mother and I decide what's best for you. What do you know about it at all—you in your teens—not eighteen, are you?—God bless us all," he added, pinching her ear and kissing the clustering curls that concealed it, "it's for your mother to say, and for you and me to listen. It is so."

He gazed at a slice of peach pie, and Jacqueline removed his plate and set it before him.

"Oh, West," she exclaimed, "I meant to tell you that there is a swimming tank on the *Majestic*. As soon as we sail I'm going to put on my swimming suit and——"

A flash and instant thunder checked her.

"Ah," said Connor, "the fair, warm days have gone, and this is the end of them. It will turn cold to-morrow."

Again the lightning glittered and thunder crashed out over miles of alders.

Connor said to West: "Thank you kindly, lad, for staying to keep an eye on the place. I've a young man, Hannigan by name, at the hotel below. So if you're minded to come back with us to-morrow, come and welcome."

"Yes, I think I'll go. I'll pack up to-night."

Jacqueline cast a radiant look at him and got up to clear the table.

When she and the grassed one had disappeared with the last dishes and the table-cloth, and when Connor had lighted his pipe and had seated himself rather wistfully beside the yellow oak table where Anne used to sew, West said carelessly:

"What did father and mother think of Jacqueline?"

"What could they think but love her?" returned Connor, innocently.

"Did they seem to like her?"

"I assume so," said the other, dryly. After a moment he let a slow, keen glance linger over the boy. But his expression did not alter, and he said nothing. Thus judge those who are readers of men—swiftly, silently, when the moment arrives for summing up. And Connor knew now that much of his parents was in

this boy—much, particularly, of his mother. But if *all* that was in his father was also in the father's son, then Connor might feel tranquil. However, time alone could show the character of this silent boy who sat there reading on the sofa.

Connor, impatient for the morrow and his Anne, went to bed early, as though to hustle old man Time along at a livelier pace.

"The car will be here at nine," he said, "and you two kiddies had better be ready, or I'll go on home and leave you!"

"I'd walk all the way to New York rather than miss the steamer," said Jacqueline.

"It's nine," remarked Connor.

"I'm not sleepy," remonstrated the girl.

Connor knocked out his pipe; Jacqueline sprang up, lighted his candle, flung her arms around his neck in a good-night embrace. Then she went back to the sofa beside West.

"Daddy hated to leave mother a single moment," she said, "but he had to come up here, and mother had to finish her fittings and get us packed up. West, I've got bruises all over my body where Tanya hit me and bit and scratched. I'm sore."

"Well, then, what did you start it for?"

"Well, *somebody* had to drive her off the place."

"That's ridiculous——"

"It isn't. She nearly got you as it was. Probably she'd have got you anyway if I hadn't come up here and cleared her out.

"You talk as if I were some sort of merchandise——"

"What?"

"Or some kind of animal——"

"She's one kind, I guess. I don't want to talk about her. Wasn't that funny what daddy said about my having a wedding?"

"Was it?"

"Well, wasn't it? When you and I agreed not ever to marry, but to always love and pet each other——"

"You talk like a kid, Jacqueline."

"Why? I can't marry you, can I?"

"Hang it all—marry! marry! marry! No! I'm never going to—neither you nor anybody——"

"That's what I'm saying. I won't either. And we always can be sweethearts, you see. I won't bother you, West. I wouldn't drive away every girl as I did Tanya——"

"Confound it all!" he remonstrated testily. "Do you think I'll let you bully me and select my friends for me and fly at any you don't happen to like? *Do* you?"

"No," she said meekly.

"Well, then, just quit that bossy tone, Jacqueline. I'm fed up on it. Behave as if you had some sense. You're free to do as you like. So am I. And if ever we interfere with each other we'll certainly quarrel."

She remained silent, her brown eyes fixed on him.

Presently: "If they send me to school over there, do you think, when I return, there'd be such a *very* great difference between us, West?"

"Difference?"

"Yes. There *is* a very great difference now. I know that——"

"Nonsense——"

"You know it, too—with all your education and experience and knowledge; and all your friends and family; and your wonderful art and talent, and——"

"Oh, Jackie," he said, "you *are* a funny kiddie!"

"Well, aren't those the reasons why you wouldn't ever marry me? Oh, West, I didn't mean to say that word again—truly I didn't!"—for the boy had turned on her, exasperated.

"Now, listen," he said, "once for all. I don't *want* to marry *anybody!* Let's cut that out right now."

"Not anybody, ever?" she ventured.

"Never! I don't want any squalling brats under foot; I don't want a wife to bother me when I'm tired, and desire only peace and quiet. I want my liberty; I want my studio; and I want to work! Is that quite clear, Jacqueline?"

"Yes," she said cheerfully; "but you'll want a girl to pet——"

"Occasionally, perhaps——"

"Well, can't I be that girl?"

"Probably—if you're not too bossy."

"I won't be; I promise. And I'll need somebody, too. And I won't have anybody except mother and daddy unless you'll let me have you. Will you?"

He condescended to smile upon her, and she threw her arms around him with a little cry of rapture and relief. Embraced, she kissed him passionately, strained him to her in the pure ecstasy of their reunion—adorable, ardently certain or childishly concerned at moments lest her pleasure in him be not entirely shared.

She said, holding him imprisoned: "I *could* kiss you the way Tanya kisses. I think I know how. But

it seems so horrid. Oh, West, I love you, and I will if you want me to!"

"No," he said, with an involuntary shudder of recollection—not utterly abhorrent, yet troubled with shame.

He drew her curly head against his shoulder and sat for a while in silence, vaguely aware, now, of a new and subtle respect and admiration for this girl—of a nascent liking quite new and different. It was neither the careless regard of comradeship, nor the more sentimental emotion and inclination born of physical contact.

Probably it was the innate chastity of mind which attracted him, although he did not understand—was not perhaps conscious that it was this in the girl that his own mind so subtly divined, and to which it now at last was unknowingly responding.

For a long while they sat in silence, closely holding each other, while the noisy kitchen clock ticked away the minutes. When it struck ten Jacqueline sighed, lifted her head, smiled at him, and got up.

He lighted both candles, and they ascended the stairs together. On the landing they kissed each other soberly, like two tired children.

So Jacqueline—weary but tranquil in the reaction from victory and vengeance; and in calm possession once more of a recreant heart regained—went slowly to her room. Here she undressed and bathed the bruises of battle with arnica and witch-hazel, and almond cream, and other magic balm and balsams, to heal her of her wounds in the dim, still Avalon which was her maiden chamber.

In his room, her recreant one lay thinking in

pyjamas—a confused and boyish mind weary of love and women, tired of the entire sex, he decided, yet lingering in a vague new liking for this odd child who had done battle in his behalf; and, alas, sometimes checking his wandering mind where it had wandered a-gipsying after a loose-limbed, graceful girl with a scarlet kerchief binding her dark hair.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN the *Majestic* sailed, Jacqueline Ardres went out of the life of J. West Halton.

Not out of his mind for several weeks.

In fact, he wrote, answering her letters, once a month for three or four months.

Then old man Time administered his patent anodyne to the boy with the usual result.

West forgot Jacqueline.

Neglected letters began it; remorse, then impatience, then boredom with a correspondence to which no longer could he subscribe with interest, finally ended the affair.

As accessories under fact and law, scores of other and fresher interests demanded almost daily recognition and attention, to the exclusion of those past performances and old out-of-date things that once had been.

To youth the past is not only dead—it never even lived—and yesterday is a million years ago. When memory fades and its ghosts dissolve into thinnest air, only effort summons them from that vasty void which shrouds for youth all that forgotten past that might have happened in another world and in another life—if, indeed, it ever happened. And Youth will not make that effort.

Non tamen irritum
Quodcunque retro est, efficiet; neque
Diffinget, infectumque reddet.
Quod fugiens semel hora vexit.

Thus Horace, radio-active.

West admitted that he never had had a more amusing and unusual holiday—taking it all into consideration. The sensational woodcock shooting, the monotonous yet fascinating landscape, his companions, the cooking, the romantic climax engineered by Connor and resulting in his acquisition of Anne Ardres and twenty thousand acres of cock-covert, all these combined to render his holiday memorable.

And there was Jacqueline. And, alas! Tanya. And all the agreeable, painful, shameful emotions that their names evoked. Would evoke for a while. Then, drop by drop, the anodyne of old man Time; and names and emotions would fade and pale. Until, like sympathetic ink, some chance chemistry of after years would bring it all out once more, startlingly clear, for Age to re-read—sigh, and read again ere again it faded from the mind.

West settled once more among his fellows, as a far driven quail, long errant, comes whirring in at last and settles down once more amid the familiar covey whose language and ways it was born to and understands.

His father and mother were at White Sulphur Springs; the limestone house just off Park Avenue was his. He vastly preferred his grubby studio, and used it and his college club; and took to the byways and purlieus and runways and cul-de-sacs haunted by that

curious branch of the human pack which nourishes itself on art.

Thither lay his callow inclinations, not, heaven knows, because there was any lack of social laxity among youths and maidens of his own sort.

No; the new generation, intoxicated by being noticed, naïvely emulated one another by bringing out all that was best of animalism in them. It became the fashion to strip their bodies, maul each other in the dance, sprawl everywhere morally and bodily, tell the elder world to let them alone, admonish it for its sentimentalism and hypocrisy. Thus animalism supplanted sentimentalism, and "naturalness" wore no underclothing in derision of the pantalette.

Youth wanted to be let alone—wanted to find out for itself. Dogs do that when they resent the tug of the leash.

But Youth wanted to know and investigate and try anything once. And sometimes there was no second chance. And sometimes the chances multiplied and extended into infinite perspective. Such land in court, usually, or in asylums.

But Youth scrapped the Past, and, with it, all has-beens who made it. It was all a sentimental lie. It was all Puritanism and Hypocrisy. A limb was a leg, a smell a stink, love merely sexual inclination, and Heaven as obsolete as good manners. Freedom! that's what Youth was wresting from the doddering parents that bore them—Liberty, Irresponsibility, and an end to all Damn Nonsense.

And what they hold is an empty husk. There is no liberty in the land. Only the loosened licence of intolerance and fanaticism is in that husk of what once was a free and self-respecting people.

Not until that degenerate people win back one by one the ancient liberties which were theirs when this Republic was founded, can Youth pretend to have wrested from Age that which has not perfectly existed since Washington was President.

Year after year bigotry, greed, fanaticism, ignorance have sheared yet a little more from the Tree of Liberty, until to-day it stands a gaunt, dead pole with a little rag atop on which is printed "Intolerance." And past it in endless procession defile the hordes intolerance has let loose upon the land—a vast swarm of spies and Government paid agents such as bloodiest Russia never knew—tax spies that degrade the nation and murder personal privacy; prohibition enforcement spies; police appointed by petty creeds; censors of personal tastes, personal beliefs; detectives to investigate individual morals; all the pimps and panders of a villainous intolerance that is rotting the very vitals of a once great race.

This is the boasted Freedom that Youth is wresting from the outworn generation now passing.

And if Modern Youth forgets its own animalism long enough to investigate the empty husk it holds, monkey-like, in restless grasp, perhaps Modern Youth may discover the fraud perpetrated upon its generation. And perhaps it may have brains enough to revolt, and lash and batter this horde of scoundrels out of the Temple—drive all out, masters and men—high and low alike—the makers of laws that strangle liberty, the wretched creatures who enforce such laws—all of them —every one—OUT!—every one—and The Temple cleansed for the first time since Washington was President.

CHAPTER XXIV

An entire winter in New York now lay before West, unhampered by parental or social duties unless he chose to cultivate the latter. He did, at intervals, his niche in the social structure permitting choice.

