



NEVER
ASK
THE
END

ISABEL
PATERSON

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TO
ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING
FOR HER LONG-SUFFERING SYMPATHY

*William, lend me your hunting knife;
This house is hollow to defend.
My fathers led a dolorous life:
Never ask the end.*

From A Lament from the Breton.

ELINOR WYLIE

CHAPTER I

"HE'LL hate having me wished on him. You can say I had another engagement."

Marta thought, if it were anyone but Pauline she would drive me mad. But she was always like that, and somehow one doesn't mind her moods and nerves. It's her voice, so light and quick and gay, no matter what she says it sounds rather amusing. Not a nagging voice, there's something witty in just the tone of it. That hasn't changed. Like a breeze fluttering a curtain; most people's minds are shut—dead air. She was perfectly beautiful, though I don't believe she knew it. Nattier painted the type over and over; I must find a Nattier for her; there should be one in the Louvre. The same delicate long nose and clove-pink mouth, that lift of the upper lip, and the unbroken line of her cheek and chin, drawn with one stroke. Her shoulders were perfect; I never saw a more beautiful body. Not even Alma. Except her hands and feet; Alma has such pretty bare feet. Keith was the only other person I ever knew who had smooth shapely feet like a child. Wasted on a man . . . Only her back is as lovely as ever. *The in-*

nocent and the beautiful have no enemy but time. Her hair seems even blacker, Indian black. It's the Scotch blood; her eyes are the color of cairngorms, and the classic almond shape; but you can see she's cried so much . . . By her mouth, the contour of her face—Isadora Duncan's face went like that. It's queer; the children, too . . . I wouldn't; I ran away. When you're the odd one of nine, that's enough; you can't go on with it. But then you run into something else. Maybe it all comes to the same thing in the end; whatever you do, you're just yourself; though I'd sooner have gone on the street—no, but a scrubwoman, any kind of work . . .

“Don't be a goop. He invited you; said he'd be delighted,” Marta repeated.

“Why should he? A middle-aged woman from the Middle West.” Accuracy was sacrificed to the phrase.

“Well, Russ is a middle-aged man from the Middle West,” which was true. “Wait and meet him. Then if you'd rather not come, you can make your own excuse. You'll like Russ. He's nice.”

“He's your friend; it's you he wants to see.”

“We belonged to the same crowd. But he was Nonie Macray's beau, not mine. I haven't seen him for six years. He went to China for the company, and afterward they sent him over here. He told Nonie to tell me to look him up; that's all.”

She thought: neither of us ever said a word about that night coming back from Brooklyn, in Alma's car.

It was disgraceful . . . I wonder if he did go to the Waldorf next morning? For breakfast, at twelve o'clock . . . I didn't; I was afraid he wouldn't be there. And if he had, I wouldn't have known what . . . Alma said he wouldn't. I suppose Alma could hear the nonsense we talked; Nonie had a pretty good idea of it, I'm sure. It doesn't matter now. Good heavens, it's seven, no, over eight years ago. When he took me home from Alma's, months afterward, he asked me if I wanted supper at a restaurant. I meant to explain, find out—what was I going to explain? that I did mean it or didn't? both—I wished we were friends—but we just made conversation, hardly looked at one another; it seemed to me that whatever I said would make it worse, for maybe he hadn't even remembered it next morning, or would rather not be reminded. And that was the only time we met except in a crowd. Well, one does a lot of fool things, and it's so long ago . . . He's probably got a girl over here; why not? . . . I'd better hurry.

She had nothing to wear, after ten days in Paris. It was ridiculous, insane. The new styles were impossible; just her luck. She would have to give away that purple flowered mistake. There was nothing for it but her old white one, washed to a rag. And the straw hat, all wilted by the sea-air. White looks cool and clean, at least. . . . My face, she mused before the mirror, is a wreck. Not the kind that wears well after thirty. From five to twenty-five there was hardly any differ-

ence—that old photograph, all the family in a row, and me scowling in cross-barred muslin and a broken-necked carnation pinned to it, with mamma holding up my head . . . When I had any color it wasn't too bad, a moon face, but I was always pale. Alma's features are modelled right on the bone; that's why she stays so young. I don't think I look as old as Pauline; but then I wouldn't think so. People don't see themselves; they don't want to. The lines around my eyes come out when I laugh. And under my chin—I wonder if they really can do anything—not that stretched, mummy effect—I guess not . . . I hate growing old. I hate it. Death is nothing. I wasn't beautiful like Pauline, but sort of a cute snub-nosed brat. Since I've had something to eat my figure is better—it never was much and legs are so important—but if I put on any more I'll probably have a double chin; I simply can't endure it.

Pauline was already dressed, in navy georgette, the type of gown that abounds at women's club receptions; she had no sense of her own style. She put on her hat and walked about restlessly. The telephone buzzed. "Yes, please ask Mr. Girard to come up." Hearing the click of the elevator grille, Marta ran out, knotting her sash hurriedly. She did want to meet him alone, though there was no reason. Only for a minute. Pauline would never have forgiven her for a solitary evening. Besides, it would be mean. You could always manage Pauline with a little patience, saying very well but wait and see, try it, then if you don't want to you needn't . . .

If she hadn't been like that, worn me down when I wanted to brood over my broken heart, I'd never have married Keith . . . I lost my head, went cuckoo suddenly . . .

Dusk had crept through the hall; perhaps it was that that made such a friendly atmosphere, through which they moved toward one another, making it natural and simple for him to put his arm around her, while she lifted her face spontaneously for his light kiss. "I'm so glad to see you," the words chimed as they spoke at once. "Nonie said you'd got fat," she exclaimed, "but you haven't." Then she was sorry; she shouldn't have quoted Nonie. It sounded catty. No, he was just perceptibly heavier; he walked like a tired man, but he had not thickened at the waist-line. Of middle height, with the smooth unrevealing features of the business man, there was nothing distinctive about him except that his eyes should have been dark, and they were not. His mouth was expressive in its reserve; the full lips closed firmly, sensual and sweet . . . She thought, he has a cold, isn't feeling very well . . .

She made the introduction with the brevity characteristic of a nation without titles or labels, which has almost dropped the last perfunctory honorific, leaving everything to private judgment. Pauline Gardiner, Russell Girard, Marta Brown . . . As is, no commitments . . .

Pauline sat down with decision. She had always the air of a great lady, wherever she had got it. She be-

longed wonderfully with the traditional French interior, the brocaded armchairs, tall windows, and heavy crimson damask curtains. I don't, thought Marta, slipping on her rings and despairing over her hat; but where would I? . . . No, they had not dined in the Bois; it would be heavenly. Pauline had almost perished of the heat. "If I tell her again it's nothing to New York, she'll kill me. You tell her how much hotter it is in Italy." He had come up from Milan. He smiled, and refrained. "I'm ready," Marta announced, and sprung a friendly trap. "Now you are coming, Pauline? . . . She was fussing about being gooseberry."

"Of course she is coming," Russ said in his kind, grave voice.

"Try to stop me," Pauline said.

Armenonville? They had been there for ices. "But we passed a place called l'Ermitage," Marta stumbled over the pronunciation, "that looked even better. More woody." Russ agreed. He didn't profess to know his way around Paris. "I get here only for a day or so at a time. I wish we had our head office here instead of at Antwerp." What was Antwerp like? He was vague, as if it meant nothing to him personally. The main factory was there, because it was a great port and skilled workmen available; a survival of the old Free Cities, "where the merchants were the kings."

As their taxi shot through the dusty dazzle of the Champs Elyseés they shielded their eyes against the

sunset and were grateful to reach the urban greenery of the Bois. Among the trees of l'Ermitage the lights were already lit, blanching the undersides of the leaves. The crunch of gravel under her thin sandals gave Marta a sense of the impermanence of pleasure. It touched some memory, she couldn't think exactly what. . . . She speculated, could she have champagne? If Russ could afford it . . . He suggested it himself.

They were in the mood to be amused. At an adjoining table a man entertained ladies of his party with satiric pantomime. He dabbed with an imaginary lipstick, surveyed himself in a non-existent mirror, patted his hair, laid on invisible rouge and powdered his nose intently.

"He overlooked a bet." Marta extracted her vanity case, an elegant trifle in green enamel with a gold monogram. "I must keep it in employment; it's a present; I never had one before." So many things she never had, she was half afraid of luxuries. Many things she would never have; it was too late. A doll with real hair—as a little girl, she had ached for one. She hadn't prayed; she knew better. And she never asked; she understood how it would hurt her mother not to be able to give it; they were really poor. When she left home at not quite eighteen, to go to work, all her possessions were packed in one meagre canvas telescope bag, and room enough. . . . Replacing the minuscule powder puff, she licked her finger tip and swept it across her lashes, for the benefit of the mimic.

They abandoned themselves to a giggling fit. "Look at that woman with the miserable dog on her lap, feeding it from her own plate," Pauline remarked. "Give me one more glass of champagne and I'll go over and abolish it."

"She will, if we don't restrain her," said Marta. "Would you believe she had never tasted wine till we got on the boat? I made her drink one glass; before it was half finished she said: 'Let's order another bottle.'" Not but that Pauline had reason for abstinence, Marta reflected. Her husband was a periodical dipsomaniac, drank himself to death.