So he went occasionally where young men of his kind forgathered with young women of his kind—to dances, theatres, the opera; to week-ends on Long Island, in Jersey and Westchester. He made luncheon dates and tea dates with nice, nearly-nice, and not-very-nice girls—all recruits to the young, younger, and youngest sets. Once or twice he patronized parties where some button-head entertained young ladies from the Follies or Frolic.

But mostly his leisure and working hours were spent in the vicinity of *The Clodion,* a large studio building downtown—a neighbourhood rather convenient to editors as well as models. It was well peppered with libraries, restaurants, theatres, cafés, and similar conveniences appreciated by those irregulars in business who embrace Art (professionally) morning, noon and night.

It was the resort of the brethren of the midnight oil; also the haunt of parasitic genera that live upon the creative minds of others—the so-called "critics." It was the lurking place of those half-educated "newspaper men," whose almost illiterate emanations daily make up the newspapers of the metropolis. Thither, also,

prowled the paid panders of periodicals who "write up" anything for a price—not to be confused with various species of publicity men whose business is legitimate.

At noon the streets swarmed with theatrical and movie people and their emissaries, runners, chasers, jackals, and assorted yellow pups; with editors, directors, impresarios, promoters, special writers, reporters, "critics"; with illustrators, printers, employees of establishments dedicated to the dissemination of general misinformation through the public and private Press.

Here loped agile pulchritude from agency to agency in quest of jobs. Here hunted a swarm of scouts and human dingoes on that eternal chase the object of which is to get something for nothing. And invariably when they hunt it down and seize that *something,* it turns into nothing at all.

Nos haec novimus esse nihil: nihil semper floret.

West enjoyed the winter. He was making his way as an illustrator. His work was already acceptable, and always improving.

The art editors of periodical publications gave him sufficient work to keep him employed—not the choicest articles, serials and short stories—but second choice already, which was promotion from third and fourth.

As a successful field dog must be born with dog-sense, so, in West, the instinct for picture-making was inborn.

Whether or not he liked, approved, or even was interested in the text of the article consigned to him for decoration or illustration, always he found pictures in

it. Not the obvious pictures of most illustrators, which are mere repetitions of the text over quoted captions.

But like the Greek sculptors, West chose always the moment just before or just after the salient point made by the author.

Stupidly to repeat in a picture an already described climax, and thus stultify both, was not one of his blunders. And art editors, many of them not knowing why, were already watching this young illustrator, feeling more and more inclined to give him stories of greater importance.

For one thing it was evident that the boy was conscientious. He never marred his drawings with *chic*. For every figure, even for the sketchiest and least important, always was there a model—and a separate model—because West never "doubled" on his publishers—a shabby, slovenly habit indulged in sometimes by the cleverest.

He made innumerable sketches which served him for accessories in his illustrations—he was always noting bits of local scenery when away from the studio. Also, having been trained, he was one of very few who knew how to draw legitimately and intelligently from photographic data.

Furthermore, he was well-bred, well-educated, with traditions of culture as foundation—all very unusual among illustrators—and all the essential elegancies of his profession attracted him—details unthought of, unheard of by the average—nay, the vast majority of artists. An increasing knowledge of history, of periods in art, of literature, architecture, dress, social conditions, all lent a certain assurance and dignity to his work.

He studied costume, armour, furniture, ceramics, textiles, in the Metropolitan Museum when weariness suggested a change of occupation, instead of inanely loafing. He pored over the work of other illustrators, analysed the technique of the great masters of illustration—of men like Marold, Abbey, Flamang, Rossi, Sambourne; studied the more eccentric, too—Dulac, Forain, Steinlen, Willette, *et al.*

He had in him three things which, plus talent, make for success: industry, a perennial curiosity, and a preference for his profession over any other amusement. Without these there is no success, not even when talent, and even genius, is unusual. For these latter are the failures—the tragic, contemptible, or pitiable shapes that haunt the Temple of Endeavour, which never will be more interesting or more beautiful for such as they.

West's studio was no dingier than the average; it stank of plastalene, paint, turpentine, poppy oil, siccatif, fixative, retouching varnish—but neither of joss-sticks nor *peau d'Espagne.*

Several deal drawing-tables tipped at various angles; several pine palette-tables, several easels, a camera and tripod, rickety chairs, a sofa, a battered screen, and a model-stand cluttered it.

Here, in blue blouse and paint-stiffened trousers, West caressed his Muse. She's a good sport to stand for such grimy adorers.

There was, however, a rather clean sitting-room attached to the suite. In there West could give tea if necessary; and there were some rather nice antiques there—practical ones—chairs of the Fifteenth Louis on which one was expected to sit in safety, a sofa of similar

brand, a Clodion clock-set, a characteristic period table, and, on the wall, a delightful Chardin; and, in Indian red chalk, graceful studies by Lancret, Boucher, and an aquarelle by Kaemmerer. This, with a gilt mirror, rose-silk curtains, and a pastel-grey carpet, made a gay refuge from studio stench and dirt. Two or three Chinese porcelains, several lamps, a few bits of Italian silver, Limoges and Sèvres, and two walls faced with full bookshelves, made this room very liveable.

Women liked it on account of the rose silk shades on the lights, but West was not inclined to encourage ornamental wasters of time.

However, some came—some of his own kind, determined to penetrate the ever-alluring mystery of a real studio, and vastly disappointed that the place was not swarming with unclad models and revelry.

Professionals came, too, sometimes; all sorts—the frail and receptive, the predatory, the idle and mischievous, the lonely opportunist, the hungry but plucky, the fed-up and adventurous, and the weird sisterhood of those that illustrate—always messy and friendly and usually tiresome.

His was a full life. And it was enormously to the boy's credit that he lived it so energetically, because no cruelty of necessity spurred him; roof, bed and board did not depend upon his efforts. Only the essential fact that he had chosen his profession because, in hours of leisure, it would have been his preference as an amusement, diversion, sport, kept him constantly at it. And that is the only way that any profession ever should be chosen as a means of livelihood.

He never had learned to smoke; and that, and a

dislike for alcohol, made him conspicuous. He might have been a better illustrator if he smoked and drank a glass of Bordeaux of Burgundy at dinner. Or he might have been a worse one.

He might have been a better artist if he had known more about women at first hand. He might have been a worse one, too. For it is a tragic knowledge, always, because when acquired it reveals only that there was nothing to acquire.

"You gotta *live* what you illustrate," remarked one of a dreary brotherhood whose names decorate "columns" in the daily papers, headed *Literature*, or *Art*, or *The Theatre*.

West denied the necessity, and was jested at in print. He got very and unwisely mad and wrote to the editor of the offending paper:

"SIR,—It is curious that civilization tolerates these trained vermin that are permitted to fasten on and suck and torture creative minds.

"Were these 'critics' educated instead of ignorant, constructive and helpful instead of destructive and malicious, even then the ordinary decencies ought to be observed.

"Can anybody imagine a printed attack on any article of general merchandise? Such and such a man is a fool and the automobile he sells is junk. Don't buy it. Don't buy Smith's or Jones's or Robinson's commodities, because they're rotten.

"But these half-educated, dull-minded vulgarians who sign their names to a perpetual stream of pointless prattle and who head their columns with fanciful titles, daily sit in judgment upon plays and books and pic-

tures and music; and the Great American Ass reads and swallows his daily dose of ready-made opinion.

"Once there were great editors, and editorials were authoritative. Once there were great critics; and their clear, sane, generous and capable opinions were respected.

"Except for two or three music critics, survivors of the great age, none is living. Instead the inky sheets of the daily Press swarm with dirty parasites—some of whom can be bribed to stop sucking—none of whom is capable of one constructive idea, one respectable opinion, one generous emotion.

"It is their incessant babble that sickens all intelligence.

"Only silence concerning a book or a play, disapproved, could really accomplish murder—not the verbal black-jack or simpering humour of the moron. But if they suspect this to be true it would mean starvation to them. So they continue to suck and simper or lather what they like with the saliva of approval; and public taste and appreciation sink lower and lower into that levelling mire toward which a spineless and acquiescent people are tending."

Had the editor wished to murder West he would have printed this letter. He was generous and paid it no attention.

So a few maliciously humorous attacks in print did no particular harm to the career of J. West Halton, illustrator, except to surprise, irritate and hurt him for an hour or two.

On the contrary, the malice of publicity helped to familiarize his name.

The Girl in Golden Rags

Toward the end of the winter, Roger Aylward sauntered into his studio one late afternoon; and West laid aside work, dismissed two men models and an old woman, washed his hands, shed his blouse, put on coat and waistcoat, and came into the little reception-room to entertain Mr. Aylward with tea and cigars.

"Well," said Aylward, much flattered, "when are your father and mother coming north again?"

"They're at Nassau. I don't know. You see, mother doesn't like cold weather."

"I know that. Probably they'll come back for April and May. Do you hear from P. J.?"

West reddened. "I've been rather negligent in writing," he confessed.

"Don't you hear from Jacqueline?"

"She hasn't written recently. I don't blame her," said the boy. "But somehow the winter has slipped away so fast and I've had such a lot of things to do——"

"I know," remarked Aylward, lighting one of his own cigars; "I was like that, once. But when you arrive at my age, West, you'll find it pleasant to hear from friends, and you'll always find leisure to let them hear from you. It comes with age, that willingness to take pains for friendship's sake. No young people bother with it; friends are too plentiful; there are always new ones to replace those worn out or forgotten. It is not the case when you arrive at my age."

West listened with the respectful inattention characteristic of Youth when Age becomes platitudinous.

"I'll write to P. J.," he said, "and to Jacqueline. Where are they now?"

"They were in India. They're in Egypt now. But they'll be in Paris in May."

"That's jolly for Jacqueline and her mother," remarked West, with an effort to be interested.

Aylward said: "I hear from P. J. every two weeks. He's a happy man, West."

"That's fine," said the boy cordially.

"Yes, it is fine. We're very close, P. J. and I. I miss him. Well, he's married and it's all right, of course. She's made old P. J. happy; that's the main point. But it's devilishly lonely, sometimes. I go up to Ardres Farm every month. Then I write to P. J. about the work there."

"Oh," said West, "how is it coming along?"

"They're working indoors, of course. The house will be very handsome and very comfortable. As soon as the ground thaws they'll go on with their wall building and grading. Lord, it's a lonely landscape in winter, West."

"I suppose so."

"It is. That endless death-white pall over everything! Well, there are those who like it, I suppose. Give me spring, and a good trout-stream; or autumn, and a good woodcock covert. That was fine shooting at Ardres Farm. We certainly did have a good time there, didn't we, West?"

"We certainly did," said the boy.

After a silence: "But—who on earth ever could foresee that P. J. was going to find in such a place the only woman he ever would have married?" said Aylward, rather sadly.

He added: "Not that I don't admire her. Anne is a fine woman; she is, indeed. And I can see, now,

why such a woman is precisely what would be most fatal to P. J.—or, perhaps, fatal is not quite the word."

The boy laughed and Aylward smiled slightly.

"Better not laugh, West; you'll marry one of these days."

"I'm not inclined to."

"No? Well, I've never been inclined to, either. No. I like to feel free to get into a dinner-jacket and pumps and consider what to do with the evening."

"So do I," smiled West.

"Instead of having to consult some strange female," added Aylward.

They both laughed.

"Well," said the elder man, "marriage is for those who like it; but I never supposed P. J. would. No, I never dreamed of such a thing. I miss him. Well, he's got a wife and daughter, now. He writes that Jacqueline is growing up very fast—quite a young lady already. They've got a governess to travel with her—some financially shattered duchess or queen—I don't recollect. P. J. says Jacqueline is growing to be very pretty. He's very crazy about that child."