Pauline laughed. What one could survive—that wasn't the worst. She mustn't think about the children. George's death was a relief, though she wished he had lived five years longer. He was making money, after a heart-breaking stretch of anxious poverty. Everybody was broke out there, during the war; he had plenty of ability. And he had been decent about his will, leaving what there was to her without conditions. While he was alive he was wearingly jealous. It was George's money that was giving her this evening. There was just enough, so what she earned allowed a margin of ease. "Can you imagine," she said, "when we were living in Carberry—one of those horrible prairie towns—George hid a case of champagne in the woodshed, and it froze. Thirty below zero. Every last bottle burst. And I didn't care. I could weep to think of it." He used to hide stuff all over the place; a silly perform-

ance, she was bound to find it. Sometimes she threw it away, more often she left it alone disgustedly. He'd get more, and it cost money.

"We'll make up for it now." Russ signalled the waiter. The two women looked at each other. They didn't want to exploit him. Pauline thought, why should he buy champagne for me, a total stranger he never saw before and never will again—no, I hope we'll see him again, I hope he likes me. Marta thought: Russ used to be rather hard up, and this place is quite expensive; the bill will be millions of francs. I can't figure it in my head; but it was he who suggested the Bois. Another time, we'll be more careful, not let him in for it.

Russ said: "I'm entitled to a party. Yesterday they made me chief technical director for all Europe."

"Oh!" They regarded him with the unenvious admiration of women for a man's success. "Isn't that gorgeous? You run the whole show?"

"Only the engineering side. Not the financing, the general management."

They exclaimed again, delighted for the moment as if it were their own good fortune. "And to think that I knew you when you were only a poor boy," Marta said. "It's funny—I never knew exactly what your job was, except the name of your company; but you must be an electrical engineer."

"I must be; I took a year's course. I'd heard you could get a job as soon as you graduated, at twelve

dollars a week. That was a lot of money. Better than helping Saturday afternoons in the grocery store. Or driving a team of mules with a construction gang; I tried that once in the holidays. The mules didn't like me either." They all remembered, astonished not by their beginnings but by the fact that they were here, together. "Certainly, it's a vast sum," Marta agreed. "I got twenty dollars a month, as a waitress. But before that, when I was seventeen, I was working on the railroad, too. Cooked for ten days for a gang of section hands, and lost ten pounds' weight. I was visiting the wife of the section boss, and she broke her arm falling down the cellar steps with a lemon pie. She gave me four dollars and fifty cents, the first money I ever had. So this is Paris! Did you go out as a trouble-shooter, spurs and all?"

"Yes. When I'm tired I dream I have them on yet." Dreams were queer; little bits of the past coming back to claim you.

"And when young men ask how you rose in the world, you say, by climbing a telegraph pole," Pauline commented. "I must tell my son about it. He worships success." . . . An orchestra began to discourse jazz. In the open air, the tune was sweetly sad. "Oh, I should like to dance," said Marta. "Do you dance as much as you used to?"

"No, I've about given it up."

"Given up dancing?" She was shocked. He had been the best dancer in the old crowd. He said nothing.

"You've hardly touched your champagne," she observed out of her bewilderment.

"The doctor tells me I have high blood pressure or something." He was through; the doctor didn't need to tell him that. If he could hold out two years—though it didn't matter. When you're tired, nothing matters, except to be let sleep. Waking in the morning is the hard part of the day. Once you are up, habit keeps you going. He'd had his warning six years ago, before he went to China, when the insurance company refused him. He had lasted the six years, maybe he could last two more. Then he would have his pension, and a little over—enough. There was a time when it would have made all the difference. Harriet and he might have made a go of it. Maybe not; still he could have given her what she wanted, cleared his own pride. He supposed she had as much right to her ambition as he to his, but you couldn't make a marriage out of two ambitions. This went on in the back of his mind, and being accustomed, didn't spoil the evening. Comfortable to talk to friends again. So many people bored him. Harriet never did. . . . Pauline was fun, and Brownie as unexpected as she'd always been. Pauline called her Marta. "You don't live in New York?" he said to Pauline. "You and Brownie knew each other out West?"

"I've never seen New York. I live in Seattle. Marta and I came off the prairie." She wouldn't call her Brownie. She couldn't. That name still gave a little twist to her nerves. It belonged to Keith. The

diamond doublet on Marta's left hand made a point of light . . . "Do you remember, though, it seemed as if we'd always known each other?" she said to Marta.

Yes, and nothing had really estranged them, thought Marta; not even Keith, nor George, who wouldn't let Pauline write to her; nor fifteen years of separation. It was strange . . . And I've done all the things she wanted to do, and nothing I wanted to do myself. "Oh, we should have begged, borrowed or stolen the money and come to Paris then," she sighed. "To think that all this was going on without us! I wish I had dragged you away. How we hated the prairie!" But Pauline was always afraid. Fear is her weakness, Marta thought. And impatience is mine. I break myself trying to break through. But that's over . . . Pauline said: "I can't bear to think of it. And there's another woman with a dog!" They were helpless with laughing. The past too was absurd.

"Would you like to try this one-step?" Russ offered politely. Marta stood up. Russ used to be able to dance with anybody. In those days she was too tired. Now he was as tired as she had been; she became aware of it as soon as they were on the floor. He was still easy and sure; but the ardor and vitality were gone. She remembered him catching her hands, pulling her up from the sofa to dance with him. She had wanted to say, no, hold me, let me rest. . . . He ought to take a long holiday. She said: "I'm sorry; I can't get this tune; it's too tricky for me."

The glasses were empty. "No, good heavens," Marta declined, "I've had too much now." Would they like to go on to a cabaret? "We tried Montmartre last night. It was crowded and noisy." Russ was of the same opinion. "I don't like those places much. When Nonie was here I went with her to Montparnasse, the Dome and the Rotonde."

"Mobs of queer people, sitting around under those frightful arc-lights, looking at a torn-up street-car track. I'd as soon sit out on the sidewalk on Eighth Avenue, where they're digging the new subway. Nonie is good-natured, and she likes oddity, variety. Could we—could we drive around the Bois on the way home?" The *addition*, embarrassingly visible in hundred franc notes, still bothered her. "You've got to work tomorrow; we haven't."

"I'm taking the eleven o'clock train." They were heartbroken to learn that he had come in the night before and called them up—while they were on Montmartre. And that there wouldn't be another evening in the Bois, with the swans glimmering white on the black water and the cool smell of the underwood flowing in the cab window. In the darkness Russ leaned sidewise and kissed Marta gently, only once. Pauline didn't see. He said: "If you and Pauline are going to England next week, couldn't you come by way of Antwerp? There's a night boat to Harwich. I have to go to London myself, Saturday I think, and I'll take you over. Maybe I can't get away till Monday, but

you might stop over Sunday, though there's nothing much in Antwerp."

"You'll be there," said Pauline. She thought, I'm so glad he called me Pauline; now I can call him Russ. "Do you mind if I hold your hand, Russ?" Marta laughed. She was quite aware that Pauline had been holding his hand for some minutes. "I don't mind very much," Russ conceded, amused by his position. He had a habit of laughing to himself, as children do in school, hunching his shoulders and lowering his chin. All his mannerisms were inconspicuous, repressed, as if he had been under years of tutelage. "You will come to Antwerp?"

"Won't we just!"

"You could stay in my apartment; there is an extra room." They wouldn't impose on him. All right for us, Marta thought, but to have visitors for breakfast when you're busy, hurrying to work, is the last camel . . . Besides, he was only being hospitable, didn't mean it . . . He did though; he let it drop, but when they got there, he'd meet them . . .

It was stupid to ask him to come up to their suite for a few minutes at the hotel. But there was no harm in it, and the concierge's surly interposition was as insulting as a slap in the face. Russ said goodnight at once, without comment. Pauline was white with rage. In the elevator, she muttered sincerely: "I could have killed the wretch." Short of that, there was nothing to be done. Served me right, Marta thought. That's

the second time—idiot. She pouted her lower lip, a gesture of contempt, habitual to her when she caught herself in a lapse of taste or tact. They didn't tip the night concierge when they went away a week later. And they never mentioned the incident again. It was one of those humiliations which are intolerable because so trivial.

CHAPTER II

THE ripening fields slid past in gold and emerald stripes, soothing them with the charm of homeliness. To the northern bred, trees and grass compose the landscape of Eden. Except that it was cut into such narrow plots, some of them not ten yards wide, Marta thought, you could hardly distinguish it from, say, Minnesota. The low slopes, the willows along the creeks, even the texture of the summer clouds and the pure blue of the sky, were familiar. There must have been fighting all over here, she mused, but there's nothing to show for it, after only ten years. She had not wished to see battlefields; it made her sick to think of the war. While it was going on it made her sick—as if that helped! But it went on and on beyond endurance. Like her childhood; did everything painful tie up to that? Most people had enjoyed the war; those who weren't actually shot or starved. Probably they were sensible. Pauline had gone out to the Marne, with a Cook's party. Walking through a lovely wood, they had been gratified to come upon the unburied bones of a soldier. "More likely a strayed

tourist," Marta said. It couldn't hurt his poor bones now. *Am I to weep? Good sirs, the earth is old. Of the whole earth, there is no single rood but hides a grave.* Pauline said: "When you're married, what is a war more or less? With three babies and no money, you can't worry about anything else."

Pauline had been driven by duty. "If people ask me, did I see this and that, what shall I say?" she demanded. "We haven't seen anything." Marta pointed out that she could say yes. "They'll ask, but they won't listen. It was my fault; I'm sorry to be so lazy. I did insist on seeing the fountains play at Versailles, and Jane wouldn't speak to me for three days. I don't blame her." Under the August sun, the gravelled terraces were a blazing desert, and they suffocated in the clotted crowds. The genuine, indomitable tourists filled them with hatred and awe. Dumb driven cattle . . . yet somehow heroic, too. They certainly got something out of it, but what? Marta wondered, recalling the desiccated gleanings of history forked out like baled hay by the brisk guides: Marie Antoinette's mirror and Pompadour's bed, Louises by the dozen and Napoleon in bulk. Mostly Napoleon. The tourists had heard of Napoleon before; his name evoked a gleam of recognition, almost of dawning intelligence.

Maybe that was the way to enjoy it. Otherwise the weight of history was too great. Europe was crushed under it. Too many things had happened.

For themselves, Pauline and Marta had given up. Settled on the train, they experienced a conscience-stricken relief. They were retreating, in none too good order. The struggle with milliners, dressmakers, trying to secure something, anything, and be done with it, had ended in confessed defeat.

"For one suit and one hat," Pauline exclaimed. "And still I have nothing that I can just put on and wear. You know—one never has." Marta knew. "A frock one can breakfast in, wear all day, and go on to dinner and the opera without changing; and be suitably attired throughout. My suit doesn't fit either."

"No, it's no use," said Pauline. "There's Jane—a creature so elegant that even in Paris people turn to stare after her in the street. And her feet hurt."

Pauline had not surrendered to Paris. It aggravated the malady of her soul, her sense of dispossession. In Paris, one should have everything or want nothing. Only that one evening, Paris had belonged to them. All the next day they had been immeasurably dejected. Marta had enjoyed Paris for itself; she had learned in her bad years to be a looker-on. But she understood Pauline's insistent need of distraction. And one slight expectation for Pauline had failed.

"Didn't you have any sense of recognition?"

Pauline understood the allusion. "Only in the Luxembourg Gardens, when the sound of the bugle came through the trees." At the closing hour, relieving the guard, Marta supposed; or a signal for clearance. "It

was as if I'd listened for them once and they didn't play, or they played another air—As if it were the end of something. . . . And on the steps at Fontainebleau, maybe; and in the Carnavalet Museum, the picture of that horrible man—”

“Bailly? He wasn't a horrible man; as a matter of fact he was rather humane and honest. Of course, the aristocrats must have thought he was a monster. You spoke exactly as if you belonged to the Court. That was the way you used to talk; it was funny.” Years ago, when they shared a meagre apartment in a wind-harried prairie town, and Paris was barely a name to them, beyond the furthest horizon of their hopes, they had experimented blunderingly with some kind of white witchcraft; they didn't know what it was then and were no wiser since. Certainly they had not got it out of books; Marta had just begun her insatiable reading . . . You don't learn anything out of books, said Alma, except what you know already. She too had tried that road to wisdom . . .

But Pauline was certainly a witch . . . Seated on a red corduroy sofa, leaning back against a green satin cushion, there in that scantily furnished, box-like room which had no history, no memories beyond yesterday, Pauline had conjured up out of the emptiness of twilight another state of being, a past such as neither of them had known or dreamed, through which she moved in powdered curls and red-heeled shoes, a lackey following to hand her chocolate and stand behind her

chair. They were both in the story, and they had been fortunate, insolent and gay. Until it was all eclipsed in some disaster Pauline shuddered away from recalling. Don't ask me any more . . . She had, in the present, a mortal terror of locked doors.

Not that that proved anything. It was outside of proof, and impossible on the face of it. Only the details had been so curious, Marta could not forget them. They came back to her in the light of later knowledge. Much had been incomprehensible at the time: points of etiquette and custom, the unaffected hauteur of Pauline's phrases. Certainly they did not then know the duties of a lackey; or that it was an act of extreme condescension and affection for a lady of rank to run down a grand staircase and meet a guest at the foot instead of awaiting her at the head . . . At Fontainebleau, Pauline said, coming suddenly upon the state entrance, with its majestic double flight of curved stone steps: "There's a way of walking downstairs, the right way; you click your heels a little on each step." . . . It was of such things she used to speak, as if naturally one would know them. But they knew nothing. How should they, growing up in poverty and isolation on the last edge of the vanishing wilderness?

Probably Pauline was still but vaguely acquainted with the great drama of the Revolution, the part Bailly played in it. Marta offered no further enlightenment. Pauline resented information. Another phase of her

pride, innocent enough. Or had it been that which held her back from some ampler fulfillment? She wished to be equal to every occasion, and most occasions are trivial. One could spend one's life outdoing the woman next door in embroidered lunchcloths, or perfecting one's game of croquet.

No doubt their magic had been nonsense, too, better left alone. Did not every idle silly woman cherish the belief that she had once been Cleopatra? Nobody remembered being a kitchenmaid. And it would really be more interesting . . . If I should remember anything here, thought Marta, it would be the wild strawberry ices . . . It's absurd to call Americans materialists; they won't even bother about food. What is it we want? Something—something *more*. . . . Beyond anything that has ever been. To fly, to resolve into a finer essence, pure spirit, above the law. It's why we are unhappy in love, except at moments, when even passion is outdone, forgotten . . . Flesh and blood won't stand it; so much the worse for them; we can't help that. Of course we get tired, burn ourselves out. We want to. In work, if we can't find the other way, whatever it is . . . Like Russ . . .

He did invite us, Marta thought; visitors were the original plague of Egypt; but I daresay he can put up with us for a day or two. How ready one is to hang around someone's neck at the slightest excuse. It must be an art, though, for I've never been very successful at it. When Keith and I came to a showdown—not

two words about it. I packed my suitcase for the next train, at five o'clock in the morning. Keith took me to the station, ever so polite and yawning. The sun was balancing on the level edge of the prairie; you could see the round of it, not a flat disk but a globe, cool and yellow as amber, marvelous, and the world brand-new, and everything gone to smash . . . But there never had been anything . . . The Player Queen . . . Acting out an imitation tragedy with Keith because I'd been through the real thing and it was so deadly quiet; because it consisted precisely in nothingness, silence, absence. That's the use of melodrama, why people eat it up. *They were born, they suffered, and they died.* Without ever achieving the satisfaction of the final scene. The vows and reproaches, the explanations and retributions and rewards, the last words, are never spoken. So we force an occasion, make it up. It wasn't fair to Keith, making him understudy; he meant his part while it lasted. In the long run I guess it didn't make any difference. He was spoiled already by women, or born that way. An indolent handsome boy with amazing black eyes and seal-brown hair; he should have been a girl—but then he'd have been a . . .

Tickets? . . . passport? . . . no? Pauline and Marta consulted each other wildly, turning out their purses in complete submission. *Douane.* Marta grasped the one word presently. They abandoned all their possessions to the mercy of the customs officer. He chalked them through with brisk contempt. To him they were

indistinguishable in the endless procession of American women of uncertain age, roaming about Europe in search of God knows what. . . . They drew cheer from the inference that they must now be in Belgium. "Do you suppose Russ will meet us at the station?" Pauline speculated. He might be too busy, Marta replied cautiously. "You'd think," she grinned, "that we had come all the way to Europe to track down that poor man. Maybe he came to get away from us." The last time he went through New York, coming from China, he had not let anyone know. None of his close friends. Marta did not place herself in that category, but Nonie and Alma—

He must have sought to make a clean break, for awhile at least. She could imagine why. He had been so intricately tied up, for years. That was one thing used to make her shy of him. He had troubles enough. So had she, for that matter. He between Nonie and his wife—what was her name? And maybe others. It was no business of hers; so she pondered it intensively. Marta admitted to herself that she was worse than the Elephant's Child. Full of a positively depraved curiosity. She would have listened at keyholes, read private letters; only you couldn't hear at a keyhole, and most letters were a waste of two cents. She had to find out somehow, and she was so stupid about people. No intuition. Even with the most earnest snooping and much reflection, her progress through the world was attended by a continuous sound

of crashing and the cries of the injured. Literally as well as figuratively, the most absurd things happened to her. When she was newly come to New York, she had once halted to look about for the bell that rang mysteriously underfoot. Then the pavement rose with her, and she balanced with spread arms on the ascending top of an outside freight elevator, while the populace shouted warnings. She was always doing that, or falling into excavations. And people thought she did those things on purpose, to be original. Pauline was the cat's whiskers, all quivering sensibility. Not sense, perhaps—but nobody had any sense. Where would they get it? "I can't think of his wife's name," Marta repeated aloud, returning to that problem.

"Russ? Do you mean he is married?"

"Aren't we all? Yes, he's seen the wolf. I told you before. They've been separated—oh, for ten years. Before my time. I'm not sure if they got a divorce; I think the case was thrown out once for collusion, but it may have gone through afterward." Collusion carried a suggestion of extraordinary intimacy, of an unbreakable secret bond. As if when they faced one another in the courtroom the judge felt they didn't mean it about the divorce; they were married in spite of themselves for keeps. Marta had once, with incredible gaucherie, asked Russ about his wife. She blushed inwardly at the recollection. Perhaps her imaginary courtroom scene was based on his justified evasion of an answer.

"What is she like?" Pauline asked idly.