Aylward got up, wandered about looking at the place, walked into the studio and inspected West's work; sauntered out again, picked up hat and stick, and suffered West to aid him with his fur-lined coat.

"Maybe," he said, "P. J. will be back by autumn and then we'll have another shooting party at Ardres Farm."

CHAPTER XXV

But Connor did not return either that spring or summer or the following autumn. There was no shooting party at Ardres Farm. Aylward would not go up to shoot alone for any length of time, although urged by letter and cable from Paris, where the Connors now were established for another year.

He did go to inspect the work in progress, however, and he reported conditions by letter to Connor. But he had only one day's shooting in the alders; and, although the cock were plentiful and sport excellent, he missed his old companion too keenly, and he went away next day out of sheer loneliness.

West was sketching at Provincetown that summer and autumn, for he had designs on the winter Academy.

His, now, was an established reputation among illustrators. Editors were sending him better manuscripts and offering better compensation. "Critics" were becoming more ill-natured.

In December he went to the West Indies with his father and mother, taking nearly a ton of painting paraphernalia with him. The riotous tropical colour intoxicated him and he plunged into aquarelle and oil with delirious abandon.

In early March he returned alone to New York, lugging his plunder—stacks of canvases ablaze with colour; reams of aquarelles; strapped books bursting with drawings.

In late March he made a cut-throat bargain with a bandit who ran an art gallery near Fifth Avenue, and gave his first exhibition.

The "critics," too stupid to know whether his work was good or bad, played safe and damned everything. He sold a dozen studies—and still owed the bandit for the rent of the gallery, and remained in debt to his frame-maker and to the gentleman who furnished the van, both ways.

It's a humming era for art in America. A hundred years of dilution and pollution! But the dregs are settling now, fixing the intellectual level of a pitiable people.

One day in June, returning from the lawn-clipped, hedge-clipped and featureless paternal villa in the Berkshires, he met Roger Aylward, also returning from a lonely fishing trip in the Deerfield Valley; and they lunched together on the train and played a game of chess together in the club car.

"There's not much fun in fishing alone," remarked Aylward; "I got fed up in Canada first—lost interest. You see when you're accustomed to a companion like P. J.——"

After another silence: "Did you ever write to Jacqueline, West?"

"No," admitted West, ashamed.

"I thought you wouldn't. The healthy young don't write letters. No. Well, it will be two years this autumn. Two years since P. J. and you and I dusted those woodcock at Ardres Farm. Oh, lord!"

West said uncomfortably: "I ought to have written.

It's too late now—like writing to a stranger, almost . . . I'm ashamed to write."

"Jacqueline would be glad to hear from you," remarked the elder man, lighting a cigar.

"Probably she's forgotten me and she'd have to make an effort to remember who it was writing her," muttered West. There was hypocrisy in what he said. Male vanity never believes it can be forgotten.

"In every letter from P. J.," said Aylward, "there's a postscript from Jacqueline. And every postscript contains an inquiry concerning you."

The young fellow flushed. "How rotten of me," he said; "I ought to have written to the child." For he still thought of her as scarcely mature when he thought of her at all—always picturing her as he remembered her—a slim, thin-armed, thin-legged, golden thing, all ardour and brown eyes——

If he'd seen the photograph of her that Connor sent to Roger Aylward he'd not have recognized Jacqueline Ardres.

But Aylward didn't carry it around with him, and West was not very attentive to his description of it, and his ideas of Jacqueline remained unaltered except for the hazy and indistinct film with which old man Time had tinted and dimmed her memory in the young man's mind.

It was not until the first of September that West again encountered Roger Aylward. They met on Fifth Avenue one golden morning, the younger man walking blithely downtown to his studio; the other exercising himself northward, his club the ultimate goal.

Aylward's colour was bright, his eye clear, and he

seemed unusually animated and vigorous. The reason for his lively gait and colour became apparent with his first words.

"P. J. and family sail on Saturday," he announced, "and I'm devilish glad to hear it!"

"On Saturday next?"

"They are; P. J., wife and kiddie. And I tell you, West, I'm glad those two years are ended. If he'd stayed another year I'd have gone over. I have been incredibly bored."

"Are they coming to New York?" inquired West guiltily.

"They'll stay here a day or two. P. J.'s house is always running in clockwork order. But he writes that he wants to go up to Ardres Farm as soon as possible. He wishes me to go up now—be there before he arrives—scout about and see what the prospects are for cock and grouse and pheasant——"

"Are there pheasant, too?" asked West. But his uneasy thought was still on Jacqueline.

"Yes; P. J.'s head keeper has turned out several thousand Chinese. The hedges and grain are full of them. I was up there in August and I kept putting them up all over the place."

"How is the place—finished?" inquired West, more and more uneasy.

"Entirely. It's a mighty pretty place, now," said Aylward. "There's a housekeeper there and servants, and there are farm hands and gamekeepers and patrols—really quite a miniature establishment—quite delightful—and it has plenty of old-fashioned charm to it, too—very simple, you know. By the way, I have P. J.'s letter in my pocket——"

He fumbled for it: "There's a message in it for you——"

He found the letter; they stepped back to the semi-privacy of a portico, and Aylward, searching the pages, found what he was looking for and read aloud:

". . . And God bless us, Roger, it's a grand time we'll have, what with dusting the woodcock and grouse and pheasant and strolling over the place. . . . Do you remember that rainy day on Windy Pond? I was nearly drowned with the rain; I was that. But we had sport. They were grand days, Roger; they were so! . . . And they'll come again, never fear. They'll come this next October. But in September we'll just enjoy the place and scout around and make all ready to salute the first long-bill that flushes out of those blessed alders. We will so.

"And Anne and I have written to a few friends to come up to Ardres Farm for September; but we don't want too many there when we're shooting. No! And now this is what I'd say: you're to tell West Halton that he's expected at Ardres Farm, and that we'll never take no for an answer.

"When you go up you'll take him with you—him and his paint-box, not forgetting his gun, either. Mind, now, for he's a good lad and I like him, and his father is a friend like none other, only yourself, Roger——"

Aylward paused, scanned the heavily written page in silence; then:

"Here's Jacqueline's postscript," he said, and read it to West:

"Tell Mr. Halton please to come. I'm dying to see our house again and I'd like to have him there when we arrive."

He folded the letter and looked at West. "Well?" he inquired smilingly. "You have your orders. Will you obey them?"

"It's extremely kind of Mr. Connor——" he hesitated.

"Yes," said Aylward, "it's friendly. They're friendly people. You know there aren't so very many friendly folk in the world. Did you know that?"

"It's mighty nice of them. I'm almost ashamed to go——"

"You come along with me on Saturday," he said, patting the young fellow's shoulder. "Ten twelve; I'll have your tickets. Be at the gate by ten."

"But I'm working up some West Indian stuff——"

"There are plenty of rooms for you to work in up there, West. Bring whatever you like; only don't forget your gun. Come, my boy; don't hurt your father's loyal friend."

"All right."

They shook hands and parted, West continuing his way downtown.

He had not gone a dozen steps before he was sorry for his decision. For now, in the imminence of meeting Jacqueline, that indefinable irritation, long dormant, began to possess him again. He had forgotten what it felt like, but he recognized it instantly.

From what it arose he had never analysed—whether from vague resentment because of his familiarities with a girl of her class, or because he instinctively resented letting himself go with any girl of any class—or whether its origin was obscurer still—some occult premonition, perhaps—some uneasy fundamental instinct.

Because, deep within him, he knew, now, that not only had he no desire to meet this girl again, but he was even conscious of a sort of aversion to such an encounter. A sort of indefinable dread of her interference in the sort of life he was choosing to live—in the isolated freedom of it and uninterrupted gratification of individualism—was growing stronger in his mind.

He wanted no extraneous demands on him; would tolerate no intrusion upon his mind or his emotions.

For, as he remembered Jacqueline, she had asked too much of him—not with intention; she was not that sort of nuisance; but her mere propinquity had stirred him mentally and emotionally; stimulated, interfered, invaded, disorganized self-centred method and measured intention.

Had it been merely the ignoble emotion evoked by such a girl as Tanya, he now would have dealt with it coolly and mercilessly. Every austere and chaste inclination in him chilled at that degrading memory. And, thinking of Tanya, he permitted himself the vanity of contempt—alas!—not self-contempt.

No; what disturbed him about Jacqueline was her potentiality for disturbing him; interfering with intention; with liberty of choice; usurping thought; invading his mind and filling spaces there in spite of him—spaces he desired to reserve for other more important and personal matters.

There *was* an undeniable charm about Jacqueline Ardres—more charm, perhaps, of mind than of personality. Yet he remembered that her personality had engaged him, too—the essential honesty of her. And there was a tenderness to her which also had infected him—rather shamefully. He remembered. And once—

when he was off his guard—and she, not knowing how to guard—at passionate disadvantage——

He reddened, partly with annoyance.

As he entered his studio, memory, now resurgent, was flooding him with all this annoying debris again—recollection of her inborn gaiety of soul, her laughter, her impulsive caress, her swift ardour, the fiery revulsion from passion to violence—the blow she had struck him—the whirlwind punishment of Tanya——

"Confound it," he thought, "is all that going to be let loose on me again?"

The very thought made him mad. Two models—inoffensive old men—were seated in the hall awaiting him. He glared at them.

And all that morning he scowled over his drawing, already upset by the forewarning of the advent of this annoying girl who really had no place in his career; no reason for being involved in it, no claim on him, no warrant for intrusion.

There is no selfishness like exclusive self-absorption in one's own career. Therein lies an ever-living danger to attainment. Age hardens self-absorption to a habit until it becomes encrusted like an armoured casing out of which there is no longer any growth. Only the really great never remain indifferent and unapproachable; only they never lose contact with the broad humanities.

There was that in this young man's face which threatened ultimate disaster to attainment: the very purity of the unmarred face—the boyish curve of cheek and throat—the clear blue austerity of eyes—eyes of a crusader—eyes without reproach—eyes of Galahad—eyes that should not always remain aloof, not always

coldly clear, lest they become the eyes of a fanatic—lest no warmth melt them—no impulse brighten, no emotion dim; nothing of the broader humanities cloud them with the joys and sorrows of his imperfect fellowmen.

As the days passed and Saturday approached, the young fellow became more and more disgusted at the prospect before him.

For by this time he had evolved out of oblivion a very definite memory and picture of Jacqueline Ardres. This memory comprehended and included every hour of their acquaintance. He recalled the first moment that he laid eyes on the laughing, ragged child driving her white horse along the alders. He remembered that sudden impulse on the stairs, when he had kissed this musty smelling and dingy little creature. He recollected every hour through every day down to that last advent, when she appeared in clean and attractive clothes —with presumably a cleaner person underneath—still hot-faced and brilliant-eyed from her victorious battle with Tanya Larisch.

"Hang it all," he thought bitterly, "I was a fool to let her into my life again. And I'm an ass if ever I let her stir me up."

However, back of it all was the tranquillity of certainty; because, concerning two fundamentals, he was convinced: first, that marriage absolutely was not to be considered in his career; second, that under any circumstances a girl of Jacqueline's origin could never be considered as the remotest of possibilities for him.

There is no snob like a conscientious one.

CHAPTER XXVI

ROGER AYLWARD'S car, which had been sent to Ardres Farm a day in advance, met them at the flag station. A Ford truck also waited there for their luggage—considerable in West's case. For there was a field easel; piles of corded canvases; heavy boxes full of oil-colours; a pair of guns; five hundred shells; and two suit-cases and a trunk full of the highly specialized apparel with which modern masculine youth decorates its fastidious exterior.

"Good heavens," said Aylward mildly, "did you think this was to be a safari, West?"

The young man's smile was slightly embarrassed. He himself did not quite understand why he had so fastidiously equipped himself with clothes. Surely it could not have been for any prospective effect upon a girl whom he did not desire either to interest or encourage.

Certainly there could have been no conscious plan to fascinate with male plumage so inconsiderable a female as little Jacqueline Ardres.

Probably these matters are mechanical in the male—an involuntary assumption of gala dress—as when the cock-pheasant preens its gorgeous quills and steps high before the humble hen; and the male trout, through no knowledge, effort, or intent of his own, finds himself all blazing in new, jewelled clothes.

"This looks like a brand-new road," said West, as they sped smoothly northward.

"It is," nodded Aylward.

"A state road?"

"Oh, no; one of P. J.'s."

"Good heavens," said West, "it's twenty miles long if it goes all the way to Ardres Farm."

"It goes all the way," nodded Aylward carelessly.

Some faint idea of the enormous wealth and power of P. J. Connor for the first time filtered through West's comprehension in terms of figures. He lay back in the comfortable car watching woods and alders as they sped by. Green barriers streaming past on either hand dazzled him with running flashes of fire from the afternoon sun.

Butterflies whirled away, blown in every direction by the breeze of their passing car; a tremulous unbroken sheet of goldenrod bordered the new highway, undulating like two broad golden ribbons along the alders' edge.

As they approached the south side of the hill where the farm stood Aylward told his chauffeur to drive more slowly.

And now West began to see more of Connor's work —a mile of nine-foot masonry wall on the left; a vista between double rows of lindens already of five-inch calibre; then a small stone house built into the wall, and a service gate, between the grilles of which stretched the service road bordered by old-fashioned flowers.

"Calvin Rand, superintendent, lives there," remarked Aylward.

There was more wall, then three stone cottages set

among young trees and a riot of flowers; and beyond, two water towers of stone and other low buildings with high-pitched slate roofs and gilt weather-vanes atop.

"Water, heat, and electric plant," said Aylward briefly.

More wall; then an entrance gate through which a blue stone road left the macadam, curving in a semi-circle to the westward and emerging through the twin of the first gate.

But the car stopped at a white pillared portico, and a smiling Japanese opened the door and trotted down the steps to welcome them.

West got out and gazed around at the lawn and the flowers; at the circular pool which spouted water; at the agreeable massed planting of evergreens and the old-time border beds of flowers.

Then he looked up at the house. It was very handsome and neat, and had been carried out logically along its old dignified lines—the older wing, as before, containing the kitchen, but this now had been moved to the other side; a servants' dining and sitting-room replaced the old sitting-room; the part of the building dating from 1800 was now exclusively the master's quarters; and here was a handsome but very simple living-room, giving on lawn and garden, and a pillared veranda level with the grass.

"This is astonishing," said West, walking across the lawn with Aylward.

"P. J. is always that," returned the other, with a smile which pride and devotion and tenderness made oddly radiant in the worn face of a middle-aged man.

The basin was a simple affair about thirty feet in diameter; a jet spouted water from the centre; enormous

and very fat goldfish wiggled about in transparent depths.

In the border beds some perennials were out of bloom—only a few larkspurs and hollyhocks were left; but thickets of lilies bloomed fragrantly; foxgloves, late phlox, and great sheaves of lilac-tinted and perfumed butterfly-bush pushed their spikes as high as the wall. Pansies, ageratum, candytuft, portulaca bordered everything. Some beds were masses of calendula, orange sunflower, orange-tinted dahlias, and snow-white dwarf phlox.

Back of these wide rambling beds of flowers were massed hemlock, arbor vitae, retinospera, and Mugha pine. Farther behind the tall shafts of promising spruce rose.

The sky was blue, the air still. Long bars of ruddy sunshine fell athwart the trees and lay between blue shadows across the velvet turf.

And everywhere birds were flying; but not many among them ventured on any sunset music; robins and cat-birds came to the water; flickers probed for angle-worms on the lawn; flights of goldfinches undulated from thicket to thicket where weeds stood unshorn; the faint, cheerful murmur of cedar-birds came from the taller trees. Somewhere a chickadee made remarks; and a downy woodpecker was busy on a laurel-leaved willow by the gate.

"This is charming," said West in a low voice, trying in his memory to reconstruct this hill-top as he remembered it—a shabby, weedy place of scrub, fallow, and rotting fences, with buckwheat stubble beyond.

It seemed a relief to gaze out over the familiar monotony of miles of alders. Far to the north-west,

like a bank of amethyst mist, remembered hills bordered the horizon. Except for the low eminence in the north-east, where sunlight struck windows on the Verril Farm, all else was a vast waste of grey-green bushes and patches of woodland.

Over them now a marsh-harrier was sailing, stopping short in mid-air to hover, then sailing leisurely and low; and West could see the white spot glimmer just above the base of his broad tail.

"P. J. has made a beautiful place of this," said the young fellow. "I never supposed there were such latent possibilities here; did you?"

"Whatever is in anything," said Aylward, "P. J. gets out of it if he cares to. He *sees* where we merely *look*. That's what, in business, we call 'vision.' In statesmanship, too; in every creative and constructive art, profession and business that is what counts most of all—vision."

"A sort of intuition."

"Partly; partly imagination. Nothing in business is any good without imagination as an ingredient. A clear brain, energy, imagination—the combination is called vision. Maybe, in some men—like P. J.—there's a—perhaps just a tinge of clairvoyance. I sometimes have thought so—for example, in that Congressional investigation of—but you wouldn't remember."

They turned and walked slowly over the velvet turf toward the house.

Aylward spoke in a hushed tone as though thinking aloud: "That's what's always comforted me about the woman he married. P. J. never would make a mistake. He had the vision to see what Anne Ardres was. We just looked at her—and we saw what we saw—

nothing extraordinary—no—only a ruddy-haired woman cooking—and two unusually blue eyes that met yours when she spoke. No; I haven't ever worried about the choice he made. But it's been—rather lonely."

They came to the paved veranda which was level with the grass, and seemed part of the garden itself.

A maid opened glass doors and invited them to their rooms.

There was no wall-paper in the house; only old-time panels painted cream-white; and, in the living-room, panels of unstained oak and black cherry from old trees out in the Ardres woods.

West, in a dinner-jacket—and smiling at the idea of it on the Ardres Farm—said to Aylward: "A few pictures wouldn't harm these walls."

"I believe you are to paint the family portraits," said Aylward, seriously.

The young man reddened with surprise and a sense of his own shortcomings: "Who told you that?" he asked.

"It was in one of Jacqueline's postscripts. If," he added, smilingly, "Jacqueline really resembles the photograph she sent me from Paris, your job won't be so very unpleasant, West."

"I suppose she's changed considerably. Of course, I picture her as she was——"

"No; she hasn't changed much. Only she's *more* so—you know—filled in according to plan. She hadn't her full growth when we were here before. She was rather a skinny child—you remember?"

"Yes."

"Rather inclined to be grubby, too, if you ask me,"

added the elder man. "Well, she and Anne, too, were transfigured at the wedding. I really was astonished, West. But, of course, it was clothes, then. Now I fancy *they* themselves have improved. Or the French photographer flatters them outrageously."

"Mrs. Connor, too?"

"Rather. She's a very handsome woman—if you believe that photographer. Remarkably fine-looking. And maybe she really is; because P. J.'s own photograph is exactly like him—the same old P. J. However, they don't touch up men's pictures, do they, West?"

"Indeed, they do," said the younger man, laughing. "Comparatively few men like to be photographed at all; but I understand that those who do are very fussy."

They strolled out to the garden veranda. A delicate yellow light lay over the world. In the primrose clarity night-hawks were soaring and swooping overhead, and their short, dry cry came with varying distinctness through approaching twilight.

A nice little Japanese butler came to announce dinner. They went in.

Once during the irreproachable meal Aylward whispered to West:

"Oh, for the johnny-cake! But maybe *she'll* show these people how when she arrives. I think so—knowing P. J.'s tastes."

After dinner, by discreetly shaded *electric* light in the living-room, Aylward drew from his breast pocket the photographs and handed them to West.

He said: "P. J. hasn't changed. Mrs. Connor certainly is handsome. Very. I can see she has

changed." He passed back the two photographs; took the third closer to the light and stood examining it in silence.

Aylward was quite right; Jacqueline had merely filled in according to the plan upon which God had constructed her.

West seated himself under the lamp to consider the picture.

If Jacqueline really had become a facsimile of this photograph she was scarcely the girl he had known. No; not that girl. Scarcely like any type of girl he could remember knowing—or even seeing. An unusual type. A rather clever photograph, too. Clever man to so bring out the glowing vitality—so cleverly to reveal the radiance of an unsmiling face—or was it smiling faintly?—or was it that inward radiance he now and suddenly remembered?

The throat and shoulders and arms were slender but full. Seemed quite flawless, he thought. It seemed that she had bobbed her hair. A girl with such a head, so shaped and poised, could, of course, venture to wear a mass of curls all over it. Few heads could stand it; few faces could dispense with the merciful shadow, contour, and relief of properly arranged hair. He hadn't remembered that Jacqueline's head was so symmetrical. Or that her upper lip was so short and curly. He'd forgotten about these proportions—about the modelling of the nose and nostrils. Her eyes always had been rather lovely. And—were those the rough, water-reddened and uncared-for little hands?

He lifted his eyes to hers, and felt a vague shock as though her own had consciously returned the glance.

To Aylward he returned the photograph, saying

that it resembled very much the girl he remembered and that she had grown exceedingly pretty.

Afterwards, in bed, he realized that the word might have been "beautiful" instead of pretty. Then a sort of strange perversion assailed him with the hope that she was not as beautiful as her picture. Perhaps it was born of that vague, latent resentment—or of some strange male inhibition—such as the willingness not to be stirred up, burdened, involved with anything so vital and significant that he could neither ignore it nor dare abandon it to the hazards of an appreciative and predatory world.

Far away in the alders a whip-poor-will's husky call came through darkness. He turned his head on the pillow and saw the September moon above the woods.

For a long while he lay awake, just conscious of formless apprehension. And fell asleep with the breathless call of a whip-poor-will in his ears.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONNOR'S telegram to Aylward said that they were motoring through from New York and could not tell what time they might reach Ardres Farm, but would be there for dinner, anyway.

Aylward got it that morning over the telephone from Drifting River. He notified the butler and went on through the house and out across the lawn where he saw West sitting on a stone bench by the pool, apparently contemplating the goldfish.

"They're on their way," said Aylward with happy brevity.

West looked up as though slightly startled.

"They're motoring through," added Aylward; "probably arrive late this afternoon. Well, I'm devilish glad. Two years, Lord!"

He was in knickers and carried a light brush-gun—a habit when scouting, in case of vermin.

After a silence: "I'm going to walk off my excitement," said Aylward, smiling. "Come on, West; you don't seem to be painting much these days——"

"Go ahead; I'll look you up if I feel energetic," said the young fellow.

"Well, I'll tell you where I'll be—the other side of Windy Pond. I've been scouting the willows; there are at least six coveys of grouse in that district. The black duck nested in these, too, and their families are all over the lake. You ought to see them, West—fine,

big plump duck they are already. As for woodcock, the natives are not particularly plentiful along there, but there are lots in the alders everywhere. I'm wondering whether these cocky Chinese pheasant interfere at all with our ruffled grouse. What do you think?"

West had no ideas on the subject.

Aylward went on a few steps, turned partly: "Did you take Jacqueline's photograph out of my room?"

"I'm sorry. I wanted to look at the clever photograph again. I'll go up now and put it back on your dresser——"

"It's all right. She'll give me another——"

He continued on toward the alders, letting himself out of the garden through a little door in the wall. West, still slightly flushed, returned to his study of the goldfish.