"I never saw her. She's a singer. Concert work, I believe; but she never quite arrived." An accomplished musician, Marta had heard, but not much of a voice. For distinction, she chose unusual programs: Turkish folksongs or Siberian lullabies or Aztec hymns or what not. The rewards were slight in money and fame. What the public wants is to have its eardrums astonished with a high C. Or a whiskey mezzo and the blues. "You know I hate singers," Marta added pensively. Pauline knew. Nothing to do with Russ's wife. One of those old, unhappy, far-off things that only Marta and Pauline did know about each other. Everybody else concerned had gone about other affairs, faded into limbo. The story was too complicated to revive at the moment; they were eagerly deciphering the wayside stations, most of which appeared to be called *Sortie*.

Their view of Brussels was limited to a dismal stretch of switch-rails and freight sheds; the train backed out again cautiously, as if it had made a mistake. No carpets nor sprouts, Marta found herself thinking inanely. Apparently the Duchess of Richmond had given her Waterloo ball in a box-car. Travel books do not allow for railroad yards and suburbs. Nothing but castles and cathedrals, the intervening avenues lined with pictures and statuary . . .

The landscape, Marta thought, positively refused to look foreign or historic; it grew more and more like

home. Dunmore Junction next stop! Where she cooked for the section crew. Nonsense, it didn't really look the same—turnip fields and garden plots compared to unending miles of yellow sun-cured grassland—but somehow it felt the same. Being with Pauline revived all the rest. How young and fresh and eager they had been. *Ah, those dear vanished days when I was so unhappy.* If it were offered, would she live her life over again? No. But to be so much alive—yes, yes, yes! How little one made of youth while one had it . . .

At last. Though they weren't quite sure, they tumbled out in an avalanche of suitcases and hatboxes and typewriters. "*There he is,*" cried Pauline; and they were all laughing again, stepping into the waiting motor. Not a taxi. "My goodness," said Marta, "I was afraid we were going to two other places. How many names has this town got?"

Russ answered liberally: "Four." Antwerp, Antvers, Antwerpen, Amberes. Have it your own way; the Belgians don't care.

They liked it by all of its names.

Russ began an apology for some circumstance which was not immediately clear to them. He had reserved rooms at a hotel. He was sorry not to take them to his apartment as he had intended; he had a guest already, unexpected and apparently uninvited. "One of the men from our office, Ernest Wilson. He was there when I got back. I don't know how to turn him

out. He says his wife made the arrangement with me. If she did, I never heard her."

Marta said severely: "You must break yourself of the habit of saying, 'Yes, dear,' when you're not listening. Let this be a lesson to you. Especially when there's a husband."

Russ glowered and smiled. "Brownie, you devil . . . Caroline is the last woman—"

Marta persisted: "Well, how did Ernest get in, unless Caroline lent him her latchkey? Where is Caroline?"

Russ hunched his shoulders. "Sailed for New York. She took the children, so she thought it would be convenient to have her house done over; she'll be gone a month. Besides, she thinks it isn't good for me to be so much alone."

Marta repeated. "For a month? She parked her husband on you for a whole month?"

Russ elucidated patiently: "She thought it would be better for both of us. She didn't want to leave Ernest in a hotel. Ernest is nervous."

Still Marta could not quite grasp it. "You mean that he simply moved in while you were away?" Russ meant precisely that. "Ernest is nervous," Marta repeated dazedly. "If he ever gets over it, he should go far. What I don't understand is why she didn't leave the children. It would have been good for them. For him. For her. For you. I must see Ernest. I wish to gaze upon him."

“You will,” Russ assured her. “This is the Grand Hotel de Londres. Winston Churchill once stayed here.”

“I remember,” said Marta. “He rushed out on the terrace armed with a dinner napkin. To repel the Germans.” The terrace remained, a stretch of pavement snugly enclosed by a striped awning and green-painted tubs of shrubbery.

They liked it.

CHAPTER III

THE wall-paper alone, they agreed, was worth the money. It was fabulous, a cheerful nightmare. Each room exhibited a different and more terrible design, of purple cabbages peering through blue lattice-work, pretzels in mustard growing on tropical crimson vines, and Euclidean explosions in the most bilious hues known to chemistry. The hall was utilized to full advantage: two unrelated patterns were narrowly separated by a wainscot strip. There was something engaging about such industrious whole-hearted bad taste. The parlor on the ground floor, in the rear of the lobby, admirably served its only conceivable purpose as a reliquary of the eighteen-eighties. Completely enclosed against any destructive incursion of light and air, it contained antimacassars and chenille table covers and a mummified palm in a fluted majolica jar resting upon a spiral pedestal of varnished oak. Pauline and Marta waited for Russ in the lobby, in plush armchairs adorned with fringe.

Marta's store of useless knowledge yielded unbidden the item that Van Dyck was born in Antwerp. Van

Dyck, the painter of supreme elegance, almost the inventor of elegance. Then there was no reason why another Van Dyck should not be born in Brooklyn. Placidly unaware, Brooklyn would outlast him. Van Dyck was nothing to these honest Belgians now enquiring for friends or buying cigars at the desk. Marta supposed they were Belgians. Like the landscape, like the hotel, they were bafflingly familiar, yet she couldn't place them by any individual features. Just men in soft hats and sack suits, youngish men barbered into an unobjectionable uniformity. The sort of men to be seen in commercial hotels anywhere . . . But that was it! Anywhere in the West or the Middle West. This was a middle class country, a commercial country. She had failed to place them precisely because they were so familiar. Add the personal note, and there was Perry Wells, except for his bright gold hair, and Wes Romike and Walter Burrows and Rich Anderson, though he ought to have a white bull-terrier at his heels, and Bert Champion and Stanley Simmons . . . Real estate, banking, brokerage and insurance . . . All the young men about town . . . All but Keith Brown and Chris Jackling . . . Marta nudged Pauline, demanding confirmation.

"So it is—they are—even if he is talking Dutch, that's Perry Wells selling somebody a corner lot in the East Antwerp Addition," Pauline agreed. "How weird!"

The perspective of the past is a misleading metaphor.

As experience the past is incorporate in personality; regarded by the participant, it is circumambient, equidistant, a cloudy sphere peopled by impalpable forms, to whom one's thoughts are addressed. And the self is not single; Marta was aware of three selves. There was herself now; there was the girl who had been herself; and there was the child she had been. She could see the child with objective distinctness; she had left the child behind when she left home. She could see the girl, though the point of discontinuity was not so definite. But the girl existed only in that forsaken prairie town; the woman who went away from there was her present self.

"What became of Chris Jackling?" Pauline asked; though Marta knew, by the inflection, that Pauline was not thinking of Chris, but of Keith Brown. Because he meant the same thing to her. Marta pursued her own thoughts aloud.

"I heard he'd gone down to Mexico." He was field inspector for one of the big oil companies, investigating "prospects"; his roving commission had brought him to the northwest. "I met him once, you know, afterward. In the lobby of the Multnomah Hotel." First and last she had seen him in a hotel. Flowered wallpaper in the first one and potted palms in the last; so it came back to her. "I recognized the back of his neck, clear across the room." That somehow was all that was left of her image of him, of his special charm—the inclination of his head when he spoke to any-

one, deferential and intimate. "I went over and touched his sleeve; he turned around and almost jumped out of his shoes. He was scared." Of the attraction that had once existed between them, that used to terrify her, reduce her to helpless despair. He was afraid of letting the djinn out of the bottle again. "I made him take me to tea. He hated it. Really, the whole thing was hard on him." She perceived now that while in love with him she had assumed that she was not responsible for her own emotions, and that he was. For both his and hers. A large order! "He was married again."

The girl who had been herself, Marta Cooke, belonged to Chris Jackling. She had surrendered at a glance, clear across the long dining-room. It was full of men she never really saw at all. She used to look over their heads.

She was eighteen, a shy, bold, moon-faced minx with a flyaway pompadour dipping over one eyebrow, pointed upward with a bow of black ribbon. Her black uniform frock was as simple and severe as a calyx, except for a slight fullness at wrist and blouse, until it flared about the hem; and the continuous line gave meaning to her least gesture, bringing her whole body into complicity. Leaning backward and sidewise, with the same motion she kicked open the swing-door, her skirt swirling about her ankles, and swam down the room with her chin lifted, swaying on the slender stem of her waist to balance the heavy tray held

shoulder high. *Against my will I am sent to bid you come to dinner.*

He had stopped by the furthest table to exchange a casual word with an acquaintance; he bent his head slightly and smiled. He would have addressed an aged squaw just so, as if he had happily come upon the one person he sought. Marta was hard put to describe him in terms that might not have applied to any other presentable young man, except that he was somehow all of a piece, well-made and harmonious, so that his even tan went with his brown hair and eyes, and his gestures had a natural grace. She had always preferred brown men; or was it because of him? Could it be so simple, so silly, so shockingly a matter of chance, like the turn of a card at the moment in the game when it would take the trick? Why should she remember forever that he stood just there, smiling with his eyes, a complete stranger?