He wasn't thinking about them, however. Not even about the photograph. He was thinking about his mother. A sort of curious unease possessed these thoughts, which wavered around his mother sometimes, sometimes around the girl whose photograph he had rather frequently abstracted from the abode of Mr. Aylward.

Never before had he thought of his mother and this girl in juxtaposition. It merely had been one of those things that never had entered his mind.

It was odd, too, that he did not think of her in juxtaposition with himself; that was a sort of formless, indistinct idea which had scarcely attained the importance of a thought. But somehow or other he had begun to associate Jacqueline and his mother in his mind—vaguely, yet uneasily—and was gradually obsessed by

a kind of indefinable apprehension regarding this imaginary propinquity.

As for his larcenous behaviour in regard to the photograph, he had always, hitherto, returned it as surreptitiously as he purloined it. . . . Had no thought of retaining it on his own dresser—no particular wish to do so, he supposed. Until this morning, when he decided to let it remain leaning against his shaving-glass. No definite idea of permanent robbery. But he thought he'd leave it there.

Also—irrelevantly—Aylward was wrong. He had made some sketches. Some. . . . Out on the road the shimmering vistas of golden-rod had thrilled and challenged him. Half a mile down toward Drifting River he had pitched his easel by a crumbling stone wall edging the alders on the east side of the road, which did not belong to the Ardres Farm estate.

And there, just by the alder-shaded wall, he had met with a disquieting adventure.

It began by a girl coming out of the alders and leaping over the wall. Recognition was mutual—not effusive on his part.

But Tanya Larisch was enchanted—a lithe, careless, graceful creature still, with an added brilliancy of colour and a full-lipped, reckless smile that was more audacious than he remembered.

The young man was polite; the girl warmly receptive. Sometimes she leaned back against the wall, sometimes vaulted up and sat on it, swinging her legs; or came behind him to look at his sketch; or sauntered at hazard, hands on hips—always in lithe, nervous motion, always in every movement a velvet-eyed provocation.

"How long will you be up here?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"I guess they won't want me to help," she said, laughing, "not with all those fancy people and Japanese."

He went on painting, coolly aware that never again could there ever be any attraction for him in this girl—not if she were the last girl left on earth.

Nor did his indifference seem to arise from any innate austerity; it was simply that all interest in her, or any other woman, had become non-existent—and rather suddenly.

Because of this phenomenon he had not been aware until he saw Tanya this time.

And recollected with cold and stern aversion his degradation . . . and seemed, all at once, to comprehend he would remain incurious, unresponsive, indifferent about any other woman also—aloof without effort and without involving any of the particular principles or beliefs he laboured under. . . . *Any* woman. . . . Unless——

He didn't care for Tanya's light touch on his shoulder and stood up to avoid further contact.

"I guess you've got a new sweetheart since I last saw you," she said smilingly, "haven't you?"

"Oh, about a dozen. I'm collecting a zenana."

"A—what?"

"A harem."

At that she threw back her head and fairly rippled with laughter.

"I'd like to belong," she said. "Do you want another?"

"No; it's full, and there's a long waiting list, Tanya."

She thought that exceedingly funny, and was inclined to lean against his shoulder in her mirth, but he discouraged further contact by resuming his sketch.

Toward noon he gathered up his traps with a dry good-bye. She loitered near and reminded him that two years was a long time between kisses.

"Nothing like that," he said pleasantly.

"Why?"

He shrugged, strapped his folding easel, put a clamp over two wet canvases and corks between them.

"Don't you want me for a sweetheart any more?" she asked teasingly.

"I'm too busy."

"Well, you can walk down the road at night——"

"No; I'm through, Tanya."

"Through with me? Why? Wasn't I nice to you?"

"Very. Don't let's discuss that. I'm a guest at Ardres Farm and the family return to-night. You're not on friendly terms with them and I can't be seen with you. So good-bye——"

He nodded, held out his hand, and was sorry, because she was inclined to retain it.

She was still standing there when he started to ascend the hill. He did not look back again.

All that happened on the second day of his arrival at Ardres Farm. The following day, supposing that the girl understood and would keep clear of him, he pitched his easel on the same spot to finish the two sketches.

Tanya appeared; and he had rather a disagreeable time with her—even painful—for the girl unexpectedly

dissolved into tears and he was ashamed to have anybody see them on the road, and made her withdraw with him into the alders.

Here was a most annoying scene enacted—for it seemed that the girl had not by any means forgotten him, and had naïvely succumbed to the former fascination as soon as she saw him.

Anger, impatience, contempt; then self-contempt, chagrin, pity, all seized upon the young fellow and rent him by turns.

No woman ever was argued with to any purpose, but he argued with her. No woman of any kind ever yet has *understood* why she might not have her way. And Tanya did not understand even when tearfully convinced that she wasn't going to have it.

"You're very cruel," she said, sobbing. "If you knew what my life is like—the awful loneliness——"

A picture of Nick Larisch's shanty in the winter woods followed, and West found the picture familiar. Yet it probably was true enough. And the girl said she never had met any man of his sort since he had left. Said she couldn't ever stand the men she used to find amusing in Drifting River. Asked him to be a little kind to her and see her once or twice while he was here.

But he made an end of it—or thought he did—considering a short shrift the kindest.

When he emerged from the alders where she had flung herself down to weep distressingly on the grass, he swore, as he buckled up his easel, that he'd had enough of golden-rod and Tanya Larisch.

That's why he kept away from the road and did comparatively little painting for a day or two.

Also, to his disgusted relief, meeting the grass-widow, Tessie Wessels, and stopping for a modicum of polite gossip, which is the custom of the country, he learned about several matters of local interest.

"H'aint you seen Tanya yet?" Mrs. Wessels had inquired archly. "I kinda 's'picioned you was sweet on her."

And, as West professed grave surprise at any such conjecture:

"Waal," said Tessie, "Ross Chase got her."

"What?" he said sharply.

"Ross Chase got her," repeated the grass-widow. "She's his girl, she is. Not that they don't say she's been other men's, too. That's the talk down to the village, but I dunno."

An unpleasant mental picture of Chase left a slight frown on West's face.

"He's a nawful man," said Tessie, in a hushed voice. "He's crool an' he's cunning, too—him and that Catlin—the two of 'em—*they* ain't men! Naw, they ain't. They're just too low for even annermals. 'N' I hope God punishes them as they deserve—what with their crool ways an' good-for-nothin' habits—thievin', drinkin', an' allus after women——"

"Why on earth doesn't the village put him in jail or run him out of the region?" asked West.

"They're scared. Everyone's scared of Ross Chase. Why, he'd just as soon shoot your cows or colts or fire your barn—or mebbe kick you to death like he did once to a poor Polack—or so they tell. I dunno what to think, but I don't want Ross Chase hangin' around my skirts after dark nor at any other time."

"If P. J. Connor ever comes here to live," remarked

West, "he'll see that men like Chase are under control. Perhaps he'll take up the matter, anyway. He's that kind of man, Mrs. Wessels."

The wound to his vanity, oddly enough, softened him toward Tanya, although he cared nothing about the girl and it was, of course, merely vanity that was pricked.

Even with her red mouth marred with lies—somehow West knew that the girl did like him, was really happy to see him once more—pathetically pleased—and that her perhaps easily aroused emotion had been genuine enough.

It was rather horrible to think of her as the prey of Ross Chase—a disconcerting and repulsive affair, if indeed it were true.

But, he thought, these people are malicious gossips. It may be no more true of that beast, Chase, than it was of me.

He did not go again to paint golden-rod. But the night before, strolling on the road by moonlight, the girl, who evidently had been waiting for him, came from the shelter of some maples and accosted him so pitifully that he stopped and tried kindly again to make her understand.

Then, almost before they had exchanged a dozen words, they heard somebody walking in the misty, moonlit alders—and Tanya turned like a flash and ran back toward the clump of maples. Here a pool of shade spread, impenetrable, ghostly with night mist.

Once, turning to look back, West thought he saw

a man enter the shadows. Something moved, anyway. After a moment, listening and gazing, he turned and sauntered on toward Ardres Farm.

Of all these things was West thinking as he sat on the stone bench by the pool and looked down at the fat goldfish swimming in crystalline depths.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE sound of footsteps in the dark alders, the sudden flight of Tanya into the maple shadow, then a distant glimpse of something moving—a man, perhaps—that had been his last impression of that moonlit solitude.

But for Tanya it was the beginning of the strangest thing in the world.

Veiled by the shadows of the maples, she leaned breathlessly against a tree and peered out at the road. Distantly in the foggy moonlight she could still see West, but as he started to ascend the hill his retreating form became indistinct, fading, vanishing into darkness.

And all the while the girl was listening, waiting for the sound of footfalls on the dried leaves among the alders.

Presently the stealthy sound came to her ears again —a light, firm tread very near. She turned her head and looked across the road.

Suddenly Ross Chase stepped cautiously from the alders and stood knee-deep in golden-rod, the moon's lustre white on his colourless face and glimmering along the barrels of his gun.

He looked down the dim road, then up it. Then, in a voice as colourless as his visage:

"Where be you, Tanya?"

"Here!"

He came, lightly moving, the gun cradled in the hollow of his left arm—came straight to the maple against which she was leaning.

"Who was here?" he asked.

"Nobody."

After a silence: "You liar," he said, without accent.

She laughed: "You're always trying to trap me. Who do you think was here? Dent Catlin?"

There was something savage about his silence.

"Well, who else, then?" she asked disdainfully.

He made no direct answer, but after a moment he said slowly:

"I been hearing things."

"Well," she laughed, "you prick up your big ears and listen hard, and you'll hear a lot of things, Ross Chase."

"Tessie seen you," he said.

"Who?"

"Tessie Wessels."

"Saw me do *what?*"

"Say you hangin' around that young artist feller up to Ardres place."

"She's a liar," retorted Tanya tranquilly.

"That so?"

"Yes, that's so."

"Y'ain't seen him?"

"Certainly I saw him. So's everybody else. Anyone can see him if they want to; he's always around making pictures."

Chase said in a colourless voice: "You start foolin' with him and I'll kick your ribs in." He laid one great hand on her shoulder, slowly closed it until she wrenched herself away.

"You act like a fool, Ross Chase!" she said. "You touch me again, and I'll tell pa."

"Waal, you tell Nick if he opens his mouth at me I'll pinch him dead like I pinch a pa'tridge. I'll jest take his neck like this——"

She jerked away violently and stepped back: "You keep your paws off me," she said, "or I'll quit you right now!"

"How fur d'yeh think yeh'll get, Tanya?"

Her angry eyes involuntarily rested on his gun.

"Oh, shut your head," she said sullenly.

As he said nothing: "Well," she added, "you wanted I should meet you. What's going on—a party?"

"Yeh."

"Where?"

"Up to Welch Verril's."

"Oh. Someone been running hooch?"

"Yeh."

He stood a moment revolving the quid in his grim jaws, then spat it out and took her by the arm. "We better be goin' along," he remarked.

Tanya seemed reluctant, but suffered him to conduct her across the road.

There was a shorter cut to the Verril Farm through the alders on the east side of the road—a runway made by deer and cattle.

For a long while Tanya did not speak at all; then something came into her mind, and her left arm which had been dangling listlessly in his light grasp doubled up so that her hand rested on his.

"You sell those birds?" she asked, almost caressingly.

"Yeh."

"Well, then?"

"Hey?"

"Well, then," she repeated gaily, "you know what you promised, Ross."

"Yeh; I can let yeh have ten dollars."

"When?"

"Now."

"Give it to me, Ross."

They halted; he shoved one huge hand into his trousers pocket and fished out a small, matted wad of dirty dollar bills. He seemed able to see in the dark out of his pale eyes; he disentangled the bills, sorted out ten of them, passed them to Tanya.

The girl turned partly away, pulled up her skirt, and pushed the money into her stocking. Then she took Chase's arm.

"Does anybody know you and Dent Catlin are shooting out of season?" she asked coolly.

"Naw. 'Less that Bill Humphrey suspicions us. You seen him lately, Tanya?"

"Yes, he was to the picture show Wednesday night."

"He'll be smellin' around, now," said Chase. "They's times when I'd like to let off both barrels into his innards. I feel like that—I'd give twenty-five dollars to do it just to see them innards o' his'n. A hell of a game protector! Yeh can't talk to him; he won't take nothin' to square it—the son of a slut!—like them State Troopers, jest sp'ilin' to get somethin' on to Dent an' me! By God, if I knowed where they kept their cows I'd hamstring a couple."

"You act crazy," said Tanya, disgusted. "You got

all you can attend to, what with market hunting and liming trout and running hooch. You better quit the rest of your deviltry—whenever anybody makes you mad you've got to get revenge and cripple their stock and start poisoning. That's no way to act. And don't think that folks in Drifting River forget about that poor Polack, or that peddler at Upper Falls, or——"

"Ah, hush your face," growled Chase, as they came out on to the open hill and saw two dimly lighted windows just ahead.

Welch Verril, haggard, dingy, and partly drunk, opened the door to Chase's low whistle signal. They went in.

The hunchback, Denton Catlin, yelled at them and flourished his long arms, clutching a fistful of dirty cards in one hand and a sloppy tumbler in the other. Welch Verril slipped back into the chair he had quitted, picked up his deck of cards, scanned them, flung them into the discard.

Pat McCann was there also, and Connie Verril, now nearly nineteen, her hands full of cards and a tumbler beside her.

Her sister Betty, a soiled, depraved-looking child of thirteen, sat near, just at Connie's elbow, watching everything out of eager, vicious eyes, but not permitted to play. However, from time to time she took up her sister's cigarette and puffed at it, or slyly possessed herself of the tumbler and sipped all she dared, furtively watching Andy Candler, the hired man.

"'Lo, Ross; 'lo, Tanya," said Andy, leering at them over his cards; "you got any money to-night?"

"You bet," replied Tanya.

"Chip in, then. Hey, Welch, you're bankin' here.

Give Ross and Tanya what chips they've a mind to pay for."

Tanya said to Chase: "You'll stake me, won't you, Ross?"

"You got ten, h'ain't yeh?"

"Yes, but I need that. I need shoes and——"

"All right. Where's that hooch you run in, Dent? Hey? In this here pitcher?"

He sniffed it, poured out a raw tumbler full, swallowed it, poured out another. Then he filled another tumbler full of water and bade Tanya flavour it as suited her. She used a few drops of the whisky. It required only a spoonful to excite the girl. With twice the amount she became unmanageable.

They made room at the table; Tanya dragged a chair into the circle. Chase also found a place, paid five dollars for Tanya's chips and five for his own.

"Let's begin with a jack," cried Connie Verril, freeing herself from Andy, who was mauling her.

"All right," laughed Tanya; then her eyes became curious, and she let them wander stealthily over Connie's body, the symmetry of which seemed slightly impaired.

When an opportunity offered she whispered to Chase: "Connie's caught. I *know* it."

Chase shrugged.

"You think it's Andy?" whispered the girl.

"I guesso—'r' somebody——"

Later Tanya whispered to him again: "They've been going together. He wants to marry her anyway. I guess it's all right, don't you, Ross?"

Chase, feeling the raw liquor now, took no pains to modify his voice:

"What the —— do I care?" he said. "I'd break the neck off any woman who told me I'd got to marry her——"

"Shut your jaw!" yelled the hunchback. "It's none o' your business what Connie Verril does——"

Andy, red with anger, swung around on Catlin:

"None o' yourn, neither, you crook-back shrimp! Quit your hollerin' or I'll hand yeh somethin' to make yeh holler good!"

Connie, enraged at the publicity given her condition, threw down her cards and glared from Chase to Catlin with flaming eyes.

"It's a lie!" she burst out. "You say it again, Ross Chase, and you'll get this tumbler in the face!"

"Who said it?" growled Chase.

"You—or Dent—I don't know who started it——"

"Nobody started nothin'," hiccupped Welch Verril, sorting his cards. He was very drunk; his sharp, grey-white features were patched with feverish colours under the cheek-bones, and he coughed continually.

Tanya looked at him. Catlin muttered in her ear: "Ketched it from his own cattle, mebbe."

Chase's pale gaze was on Catlin now.

"Say," he said, "you can quit pawin' my girl, Dent, or I'll put another bump on your back."

Catlin spat in derision. "Deal them cards," he retorted; "I ain't after your girl—if others is——"

"Hey?"

"If—others—*is*," repeated Catlin, in a drawling voice.

"That artist feller," added Connie. "What was you doin' in the bushes with him Wednesday noon——?"

"That's a lie; I never," retorted Tanya, flushing to

the roots of her hair under the pale glare of Ross Chase.

"Betsy saw you——"

Chase swung around on the child and stared into her precociously vicious eyes:

"You seen Tanya in the bushes with that feller?"

"If she says that she's a liar!" cried Tanya.

"Don't you dare to call me a liar!" the child flashed out. "I *did* see you and him in the alders, and you was crying and trying to make him kiss you and he didn't want nothing to do with you——"

Welch Verril reeled to his feet, seized Betsy and fairly threw her through the doorway. Then he bolted the door and stood swaying, ghastly, looking at the card players at the table.

"Women is women," he said, with drunken finality, "an' that's all about women to-night. Deal them cards, Ross."

Dawn whitened the dirty windows where the card players were still huddled about the table. Most of the chips were heaped in front of Ross Chase. Welch Verril had slipped from his chair and lay partly under the table.

Neither of the girls was drunk, but all the men were in varying degrees. The close air stank of alcohol and tobacco and sour, spilled food from the midnight "lunch" which had been indulged in.

Andy, very maudlin, was continually pawing Connie, who continued mechanically to push him away and play her cards against a luck that had remained steadily against her.

But she had pulled a fistful of bills out of her un-

conscious father's pockets, and her mind was concentrated on the heap of chips in front of Ross Chase.

The hunchback sang in a falsetto voice, continually, as he played his cards; and he cracked jests with Tanya and cracked his knuckles and knee-joints to amuse her, which set the girl into fits of laughter.

The first sunbeam found them still at it, drunker, more quarrelsome and boisterous; and a constantly diminishing pile of chips before Ross Chase, and increasing stacks, neatly arranged, in front of Tanya and Connie Verril.

The child, Betsy, came hammering and kicking at the door about eight o'clock; and Connie offered to let her in if she'd make a pot of hot coffee in the kitchen. As she returned from the bolted door she threw open the windows.

Chase's visage was a dead clay colour; his light-coloured eyes were ever roaming from Catlin to Tanya as their jests and laughter continued—always watching.

Once he said in drunken but measured tones: "Keep your hands off Tanya or I'll do for you both."

"Lord, but he's ugly," murmured Tanya to the angry hunchback; "you better look out what you do."

Betsy came again to kick at the door and shrill out her desire for admittance. Connie got up once more and unbolted the door, and the child came in carrying a heavy pot of coffee with difficulty.

As she passed Chase a scalding drop or two slopped over on his leg, and he turned with a tiger's roar and struck the child so that she staggered and dropped the coffee-pot, splashing his feet and knees with boiling coffee.

As he sprang from his chair at her he stumbled over Welch; fell crashing, dragging the table down with him; rose, a horror of colourless fury, and saw Connie trying to push her sister out of the room.

Catlin, too, staggered to his feet and picked up his gun, when he saw Chase was dragging a hunting-knife from his pocket and opening the six-inch clasp-blade.

"Run!" yelled Connie to Tanya; but Tanya, terrified, overturned her chair in Chase's way and fled around the table.

"Ross! Ross!" she cried. "What are you going to do? I haven't done anything——"

"You lying slut," said Chase hoarsely, "you have went with that artist fella an' now I'm agoing to fix you!"

The hunchback shouted to stay him, menacing him with levelled gun. Chase caught it, twisted it out of his hands and fired.

And Tanya fell.

"Oh! Oh!" screamed Connie. "He shot her!"

For a moment there was utter silence. Then suddenly the girl seized a chair, swung it on Chase, knocked him to his knees. Frantic, she struck him again and again as he tried to rise, beat him down, shrieking at every blow, until Catlin dragged her away.

"Look—look what yeh done!" he stammered, pointing at a stream of blood crawling from under the prostrate man.

But it welled up and spilled over the clasp-knife on which Chase had fallen, still clutched in the hand which was doubled under his body; and it had been driven deep into the abdominal wall.

Andy turned a horrified face and looked down at Tanya, where she lay under the window, with the morning sunlight brilliant across her face. The front of her blouse was drenched red. One shapely leg stuck out stiffly. Inside the stocking her wages bulged.

Some movement outside drew his sickened gaze.

It was the child, Betsy, running across the fields toward the distant village. He could hear her shrieking as she ran.

CHAPTER XXIX

SUNSHINE fell across the water of the pool and spun a web of rainbows around the falling spray. Where dusky iridescence covered the water a dragon-fly glittered. Through limpid depths of golden gloom fish wavered, their vermilion bodies glowing.

On the stone bench in the sun West still brooded, his chin propped on both hands. Vaguely troubled thoughts of his mother and of Jacqueline drifted through his mind, but these visions remained as remote and formless as wisps of mist rising at dawn.

Once, very far away, he heard a gunshot. He guessed, absently, that it might be Aylward shooting at some hawk. He did not know that the shot came from the Verril Farm. The passing signal for Tanya. But how was he to know?

So Tanya passed, lightly as a shred of milkweed silk drifting afield; lightly, aimlessly, as a cloud's shadow across the grass. He could not know. He was thinking of his mother and of this other girl speeding hither out of the oblivion of years. Out of those years of yesterday that, to Youth, were distant as æons which had never been. Might always have remained so. For the sympathetic ink with which Time had inscribed the chronicles of those days had faded, leaving a whitened page almost illegible.

But old man Time is a stealthy chemist.

Reaction began with the imminence of her return; faintly progressed, not alarmingly. It was the photograph that suddenly made it vivid—bit into the blank record like an etching. And all at once every hour, every word, every gesture, every step, the entire sequence from first sight to parting, became utterly clear in his mind.

How really had this girl ever affected him? Inhibition aside, had she, at any time, any moment, ever really meant anything to him? Anything more than diversion; the tolerance of sympathy; an hour's amusement?

He did not know. He could remember everything, now, except what he really had felt. It seemed so long ago. He had been so young, two years ago.

Thinking about it now he guessed that he had been more or less of a brute. He seemed to recollect that once she had called him a pig. No doubt he was one.

One matter bothered him; if Jacqueline Ardres ever had resembled the photograph in Aylward's dresser, how could even a pig of a boy have been brutal to her? Or indifferent? Yet, there were the inhibitions. . . . and his mother.

He got up from the stone bench and began to pace the lawn. Over it fluttered the lovely, pallid winter form of the Philodice butterfly. A few fiery comma butterflies flashed over the flowers, or lit suddenly on the sunny side of the wall.

He was beginning to realize how the photograph had upset him. To sneak into Aylward's room and filch it for an hour or two was a suspicious circumstance —if he were preparing to accuse himself.

Of course natural and detached curiosity might account for his behaviour.

Qui s'excuse s'accuse.

All right, then; he *had* been fascinated. If Jacqueline Ardres looked like her photograph she was beautiful. A beautiful inhibition. That is, if his mother were the court of last resort. As always she had been constituted in her son's mind. He'd never analyzed the axiom—if it were an axiom.