In a sense, she was never to know any more of him than she knew then; the effect he produced upon her, fixing her attention, was to be intensified, that was all; the situation existed complete from the beginning. She knew his name as soon as he took his place at the next table. Because of the tall beautiful red-haired woman, with the little girl, who had been in the hotel for a week, waiting for her husband. Mrs. Jackling. The child used to roam about looking for amusement, a pert, precocious yet somehow engaging infant, seven or eight years old; she followed Marta at her work

distributing fresh linen in the mornings, asking aimless questions or showing off a new frock. If it hadn't been for the child Marta might never have met Chris at all. He was at the hotel only two or three days, never any nearer than the width of the room; she had no reason to suppose he ever noticed her existence. A year later, the child recognized her. Chris said he did, too; Marta did not know whether or not it was true, another unsolved fragment of the riddle. The second encounter, the acquaintance, occurred after she had gone to another town, and to other work; but it was merely the next town, of the same type though somewhat larger; and she was still the same girl. Nothing had touched her; the year she spent in the hotel was wholly an adventure of the mind.

But a great adventure, which she would not willingly have foregone. It was unique and incommunicable, her discovery of the world. She had not been mistaken in believing so; it was the world. As when Columbus set foot on a savage island so small and poor that its identity is uncertain; nonetheless, he was taking possession of the New World. So Marta took possession of unknown potentialities, by the act of earning her living. Her own money, her own room, her own life entirely at her own disposal.

Toward the end of the year she was half asleep on her feet, drunk with fatigue. She was on duty never less than ten hours a day, and after hours she studied. She didn't complain. It was a reasonable down pay-

ment for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The extent of her ignorance was the measure of her interest. Of men she knew nothing at all. She wished she could take one to pieces, to get at his motives and impulses. Sometimes she tried, to the discomfiture and amusement of the subject of experiment. They were unable to inform her. For they never thought about it; they had been trained not to think about it. And men and women spoke a different language, the more confusing because they did not recognize the fact; so it was transvalued without translation. There was an insane discrepancy, an absence of any measure. . . . To desire anything so much, and to hold it so cheap . . . The other girls were two or three years older than Marta, and had acquired a degree of practical, pragmatical wisdom. They imparted it behind the big screen by the swing doors, whispering and laughing; they shielded one another in minor escapades of evenings, playing tag with the rules, but keeping within boundaries fixed by themselves. They were good girls; it was a respectable, dingy hotel. She was a nice kid herself, Marta thought.

She wouldn't say as much now. Whatever the gain, there was a loss; it hurt to take stock. The Everlasting Wrong . . . For in any case you couldn't go on being a nice kid. Susie, the head waitress, was as good as bread. A thin, dark, gentle girl, showing her mixed blood in her stately carriage—French, Scotch, and a dash of Indian—she was pious, too, a

good Catholic. Marta went to vespers with her sometimes. *Tower of ivory, Rose of Sharon* . . . Susie was going to marry the porter, an honest hardworking youth. She would certainly be fat and frowsy now, or haggard with childbearing, submerged in a kitchen in that dusty town. No, no, no, thought Marta, I don't like myself, and I've had a hell of a time getting to wherever I am, nowhere; but I'd rather be me, be here. *Pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death* . . . It has nearly killed us, Pauline and Russ, too . . . We're survivors from a wreck. Cast up on the beach in Paris hats and marcel waves, movie style . . .

Russ entered, searching for them with his eyes; and she and Pauline rose, beaming at him. Exactly as they used to when they sat and waited for Keith, for Chris. . . . When Russ was undoubtedly meeting Nonie, or the girl he was to marry, or maybe some girl whose name he had since forgotten utterly. . . . All of them eager for the encounter, expecting an ultimate event of enormous, undefined importance, that was to make all the difference. And all the meetings leading up to this chance conjuncture of the three of them, which meant nothing whatever, would lead to nothing. And they were glad of it, preferred it should be so; therein lay its special value. *For the sword outwears the sheath, and the heart wears out the breast.*

"Sorry to be late; some of the men from the Vienna office are here," Russ explained. "I had to ditch them.

And I wanted to take you home for dinner, but Ernest will be there." A summer shower was threading the air with silver. They stood under the awning, waiting for a taxi. The restaurant, Russ mentioned, was less than a block away. "Oh, let's go," said Marta, and they ran for it, through the lovely slanting crystal streaks that splashed into little stars on their lashes.

"There's always Ernest," she added, breathlessly irrelevant, as they crowded into a booth. There used to be a lump of a girl named Cora Drinnan, who shared her apartment before Pauline; and hadn't sense or manners enough to keep out of the way when Chris came. Marta invariably vanished when Keith called on Pauline, if there were no fourth. And much good it did. Nothing else would have fixed his interest on her so surely. For once, her conscience acquitted her; she had foreseen no such result. She was "out," a remote spectator, dimly surprised to perceive Pauline inviting a similar disaster, but aware of the futility of advice.

"Does Ernest sit up for you?" Pauline enquired. "My son invariably wakes and demands: 'What time is it?' and I have to lie by the clock. Last winter he rigged a burglar alarm, while I was out dining with the boy friend. Just as we were saying good-night—David has that old-world courtesy, holding his hat and making his best bow—the contraption burst into the most frightful racket. David almost fell downstairs; and Jimmy called out: 'Step on it again, mother.' I

simply had hysterics. You can imagine how difficult it is to manage what you might call any private life in the circumstances."

"Maybe he disapproves of mothers having private lives?"

"Quite the contrary. He asked me awhile ago, 'Do you suppose you could get married again, mother?' Not might—could." She wondered herself if she could. Bring David to the scratch. And bring herself to it. She changed her mind on both points at five-minute intervals. She'd been married, and David hadn't, an obstacle on each side. He thought it would be absurd at his age. "Jimmy is worried about leaving me alone when he grows up. Aged parent abandoned on doorstep. Or else having me on his hands. Though of course he feels it won't be long; he told me to have a good time on this trip, not to hesitate about spending my capital, because it would last my time, and he could make his own way, he didn't need my money. A touching scene. I made him promise that when I become completely impossible he'll put me in an old ladies' home, by force if necessary. Nobody shall ever say I've been a good mother, devoted to my son." She speculated why she had felt no affection for her own mother. Such a wonderful old lady, people said, so charitable and neighborly, especially if there were sickness or trouble, never thinking of herself. She never missed a funeral . . . What are we here for, if not to help others, was her maxim . . .

It's my father, thought Marta. Russ smothered an inarticulate sound, and shrugged. *My mother . . .* He picked up the wine card. Lanson?—1921 was recommended as a vintage year. And the dinner order; what would Marta have—lobster Stephanie, romaine . . . Ice cream? “No ice cream,” Marta interposed. “I'm on a diet.” Russ said, stupefied: “Lobster and champagne—that's a hell of a diet.” They broke into giggles. “I'm sure Ernest would consider it immoral,” said Marta. “Doesn't he eat cornflakes for breakfast?” Russ admitted: “He does. How did you know?” They had Ernest as a relish, with pepper sauce. Then, having lingered sociably till the Lanson was finished, they decided to go over to the apartment anyhow.

CHAPTER IV

I BELONG to the cat kind, Marta thought, as they turned into a long avenue redeemed from the commonplace by ranks of noble chestnut trees; there's nothing I like so much as this, still-hunting on a summer night, "when the windows are shut in the street," going no place in particular, especially no place I ought to be; and if it's been raining a little, so much the better. . . . She had walked with Chris in the rain, a lost girl. Lost because Chris was holding her hand in the pocket of his coat. Her new shoes that had pleased her so with their bright buckles—there was the last of the girl, of the child perhaps—were ruined, and she didn't care. Chris pulled a branch of lilac over a stone wall and gave it to her, dew-cold and sweet. They had no place to go.

Americans don't sit down, she thought. Because they think they are going somewhere, though they're not certain where, and they must keep on. All these cafés and benches are Europe. . . . The shadow of the concierge leaped nimbly across the glass panel of the street door and back again. The conscience of Europe,

an institutionalized nuisance, to be tipped and cursed and ignored. He was invisible when they stepped quietly into the quiet hall, their hush an unconscious confession of past midnights. "We won't stay long. Half an hour," Marta whispered firmly to Pauline. "You remind me if I don't remind you."

"It's not late," Russ said. Marta sighed: "Not yet, but it gets late so early. What time do you usually go to bed?" "I don't know"; his reluctant expression struck Marta. She said: "Do you do that, too? Wind the clock without looking at it, so you won't know?" He confessed: "It's all right if you don't see daylight under the blind."

The admission told her a great deal that could not have been conveyed more explicitly. Their daytimes had never belonged to them. They lived on borrowings from the night hours, repaid with interest out of tomorrow.

"We mustn't wake Ernest," Pauline said under her breath. "No chance," Russ muttered. Ernest was awake. He rose from a wing chair by the reading lamp, the gracious host complete with dinner jacket. Ernest was a desiccated colorless youngish man, tall and narrow. His rimless eyeglasses gleamed with inexorable hospitality. It's Little Johnny Bostonbeans, grown up into a Y. M. C. A. secretary, Marta thought wildly; and knew the evening was gone. Pauline thought, it's almost more than Russ can bear, to be welcomed into his own apartment, practically told to make himself at

home. Ernest has been sitting facing the door for hours, for fear we should escape. Their gaiety crystallized into defensive politeness. Pauline shouldered the obligation. "What were you reading?" her fluty upward inflection made the effort sound spontaneous. Marta answered at a venture for Ernest: "A detective story. All great men read detective stories. President Wilson and Jack Dempsey and Owen D. Young. It rests the brain. To achieve greatness, the brain must be kept in a state of absolute repose." Ernest's eyeglasses radiated gratification. It *was* a detective story.