He'd never before analysed the proposition. Never inquired of himself concerning the origin of judiciary maternal power, appellate and supreme.

From whence arose it? By consent of the governed? Traditionary consent. After years of discretion any subscription to inherited or inculcated tradition indicated intellectual sloth. Mental laziness. Spiritual inertia.

He went over and sat down on his bench again.

There was a trace of tyranny somewhere. Tyranny of caste? *That* unthinkable, worn-out gew-gaw! How many times had he supposed he had scrapped it along with tradition, formalities, folk-ways, and similar junk.

Suddenly he understood that he never had scrapped it. For his remote gaze focused upon the Spectre of Inhibition—pale, cold, expressionlessly beautiful—and with his mother's features——

After he had walked about the lawn for a while he came back and stood looking into the pool.

The dragon-fly glittered above it, poising, darting

after gnats, soaring up into sunshine, the gauzy clatter of its wings sometimes audible.

"After all," he said aloud, "it's my own life."

This voiced thought made the first nick in the fetters he had worn from birth. His audacity worried him until he thought of the photograph. As he visualized it he naïvely began to file away at his fetters again. But it was an intermittent job. Much indecision; mental alarm.

Aylward came back just before luncheon was announced.

"Did you see anything?" inquired West, as they walked slowly toward the veranda.

"Lots of pheasant."

"I heard you shoot about ten o'clock."

"I didn't shoot."

"Oh. I supposed it was you."

"No; I didn't see a hawk."

The Japanese butler appeared and made them a marvellous bow to announce luncheon. They continued on upstairs to their rooms.

Later, carefully parting his hair, Aylward called out to West:

"If you want to keep that photograph of Jacqueline, all right."

"All right; thanks—if you really don't mind."

When West was ready he stopped at Aylward's door. The latter turned and gave him a pleasant, penetrating look:

"P. J. is rather a wonder, isn't he, West?"

"Yes."

"We *look*; he *sees*."

"Yes, he does."

After a pause to dry his features on a towel:

"That's a lovely picture of a young girl," remarked Aylward.

"Yes—it is."

"There's a soul behind those eyes. I suppose P. J. saw it peeping out at him. Probably it was looking out at you and me, too. But I didn't notice it. Did you?"

"No."

"No; of course we didn't. We're not fools, either. We're clever enough, educated, intelligent. And *you* are particularly accomplished, West. You're a trained observer; educated especially to discern what we laymen don't even suspect in human beings. And yet you never noticed what P. J. saw in that ragged child's brown eyes."

West flushed slightly. They went downstairs to lunch.

About three o'clock Aylward began to fuss and look at his watch, and get up from the veranda chair and sit down, and make little excursions around the lawn.

Several times he went outside the gates and walked up and down the highway.

After one of these sallies he said to West, who was reading on the veranda:

"A man driving a Ford car called out to me something about a murder at the Verril Farm."

West looked up from his book: "Murder?" he repeated.

"I thought he said so; he was driving pretty fast.

That's the farm on the hill north-east of the village."

"Yes; Welch Verril's farm. Who was murdered? Did he say?"

"He was driving so fast I couldn't catch what he said. There were two State Troopers in the car."

After a moment's frowning reflection, West resumed his reading.

He knew nobody at that squalid place. It was a miserably lawless region, anyway, that tolerated such a man as Ross Chase.

Still frowning he read on for a while, his mind disturbed by thoughts of Tanya, too, evoked by memory of sordid rumour linking her with Chase.

Aylward lighted yet another cigar, and got up to pace the veranda once more.

"They ought to be along pretty soon," he repeated.

West didn't believe they'd arrive before sunset.

Aylward went upstairs to take another look at the rooms prepared for the family. When he came back to the veranda he said to West:

"I thought one of the servants put those flowers in Jacqueline's room, but nobody seems to know anything about it. The room is blossoming like a garden, too."

After a moment West lifted his eyes from the book and defiantly sustained Aylward's gaze.

"Oh," said the latter.

"Yes; I thought it would make her room more cheerful."

"Where the deuce did you dig up all those glass vases?"

"In the cupboard."

"Did *you* festoon her windows with ground-pine and those yellow wild-flowers?"

"Yes; it grows in the woods behind the barn. I remembered noticing it there years ago."

"*Two* years," murmured Aylward—to whom that space of time meant scarcely more than two weeks. But the irony was lost on the younger man.

"I can't stand sitting here," burst out Aylward. "I'm going out to walk down the road. They'll come from the southward, you know. I'll just saunter along in that direction on the chance of their picking me up. Do you want to come?"

West politely declined. He watched the older man striding impatiently down the drive and through the gate. He resumed his book; turned several pages before he realized he wasn't reading.

He laid his book carefully aside, stood up, looked absently about, went into the house and ascended to his room.

After he'd looked at her photograph for a while he said aloud:

"That sort of thing isn't possible"—whatever he meant by that.

He went, presently, to a larger mirror to survey himself. His slight moustache was rather too blond to suit him. Also he hated the natural wave in his blond hair, and tried to brush it out straight when wet.

He fussed with his bow-tie for a while, and finally ended by taking off his collar, removing the offending tie, and choosing another.

Then he lay down on the lounge. Then he got up

and carefully brushed his hair smooth again. Then he took the photograph from his dresser, carried it to the lounge, lay down comfortably to study it.

It was the most beautiful picture of a woman that ever he had seen.

After a while his hands wearied of holding it up, and he rested it on his chest, still grasping it.

A faint warm breeze stirred the curtains at the open window above his head, and caressed his hair as he lay thinking. He turned, resting one cheek on the cushion, and closed his eyes.

The room was golden with the setting sun when he unclosed his eyes and lay gazing at somebody seated near him. Confused, he sat up, blinded still by the receding mist of sleep.

"Jacqueline," he said.

She was looking at him curiously, intently, through the confusing golden light.

He got up in silence; she rose too.

"West!" she cried joyously.

Her picture had prepared him in a measure—but not for her colour—not for the slender beauty of her.

"Good heavens," he said, in a low voice.

Then the girl began to laugh, and stretched out both hands to him, and stood, holding tightly to his, still laughing.

"It's—it's wonderful to see you," he stammered.

"Oh, West! Oh, this is all too wonderful; I wasn't sure you'd come——" She became inarticulate—lovely, dumb, her youthful beauty pulsating, glowing like a flower in the golden light which was deepening to a rosy hue in the room.

He managed to ask her how long she had been in the house. Then laughter loosened her tongue; she had been home for more than an hour, it appeared.

"And I asleep! Good Lord!" he said.

"Daddy discovered you. Mother and I came to peep in at you several times. Finally I decided to come in and wait. How did you happen to be holding my photograph?"

The laughing question, laughingly intended, oddly enough silenced them both for a moment.

Then she said gaily: "My bedroom is so pretty. Thank you so much for the beautiful flowers and ground-pine. You found the ground-pine in the wood-lot behind the barn, didn't you?"

"Yes——"

"I thought so. Do you remember first going there?"

"Yes, I do," he said.

"That was the first day."

"Yes, the first day."

She smiled in remembrance: "I waited. But you blew three blasts on your dog-whistle to signal me that you couldn't return. Do you recollect, West?"

He nodded.

Another silence; and he presently remembered that he ought to go and pay his respects to her mother and to P. J.

CHAPTER XXX

As they went downstairs together, he was perfectly conscious that he had been shot to pieces—strangely, calmly certain of it—and was realizing now that he had foreseen the event—perhaps always, somehow, had blindly harboured within him the latent germ of that conviction. Probably buried deep under inculcated inhibitions. But it had always been there—from his first contact with the ragged child at the foot of the stairs—at that instant—he was certain of that, now.

Probably he was wrong. What was happening to the young man was also distorting and exaggerating every normal sense and emotion in him.

"There's mother," said a supernaturally angelic voice in his ear.

He went out to the veranda, suddenly overwhelmed by the cataclysmic fact that he was in the presence of *her* mother.

Anne, who was promenading between P. J. and Aylward, gave a little exclamation of unfeigned pleasure.

"It's *so* nice of you, Mr. Halton," she said, in her fresh, honest voice; "Jacqueline has been so anxious to have you with us for our home-coming——" She released his hand and Connor grasped it and looked him clearly in the eyes; and saw what he looked for; and laughed.

"Well, now, God bless us every one," he cried, "but it's a grand day we meet again; it is that! Do I need

tell your father's son that he is welcome here? I do not. And now, by golly," he said, turning to Aylward, "if we three don't dust the birds I'm a Dutchman—I am so!" And again, to West: "Does the place suit you now? Is it nice?"

"It's the prettiest place I ever saw," said the young fellow warmly. He looked at Anne; he couldn't keep his eyes off her—fascinated, anxious, hopeful of her approval—hopeful of the liking and good will of the mother of this girl who had now and forever undone him.

They all, then, continued to promenade the veranda, Jacqueline and West, side by side, walking sedately behind the other three.

They spoke of every alteration, every improvement. Jacqueline already had seen them all. She announced herself as crazy about the garden; she admired the wall and the gates and the pool with its spouting jet and goldfish.

He also became enthusiastic about the pool. Dwelt on it. Looked toward it.

She took the cue; and already they were on the lawn when Anne cautioned her about dew and thin slippers.

"I'll change before dinner!" the girl called back, and slipped her arm through West's and went on across the grass.

The mere contact demoralized him—the faint warmth of her arm, the scent of her gown, her breath, her hair——

And the bad quarter of an hour ahead of him scared him silent.

Her arm in his, they stood looking down into the water where, in sombre sunset depths, fish glowed, and

the reflected border of nasturtiums tinted the water with subdued fire.

The bad quarter of an hour was upon him. And finally he said:

"How can you be so—friendly, Jacqueline?"

She understood. Looking at the water she said: "I had to be patient, didn't I?"

"Not with such a brute as I am—was——"

"Yes, I *had* to be. And after you didn't answer my letters any more—and after I'd waited a—a very long time—then I thought I'd better not bother you . . . but just have patience."

He drew a long breath. "I don't understand how you can be so decent to me," he said.

"Don't you?"

After a moment he looked around at her. She was studying the water. "Such fat fish," she remarked. "Do you remember my poem about old Gene Jackson fishing?"

He managed to smile.

"Do you remember," she said, "how I used to read to you from my great works until you went to sleep in self-defence?"

They both laughed at that; and then he asked her if she had developed any of her talents while abroad.

"Talents?" she repeated, still laughing. "Oh, West, I haven't any. What flares up in a child seldom burns with a steady flame when that child grows up."

"You *have* talent," he insisted.

"So has everybody, for something or other of no importance——"

"You were fond of sketching, too——"

"Yes, and I was fond of fishing, swimming, cooking, dancing, following *you* about——"

"Those poems——"

"Were terrible!" she interrupted. "And you know it, West. Such nonsense! Do you recollect the one I wrote about a garbage can——?"

They began to laugh again.

"And *do* you remember that frightful water-colour drawing I made of our cow—what was her name?—Daisy or something equally unusual——?"

They swayed with laughter perilously close to the rim of the pool, and her arm tightened on his to steady her.

Afterward came laughter's inevitable aftermath—silence with its odd tinge of sombreness.

She seated herself on the stone bench. After a few moments, deliberately: "Have you seen Tanya?" she asked.

He reddened: "Yes."

She waited.

"Yes," he repeated. "I was sketching some patches of golden-rod on the highway. She came by. We chatted." He turned toward Jacqueline and she also looked at him, and saw his lip quiver a little.

Both understood that Tanya was ended as far as their career was concerned. They didn't know how utterly.

It was becoming quite dusky on the lawn. The zenith still had a rosy tinge. The scent of flowers was growing sweeter.