In the atmosphere of bleak propriety which Ernest created, they were unable to remove their hats or accept the invitation of the deep-cushioned sofa; they moved about the room tentatively. It was very large, new, restfully negative, being furnished only with necessities. The furniture was unstamped by any personality through use, except for some books on the table and mantel; an odd lot, French and English, some bespeaking taste, others accidental. Pauline exclaimed: "You've got 'The Tale of Genji.' We read it on the boat; isn't it charming? At first it seems quaint and far off, and then it comes alive; they are real people, only they've made a world shut in by a garden wall, where nobody had to worry about money or work. They spent their time matching silks and taking the pet crickets out for a sip of dew and presenting one another with sprays of wistaria. Everything was done by form, but all the formalities were paper partitions, and they stepped

through whenever they chose, but it had to be done in exactly the right way, or at the right moment, to keep up the play, and you can't tell what made it right—the same as with us, wearing a bathing suit on the beach, when you'd be arrested for going on the street in it. So you're never quite sure what they will do next—except compose a poem. I wonder if it really was like that?" Russ said: "It is yet. In Shanghai there's a street where the Chinese merchants stroll up and down carrying bird-cages, solemn old duffers in brocade coats and embroidered shoes, giving the canaries an airing. And the geisha girls in Japan make verses at dinner, by way of repartee with the guests. When one of them made a neat hit, I could tell by the way the Japanese men took it; but if I asked what she said, the translation hadn't any point to me: autumn leaves or morning glories or moonlight." In the glow of her enthusiasm, Pauline turned to Ernest: "Have you read it?"

Ernest said: "Not yet; I meant to try it, but haven't had time."

"You wouldn't make much of it unless you've been to Japan," Russ said. Pauline's eyelashes flickered; she thought, Russ doesn't want Ernest to read a book he likes himself. He knows we've never been to Japan. Marta thought, Ernest might as well be at a Japanese dinner, he yearns to join the conversation but it's in a foreign language. To make a diversion, she glanced at another book, then put her finger on it tentatively: "Something About Eve." Russ was watching her;

their eyes met. She ventured the question: "Did you care for this?" hoping for a disclaimer. Russ nodded: "He's got it all down."

Then it was true, as a disclosure of a man's mind, his feeling about women. Pauline looked: "Would I like it?" Marta said lightly: "It's pretty rough stuff." Here was the riddle to which she had found no key when she was eighteen. To men, women are another species. She had surprised it in their eyes, following her or some other girl as one might observe a wholly strange creature; something unaccountable, enchanting, perhaps dangerous, almost supernatural. And bad. There was a dark streak in their thoughts . . . But why? Trix O'Neill told me once that I had no feelings; not that I was unkind or mean, but like Ariel when Miranda was weeping for the shipwrecked sailors: *So would I too if I were human*. Afterward she said she was wrong, that it was because I reversed the usual process, felt with my mind, instead of thinking through my emotions. . . . When I was in love with Chris I couldn't class him with other men; I didn't know what to do or say; he had power, he was as incomprehensible as a god. He belonged to another order. Then it must be as if men were in love with women even when they're not in love with one woman. They are bewildered, and they grow to resent the subjection. It makes them cruel. They want to deface the image of the Witch Woman, degrade her, burn her. We don't understand why they are obscene; it's a denial of the Witch

Woman's power. Something you must submit to or fight; you can't come to even terms, or make a truce. That might be why—I don't know. Chris told me I could have had him under my thumb; he said I was far stronger than he. But *it* was stronger than I. For I didn't want him under my thumb; I wanted him to bestow happiness on me, because he had power. It was enough to scare him, to have me pile the world on his shoulders. I can't stand it either when a man expects me to make him happy; I've always run away . . . Russ likes women, he really likes them; but it must be that he feels they broke him, as I felt about Chris. Chris didn't, of course; he was rather decent, on the whole. . . . I daresay we'd have to be dead and disembodied to understand. . . .

Russ was still watching her, half smiling, under his dark brows, with the expression of one disarmed, who surrenders without retracting; as if to say, yes, it's true, all of it, and I do like women, I like you. You've got it on me. Besides, it doesn't matter now, the war's over.

What he said was that there was champagne in the icebox. They fetched it out.

Even that did not help much, against Ernest. Pauline struggled bravely with the stock market and the weather. Marta, sitting on the sofa beside Russ, shrank under the pitiless publicity of Ernest's eyeglasses. She said to Russ: "This flat looks as big as the Pennsylvania Station." Prompted by an impulse toward escape, Russ

asked if she would care to look around. "There's nothing to see," he added; "I got some stuff in China, but I shipped it to New York—not sure how long I'd be here. So I just walked through a furniture store and ordered this lot wholesale." Marta rose with alacrity. Conscience compelled her to include Pauline: "Do you want to make the grand tour? Not that I want you—ow!" Russ had thrust out his arm and "side-swiped" her, dropping her neatly back on the sofa. "No, you don't! . . . I'm sorry, I didn't mean—" "To break a rib?" Marta giggled. "It's all right, nothing but the collar-bone. What's a collar-bone between friends? I assure you, my intentions were strictly dishonorable." She thought, that's the champagne; I'm talking the kind of piffle you think is funny when you're half tipsy. Russ isn't, and he doesn't want me to let down, on account of Ernest. I must pull myself together, go home. She slid around Russ and he followed her into the dining-room. Maybe, she thought, he really did suspect I meant to start something. She was suddenly shy and sober. They stood by the open window, gazing down at the dark mass of the heavy-leafed chestnut trees, not quite looking at each other. The delicate balance established at the moment of their meeting in Paris was shaken. As if they had been dancing and lost step, or the music stopped. They were unwillingly aware of the profound implications existing between them simply as a man and a woman; their silence was confession by avoidance. Once, eight years ago,

they had trespassed recklessly on the debatable ground; because it was only once, the impression remained vivid and near, as when two people see each other by the spurt of a match, leaning together to light their cigarettes in the dusk. With no clue to what Russ was thinking, Marta could not have said what was in her own mind. She dispelled the silence: "It's nice to have so much room to yourself. When I go home at night, the best of it is that there's no one waiting for me. Except the colored maid, and she never speaks, and leaves after supper. Where do you keep your old family retainer? I hope we haven't disturbed her."

"Berthé? she can't hear us; the servants' rooms are on the floor above. She has a husband concealed up there." Russ did not answer the rest of what Marta had said; because she had, in the slang sense, said it. Here he had space and quiet; so he was enabled to get through each day as it came. He preferred not to reckon how many years he had spent in single rooms, whether hotels or lodging houses, definitely limited to four walls, with no sense of permanency or possession. You went out just to get out; some queer enough places he had gone to, under that necessity. . . Brownie had a trick of getting past your guard. In Alma's car, how long ago was it? coming back from a party, he had spilled everything, told her between kisses how he wanted to get clear away, cut all the ropes. The joke was on him, for he asked her to go with him, and she said she would—she was playing him, of course

—but there he was, wanting to get away from women, and proposing to take one along! . . . Then she wrote to him in China, called the turn again, told him how bored he was with the stuffy clique of the foreign colony, the same thing over again, as if she'd been there. . . . She used to sit sunk in the corner of Alma's sofa, as pale as a ghost, as blank as if she didn't even know your name; then she'd flash out and answer your very thought, coming alive like an electric spark, and suddenly almost pretty. She does it for fun, he thought. Tells your fortune by the cards and then shuffles them up—phut! You never knew where to have her, or where she would have you. He was glad to see her again, had counted on it. Because you could talk to her, and you didn't have to. Now, being near her, gave him a sense of something having come out right. But mixed with . . . He was too tired to figure it through, and Brownie had thrown the switch again. Still, it was there . . .

They went down the hall, subdued by the knowledge that they were only spinning out the last minutes. Opposite a half-open door, Marta clapped her hands, childishly delighted. "Pauline, look! Clouds of glory!" A foam of white stuff, spreading downward from a small gilt crown above the headboard, flowed chastely over the bed. "It belonged to the Empress Josephine, I'm sure. I want one! I need it—so becoming." Pauline came.

"It's only a mosquito net," said Russ amiably. "You

do need it in this town. We get malaria mosquitoes—even yellow fever sometimes, they say, from the ships.”

“We haven’t got them at our hotel,” Marta mourned.

“Malaria mosquitoes are extra,” Pauline explained. “Yellow fever, double rates.” Marta said: “Idjit! Has Ernest got a canopy?”

Russ nodded toward another door. “In there.” They stopped at the threshold; Marta and Pauline exchanged eloquent glances. “I hope Ernest gets malaria,” Pauline said piously. Marta said: “I shall cry myself to sleep. You needn’t bother to take us back, Russ, we’ll find a taxi.”

He insisted, and they were unable to deny themselves the brief reprieve from Ernest, who expressed a polite eagerness for another occasion. “Oh, we’re bound to meet again,” Marta said. In the cab, she brooded, while Pauline held hands with Russ openly. “I suppose there is no way of getting Ernest out? Not that it would do you any good; we’d move right in.”

Russ swore mildly. “I’ve had the flat nearly two years, and you are the first guests I’ve invited. Or wanted.” He added, as if driven to make the statement in self defense. “Ernest sings in his bath.”

“Can’t you give him a hint?”

“I did. So this morning he whistled.”