Jacqueline said: "I don't know what you've been doing, and of what you've been thinking for two years."

"I've worked. I haven't thought much. I mean about anything except work."

She lifted her head again to look at him: "Have you —formed any—attachment?"

"No. Have you?"

"No. No new one," she murmured.

He waited until he could control his voice. Finally: "No *new* one? What other was there?"

"You know." She looked down at the water again.

"*Ours?*" he asked unsteadily.

"Yes."

"You can't mean that you still feel—that way—toward me."

"Yes," she said, still looking at the water.

A wild impulse to kneel to her seized him. That sort of young man is likely to go to such lengths when awakened. He tried to find words; lost his voice. Sat anguishing for speech.

She said in a low voice: "I told you how it would be. I've met other men. But——" She shook her head in the twilight, made a gesture with her small white hand, let it fall on the bench beside her.

When he took it she turned around; sat so for a moment, then went closer to see his face in the dusk.

"I—I'm so in love," he stammered; and could say no more, until her soft hand crisped in his; and even then—"I love you so!" was all he could find to say—"I love you—I love you so."

"You mean," she managed to say, "as much as you *did*—sometimes——"

"Yes, more! I *love* you! *That* wasn't love——"

"Wasn't it even *sometimes?*"

"I don't know. Perhaps. I think it may have been. But a boy doesn't know anything. He doesn't know *anything!* But I know enough to love you now. And

I do, most desperately, Jacqueline. I'm most desperately in love with you. And if you can love me don't let's wait too long—because I'm going crazy about you——"

"Wait?" she repeated, in a whisper.

"Yes. What is the use of waiting if we're in love? Is there any reason? Do *you* want to wait?"

"Do you want to *marry* me?"

"Good Lord!" he said. "What did you suppose?"

"I didn't know. You *said* that——"

"Ah, that crazy stuff!" he burst out. "Do you still think I'm a fool of a boy? Do you know what I want to do to you? I want to kneel down in the grass and kiss your feet. But they can see us from the veranda——"

His grasp was hurting her fingers, but she didn't care.

"I wouldn't let you," she breathed, "but I'd kiss yours. Darling, my hand hurts."

He released it, but she straightened the fingers and gave it again.

"I don't understand how you can be so heavenly to me," he said.

"Oh, that?" she laughed under her breath. "I was wondering—about your mother——"

"That's absolutely all right," he said, convinced, but knowing nothing about it.

"Won't she mind, West?"

"Mind? She'll be mad about you—mad, I tell you!" Certainly that would be inevitable; the whole world would become mad about her as soon as they saw her—even his mother. It was strange he had not before understood what must be the consequences of

this girl's appearance on Earth. General madness, of course.

He said, with that inane tendency to repetition noticeable in such cases:

"If it were a little darker I'd kneel down and kiss your feet."

That thrilled her till she shivered—or perhaps it was a more material chill, for her slippers were soaked with dew.

"Darling," he added unsteadily.

Through the dusk came Connor's voice from the veranda, clear, resonant, gay: "Dinner!—you young scuts! And your mother says to change your slippers and your stockings, too, if they're wet!"

"All right!" called Jacqueline, without a tremor in her voice. But she was trembling all over when she laid her hand in West's and rose in the scented dusk.

"We'd better tell them," she whispered, "or they won't understand our behaviour."

"Do you think your mother is going to mind?" he ventured very seriously.

"I don't know."

"I suppose," he went on miserably, "she thinks I behaved rottenly in not writing to you."

"I couldn't help letting her see I was unhappy about it. But I made up my mind I'd come back and love you, anyway. And that was a great comfort," she added naïvely, "and permitted me to have a good time."

"What an ass I was," he said, with humble conviction. "Suppose you'd come back and found me engaged or married?"

"I'd have loved you all the same."

"But that's——"

"I know it. I'd have loved you all the *same!*" Her voice rang a little—like the chiming of golden spurs, perhaps, on that famous Field so many centuries ago.

"Love," she said, "pays no attention to little things."

"Marriage?"

"Anything. It goes right on. It goes *on!* I knew I was coming back to go on loving you. I knew you *did* love me, sometimes. And I could make you do it again."

He was thinking her rather mediæval when they stepped on to the veranda. A Japanese made them a marvellous bow.

"I've got to change my slippers," she said to West.

He continued on beside her as far as the foot of the stairs.

Here, at the same instant, they both thought of the same thing. And, as before, they were alone, close together.

"Do you remember?" she asked.

As he looked at her he saw again the ardent child he had forgotten—that passionate golden thing—the carnation tint on cheek and mouth—and, as it had happened before, it happened again. She flung both arms around his neck, her head upturned, welcoming the kiss he offered.

She was gone, up the stairs, lightly as a scented whirlwind.

He waited. Presently Aylward came down, dressed for dinner. He looked amiably at West, almost grinned.

"Yes," said West, his voice indistinct from excite-

ment, "I've asked her to marry me and she is willing. Good heavens, Mr. Aylward, do you suppose her mother will object?"

He had hold of Aylward's hand, now, and was wringing it wildly; and: "Thanks awfully," he said, "thanks so much. But I'm wondering about her mother——"

"You're crazy," said Aylward. "Anne's the finest in the world!"

"I know, but I'm such a beast——"

"So are we all—here—you'd better let go my hand, old chap, or I'll pull no trigger this season! You tell Anne how you feel. She'll be all right. Then you tell P. J."

"Good Lord," said the boy, "I wonder what P. J. really thinks of me?"

Aylward looked at him, keenly amused. "You don't have to worry," he said. "He'll be down in a minute——"

They both fell silent as the Japanese butler appeared, and made them both a most marvellous bow.

"Missa Halton, please," he said, "one soldier police at back door wish to speak to Missa Halton, please."

"Oh!" West looked at Aylward. "A State Trooper to speak to me——?" He turned to the Japanese; followed him out rather slowly to the rear door giving on the service drive.

There, in grey uniform touched with purple, a tall figure stood. Beyond, on the service drive, a Ford car had halted with engine running. Three more State Troopers were aboard.

West looked at the trooper in the doorway. "I'm Mr. Halton," he said.

The trooper stood at picturesque ease, resting one gloved hand on his holster.

"Mr. Halton," he said, "we've got a man who's dying over in Welch Verril's farmhouse. He shot and killed a girl this morning. His name is Chase—Ross Chase. He says he's sorry he didn't kill *you*. Did you know the girl—Tanya Larisch——?"

The shock of it left him speechless.

Then, through the ringing confusion in his brain, he heard Jacqueline's joyous cry:

"West! West! I'm coming! Where are you?"

He said hoarsely to the trooper: "Why did he shoot her?"

"He says she was his girl and that you interfered."

"He lies."

"We knew he did. He was just drunk and ugly. Well, that's all, Mr. Halton. Sorry to bother you——"

"Where *are* you, West?" came Jacqueline's gay voice from the corridor.

"Much obliged," added the trooper. "Good night, sir."

"Good night."

As he went out Jacqueline appeared and caught sight of the car as he stepped aboard.

"Oh," she said, "the constabulary! What did they want here?"

"Nothing. I'll tell you later." He took both her cool white hands in his, joined them, laid his lips to them in silence.

"What was it?" she whispered.

"Some trouble about—Ross Chase. I'll tell you later. I'd like to find your mother before dinner——"

They turned away together. Her hand rested in his arm and she felt him quivering.

"West," she said, in sweet concern, "are you in trouble?"

"No; but I might have been, except for you. There is your mother—and P. J., too. You'll come with me, won't you?"

"Yes. Shall I tell them?"

"That *would* be a fine business! But don't let go of my arm——"

Anne, her own arm linked in Connor's, was looking at them out of blue and level eyes.

West said: "I don't mean to be abrupt, Mrs. Connor, but I've asked Jacqueline to marry me and I hope you don't mind."

"No," said Anne, "I don't mind"—she was smiling faintly—"I knew you were in love with her."

West gazed at her in astonishment.

"Well, then," cried Connor, laughing, "I knew it, too! I did so! And 'twas I who told it to you, Anne. You shall give me credit, now; did I not say it from the very first when Roger told us how he kept her picture——?"

Anne smiled. She had known it for two years. She looked at her daughter; her smile had become slightly tremulous. Jacqueline flung herself into her Anne's arms.

"Oh, mother," she said, "mother, mother! You told me in Paris it would come all right. Oh, you did—you did. And I've got him—I've got him——"

"You little idiot!" cried Connor. "Do you want your young man to think you've trapped him?"

"He knows it, daddy! He knows I came back to get him. And here he is——!"

She flung out both arms in ecstasy and gazed upon her lover out of enchanted eyes.

Connor roared with laughter. Anne, laughing through a slight mist of tears, gave a rather brilliantly jewelled hand to West; drew him to her.

"I talked to your mother about it," she said, "when we landed last week. Your father and mother were so kind to Jacqueline. I am very happy that your mother approves."

"So does Jim Halton, then," said Connor. "He knows a thing or two."

Jacqueline was sufficiently astonished, but West was astounded.

"How did mother know I was going to fall in love with Jacqueline?" he demanded.

"Well, then," said Connor, "we talked it over when Anne and I were married—your mother and father and Anne and I. It was your mother, West, who said we should keep Jacqueline away from you for a while——"

"You never told me that, mother," said Jacqueline.

"Do you mean," said West slowly, "that two years ago you and P. J. and mother and father planned that Jacqueline and I should marry?"

"We did that! And it was your mother who proposed it as soon as ever she set eyes on Jacqueline!" He began to shake with laughter again as he looked at the blank faces of West and Jacqueline.

"Don't mind him, West," said Anne, "he's teasing. All we could do, anyway, was to separate you and hope you'd love each other when you met."

The butler appeared in a series of bewildering bows.

"All right," said Connor, still laughing. "Come on, you pair of wise ones! Where are you, Roger? Anne, sweetheart, if you're ready——"

Jacqueline looked up at West. They both were flushed. When the others had disappeared he kissed her.

"Darling," she said, "I had to have you. But I didn't know they'd set a trap for both of us."

She shook his arm. He kissed her hair, her ear, her cheek, the white hand on his arm.

"What do we care?" he said. "I'd have married you, anyway."

"We don't. And I had to have you somehow. Let them think they helped if they want to think so."

"Yes," he said, "let them. But I'm astonished at my mother."

He need not have been. The aristocracy of birth still cocks its eye at the main chance—if that chance be large enough. Kings and Queens, Lords and Ladies, Saint and Sinner, Pauper, Philosopher and Princely Pander—almost any of them would have surrendered before the tremendous battering-ram of P. J. Connor's wealth and power. What does aristocracy care where its wealth come from—if there's enough of it? And the Fourth Estate? Prelate, Prince, proletariat—what do they care? Even the thunderbolts of Jove were forged of gold; and Danæ opened heart and arms in welcome to the Golden Rain.

They walked into the dining-room with dignity. West seated her.

Then, as Connor rose with uplifted glass, all the others rose, too.

"Trapped, the two of you! And God bless you both!" he cried.

As the laughter subsided, and all were seated, a servant opened the veranda door, the night being warm.

"So we can smell the flowers," said Connor gaily. "God bless us all, but it's a grand night and the moon near its full. Roger, do you think how many woodcock are stirring this blessed night?"

West turned his head and looked out over the waste of moonlit alders. Far away to the north-east a lighted window glimmered in the Verril Farm.

The boy saw it; dropped his head. Beside him, Jacqueline felt his hand seeking hers, and clinging to her fingers.

"Darling," she murmured.

And, with eternally feminine intuition, a little later: "West?" very softly.

"Yes, dearest."

"Why did that State Trooper come to our house to-night?"

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