“George,” said Pauline, “used to sing in his bath. At seven in the morning. He was always cheerful in the morning. I have trained Jimmy not to speak to his angel mother before ten.” For twelve years, she thought,

I never had a night of unbroken sleep. The cold grey-ness of waking and the sick thin feeling under your breastbone . . . When the babies were through nursing and teething, George had acquired that unhealthy overweight; he slept soddenly, and his breathing was labored, hoarse . . . I knew that last morning, before I opened the door; I couldn't hear him. The whole house was still . . .

Marta thought, I used to laugh before breakfast. Trix noticed it . . . Not any more. Denny Forbes caught me yawning at my desk, and I said the wind had rattled the sashes. He said: Women never sleep, do they? and then he turned red. *A Short History of Women* . . .

In Pauline's room, where she stopped to retrieve a book, Marta said: "If I hadn't sent you that silver lace frock, you might never have married George." It was offered as a peculiarly feminine act of reparation. "But I thought you were rather . . . That he was attractive . . . By your letters . . ."

"He was then," said Pauline. "I don't know. I was sure he'd be successful. Nothing seemed to matter very much. I didn't even care about Keith any more. If George . . . I didn't know he drank, I mean, that it had got him. We used to go riding." Racing across the unfenced prairie, letting the surefooted broncos, half-bred Indian ponies, take their heads, on a loose rein. . . . How could she define what she had felt for the young George she had married, all fire and urgency and hope-

fulness; for the gross, pathetic, desperate, valiant husband she was bound to; when they were the same man? . . . He knew he wouldn't make old bones; with intolerable generosity he had striven to provide security for her and the children before the reckoning fell due. While the drink was on him he blustered; when he was sick and sorry, getting over it, he wept. She hardly knew which was worse. She pitied him, she despised him, she respected him—for the indestructible fibre of his ambition. And for one unpardonable word she hated him, oh, beyond the grave. . . . She did not even forgive herself for having heard it; she should have killed him. What is the sum of such a relation?

She was pulling off her gloves; she dusted her fingertips together, and said, with that truly angelic note in her voice, a voice tuned only to mirth: "You can't love a man who weighs two hundred and twenty pounds."

CHAPTER V

AND it's true, you can't, Marta meditated in her bath next morning, recovering the impressions of the previous day as if they had been held in solution in the warm water, ready to recrystallize. She woke clear-headed, in good humor and good appetite . . . I wouldn't have persuaded Pauline about the wine, she thought, only she does need it, to break the tension. For two years she has thought of the children all day and dreamed of them at night. Everything crashed at once. I wonder she didn't go mad. Even if she had stopped caring for George, it was a frightful shock.

But you can't love a man who weighs two hundred and twenty pounds. That's a plain fact.

It's so elementary, it must have a moral value that we've burked somehow. So it queers every system of civilization. As if we'd left out a cornerstone. One of the natural bases of morals. Chastity may be a virtue, continence anyhow; it calls for will and intelligence, the exercise of choice. Romance, poetry, sentiment depend on it. But they are just what that view

of marriage destroys . . . Where have I read that there isn't any statute against murder? Only common law, precedent. Because you don't need to be told it's wrong. . . . Whether you call marriage a contract or a sacrament, if the—the fact makes your flesh creep . . . I don't know what they mean by a sacrament. If you can't tell the difference afterward. Of course they call in the mystical faculty. Then I haven't got it. Nor Pauline. So for us the sacrament is nonexistent. A sacrifice—they used to:

*As it would chance of old in Babylon,
Where, of the women of Melitta, one,
Spurning the proffered coin and strange embrace,
Broke from the man and shrieking fled the place . . .*

The other sacraments, sacrifices, they've refined away into symbolism. Bread and wine for the body and blood. Impracticable in marriage. So they cover it with euphemisms, conjugal rights, duty, and what not.

What was I trying to get at? Keith was perfectly worthless as a husband. But he was good-looking. Well, that's something. A natural virtue . . . In cultivating the social virtues we've lost sight of natural values. We don't seem to have decided positively what we are trying to be; whatever it is, you've got to have a physical form for it. The handsomest races are those that have fixed a type by thousands of years of subconscious intention. The Indians gave themselves splendid bodies; they left their faces crude.

The Chinese made their faces into smooth beautiful masks—so did the Greeks maybe—a veil for thought. Not blank but serene and withdrawn . . . Where was I? . . . It's fatuous to say it was Pauline's duty to love her husband. Much more his duty to be attractive. If he wouldn't, or even if he couldn't, neither could she. Not that kind of love. You *cannot*. That was what poor mother meant . . . A worn little old woman whose face for many years had held the strange sad peaceful expression of the dead. Only her grey eyes were luminous with affection. She said: I don't think I believe in marriage. But I don't know what else people can do. . . . And she had been married nearly fifty years. What monstrous effrontery, Marta thought, for a priest or a philosopher to lay down the law to her. God himself would hardly dare. And if He did, it would still be vile . . . Mother wouldn't be shocked even if she knew all about me. She'd believe it was the best I could do, and better than her life anyway. She hoped we wouldn't marry . . . Marta moved her head, a blind gesture, and stood up, reaching for a towel.

She went to Pauline's room for breakfast, and they played their morning game of trying to have the rolls sent up hot, with enough butter. It couldn't be done; the whole force of tradition was against them. I always supposed they *were* hot, Marta reflected, when I read in novels about coffee and rolls. Nearly everything we think we know is wrong. Not a sustaining reflection for her, who had an innate, unquenchable

desire to grasp the facts, the truth. Philosophers drew a distinction between facts and truth, which annoyed her vaguely; she suspected it to be a subterfuge. If you knew all the facts you'd know the truth. That being impossible, philosophers had to pretend that facts were unimportant, else they couldn't construct their neat theories. Presently a fact too solid to ignore walked through the scheme and left it looking like a burst paper hoop. When she was a child Marta had lost the animal fear of death in the belief that when you died you'd know everything. It would be worth dying for; she was almost impatient to die. The belief had vanished since; you might know nothing whatever; but the fear had never returned.

They shared the Paris Herald. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Williams and Miss Gladys Williams of Moline, Illinois, were registered at the Crillon. Mr. J. Armstrong Sinsabaugh, president of the Winnetka Rotary Club, had arrived in Paris after a tour of Italy, and endorsed Mussolini. Mrs. Mortimer Frame, of Harrisburg, Pa., had entertained the Countess de Rochefontaine at lunch. Marta and Pauline absorbed this information as if it were deeply significant. How ridiculous— But after all, Marta thought, it is significant to us. All accustomed words are invocations. Mrs. Mortimer Frame conjures up a whole continent, mountains, forests, prairies, small towns, skyscrapers, flivvers, bacon and eggs and toast. The Countess de Rochefontaine is merely an arrangement of the alpha-

bet. A Frenchwoman, on the contrary, would see all Paris and the provinces lurching with an abstraction.

"Postcards!" said Pauline resolutely. "Then we'll go to the cathedral. I ought to send David a cable, here's his third. But listen!" She spread them out, reading aloud; the phrasing was so nearly identical that it became a chant, her short upper lip prettily satirical. "Have a good time dull without you love David. If you knew how I've worked over that man! And the minute I'm gone he relapses into this. Dull without me, love—I'll say he is!"

Marta commented: "Should you ever have dreamed that at our age we'd still be bothering about men? Or they about us. At twenty, I supposed thirty was the end of everything. Well, Alma's mother is seventy, and she was spoken to on the street. She's really a handsome old lady, though. I won't be; if I get thinner I'll look like a monkey, and if I get fat I'll look like a washerwoman. I haven't decided yet whether to be a holy terror of an antique in black silk and diamonds, with a wig and a passion for scandal; or go native, brown and battered, digging in my garden, in a print dress and flat-heeled shoes." Pauline said: "There will always be men. As I grow older, they grow older, that's all." Marta asked: "How old is David?" Pauline bit her pen, as an aid to arithmetic. "Fifty-five or six maybe. Rather distinguished, tall and lean, nice blue eyes and a clipped grey moustache, very neat." Marta suggested: "Matched socks and ties—that sort

of thing?" "Oh, yes. And he lives at the club."

Marta enquired: "Why don't you marry him? You're used to having a home and a husband, you made it your career, so to speak; not like me, I'm set, living alone. Couldn't you—of course, if you'd hate being married to him, that's different." Pauline said candidly: "No, it's not that. It's—I'm not sure." There were so many considerations, for and against, that she did not know where to begin. "Do you think I could get him?" If that were settled, she could weigh the rest calmly, examine how much, and in what manner, she liked him. "I daresay a determined woman can get almost any man she goes after," said Marta. "But you and I aren't determined, about men. Because we lost Chris and Keith. It's absurd, the same thing happened to both of us, and confirmed us in exactly opposite dispositions, so we'd repeat our mistakes to the dot if we had a chance. I'd lose any man I wanted because I'd sit around as dumb as a fish, waiting for him to speak to me, till he was bored and drifted away. You'd have your man dizzy trying to guess what you expected him to do. If you didn't want him at all, you could get him—that's consoling . . . David has money, hasn't he? It would suit you to have heaps of money."

"I must have money," said Pauline. "I've been through so much—" When the luck ran against George so persistently—there simply wasn't any money in the country—and she found herself in the

trap so many millions of women have been caught in, and her children with her, growing up to go through the same struggle, she felt she had done them some inexpressible wrong. What was the use if no one ever got out? "At the very worst," she said, "it would have been worse if George hadn't left me enough to live on."

"David is a snob, isn't he?" Marta said thoughtfully. "The sort of old bachelor who prides himself on going about with the right people, prominent people?" Pauline said: "Yes, and they bore him frightfully; he goes to all the parties and then tells me how bored he was." And doesn't take you to the parties, Marta thought. "I prefer him to be a snob," Pauline continued. "Sometimes I think I prefer to go on as we are; I've got over wanting anything settled. Possibilities are more interesting than certainties. And then, I'd be more comfortable with someone like Clint Charles. Only that's out of the question; there's Vi."

"Clint Charles!" Marta exclaimed. "Do you mean to say—" "No, no," Pauline protested. "I play golf with him. He respects me!" "Speaking as one cat to another," said Marta, relieved, "he is exactly the kind of man who respects a woman for snubbing him consistently. I always liked Clint too, in a way. He's rather good company, if you bar ideas; an idea would strike him as obscene. But if Vi died, God forbid, and I heard you were going to marry Clint, I'd take the next train and part you at the altar. You'd get to

loathe him, if he belonged to you. The poolroom lounge note. Shirtsleeves and red suspenders. Vi suits him; she's common to the bone. It's what he married her for. Vi is a dead giveaway of Clint."

"You say the most terrible things," Pauline moaned. "Because they're true. Vi does suit Clint. And I shall never see him again without thinking of poolrooms and red suspenders. Jimmy hates him too. Mayn't I play golf with him?" Marta said: "Certainly; his place is on the golf-links. But you'd better marry David. It's his money puts you at a disadvantage, isn't it? And if he had no money you wouldn't be interested in him." "He wouldn't be himself if he had no money," Pauline explained. Marta saw the validity of this. If a man should give the best part of his life to making money, and were then deprived of the money, not much of him would be left. The idea of being loved for oneself alone is a sentimental fallacy; possessions may be adventitious, but not necessarily so, and accomplishments are certainly a part of personality. Nevertheless, the merely rich shall not enter the kingdom of heaven; they have their reward. "You're a snob, too, Pauline," said Marta judicially, "or no, not really, but you value yourself too low. Herbs and apples . . ." The allusion escaped Pauline . . . *And I, too late, under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.* "You have a small-town streak," Marta continued. "And I'm a bit of a shrew, not enough discipline. We know better, but in our weak moments we revert. David's money

impresses you. It wouldn't me, but I'd probably tell him where he could go, with aspersions on his ancestry. Still, if you want to marry him—"

Between her lashes Pauline glanced sidelong at the mirror. She was resting her cheek on her palm, curtained by her straight black hair; she was momentarily dimmed, under the shadow of a cloud, a faint virginal shame for the cruelty of time. Marta read it. "No, you are young to him. And like this, in your yellow kimono, you look nice." Pauline said: "How could you tell?"

"Everyone looks in the mirror," Marta said. *The Queen was in her chamber, and she was middling old; her petticoat was satin and her stomacher was gold.* "The very first time I looked in the mirror, I was eight. I couldn't believe it was me." Perhaps that was when she lost Chris, ten years before she ever met him. . . . She had to climb upon a bench, to come level with the scrap of glass hung over the washstand. They had moved so much, in the shiftless way of the poor, that they had no more furniture than a troupe of gipsies. The mirror was cheap and cracked, bad luck for Marta, since her sole beauty was the wildflower complexion of a delicate child. She never tanned nor freckled; she grew pale. The girls in stories she read had golden curls and large blue eyes. Her straight cinnamon colored hair, her grey eyes and wide mouth, and the morbid greenish tinge imparted by the wavy glass, struck her with deep unchildish dismay. When she grew up

she would have no beaux, no attention nor admiration. She thought of that at eight! And she armored herself quickly in a stoic pride, to confront her fate. She needed it again now. . . . *And she faced the looking-glass, and whatever else there was. . . .*

Later in the morning they pursued the cathedral spire through a maze of narrow crooked streets, loitering by shopwindows filled with cheap lace, china dogs, imitation jewelry and rayon undergarments. "These must be the Belgian atrocities," Marta conjectured. "Or European culture; it's hard to tell them apart. I'm growing attached to Antwerp; I don't know why." Unlike Paris, Antwerp made no demands; one did not have to live up to it. The wayfaring man, though a fool, might rest. The spirit of the place was bourgeois, asking only whether you could pay your modest bill. The outward aspect, the horizontal lines of the architecture, held to this middle way; the buildings appeared to be two stories in height, though actually they rose to five or six or seven, but they did not tower nor strive to overtop one another, and they were unified by their irregularities, blobs of carving, projecting window ledges and random cornices. In the eighteen eighties, when wood gave place to the proud permanence of stone, America burst into a similar style, in commodious mansions and Gothic courthouses, laden with applied ornament. It had its own charm.

"I love it," said Pauline. "Where is that damned cathedral?" The sacred edifice had escaped them.

Baffled but unvexed, they lapsed into a patisserie and solaced themselves with ices, before taking a cab back to the hotel for lunch. Russ sent the motor for the afternoon. The blond young Belgian chauffeur was charged to show them the town. His name was Henri; he spoke almost intelligible English, and seemed singularly pleased with his commission. At intervals he halted the car and directed their attention to points of interest, which they examined with the rapt intensity of perfect ignorance. "Did he say it was the gasworks or the glue factory?" Pauline murmured. "Oh, the city hall, of course." They did the cathedral after all; Henri stole a march on it, and shepherded them through.

Presently they were aware of the smell of the sea, and ships rose preposterously out of the solid earth; the flat marshmeadows were cut by narrow docks. Their sense of responsibility had vanished, dispelled by the temperate light and mild sunshine, the insidious demoralization of being carried about on a cushion. "When I nagged you into coming out to the Coast the first time," Marta said, "and we drove out to Bremerton, do you remember? you stopped the car because there was a blackberry vine beside the road. And the bracken and fern, such lots and lots of it—I wanted to roll in it, like a cat in a catnip bed." For Marta, the Puget Sound region was Merlin's Forest. *More deep asleep in green Broceliande . . .* "I couldn't exist anywhere else," Pauline agreed, obediently inspecting the medieval

fortress, guardian of the port for centuries. The old Tacoma railway station was of the same genre. "You can't be entirely unhappy there; it's heaven." They hadn't been wholly unhappy even then. Temporarily they were not anything; they were emotionally out of breath, and glad of each other's company. Chris was gone. Keith was gone. That was final. He and Marta had discovered with astonishment that they were strangers; he could only carry her suitcase to the station. They were already so far apart, there was not even embarrassment in lying beside him for the last time. He was a quiet sleeper. When they woke, she a moment before him, dawn was in the room; and a fleeting speculative grin touched the corners of his mouth. . . . As soon as might be, Marta wrote to Pauline, who came; and they discussed whether she should marry George. As they used to discuss whether she should marry Keith. As she asked now, should she marry David. . . . *Oh*, Marta thought suddenly. He didn't quite dare say it! After all these years, she guessed what it was Keith had thought: Hello, kid, what's your name? The pup! After all these years, in spite of herself, she grinned too.

"Which does he mean is the oldest house in Antwerp?" The small square dwellings in a row were so darkly weathered that one felt the grime had penetrated every particle; the very stones were shrunken with age. "I can't make out if he is telling us it's fourteen hundred years old or was built in 1400. Good heavens, it

must be the one in line with the Underwood typewriter sign!" Like the Ancient Mariner's albatross . . . Henri obviously took credit for the effect produced. They confirmed his belief by offering American cigarettes.

As a return treat, he conjured up the Brabo fountain; he had been saving it. There Pauline and Marta held to one another for moral support. "Do you see what I see?" The composition, in perdurable bronze, consisted of a nude athlete poised tiptoe on the prostrate form of a decapitated giant, and holding aloft a gigantic hand detached from the vanquished foe. Castles, ships and miscellaneous objects were involved in the affray, by way of foundation. The anatomical details fascinated them—water spurting from severed veins . . . Henri's manifest pride in this masterpiece subdued them. They listened respectfully to a legend which might have explained the group if they had been able to understand more than one word in three. But they knew a patriot when they saw him. "Did you fight in the war, Henri? No, you would have been too young." Henri assented. "Myn vader—my fader, he did fight, four years." Marta said: "A country that could erect such a statue, that could even imagine such a statue, is invincible. Have another cigarette. . . . Isn't it about time to go back to the hotel?" Henri indicated that they might trust him to deliver them at the place appointed according to instructions received from a higher source; and drove on until he came to a stretch of waste land, on which piles of bricks and iron

girders had been laid down. "Here," he said, "will be the—what do you call?—the site of the General Motors." They presented him with the package of cigarettes.

Re-entering the city, the car turned into a broad avenue handsomely set with trees. Pauline sat up: "Do you know where we are?" Obliginglly Marta peered at the signs; before she could decipher one, Henri slowed sufficiently to wave an arm toward the discreet façade of an apartment house otherwise indistinguishable in the ranks of new apartment houses. "And this is the residence of Meester Gir-rard."

"I told you so," said Pauline. "Isn't it lovely? Russ is one of the local landmarks." They gave Henri ten francs when he deposited them at the hotel.

In the upper hall, Pauline asked, without prelude: "Where did you get the money you sent me to come to the coast on?"

Marta was rummaging in her handbag. "I got it from Captain Matt Bradford." She fitted her key in the lock. "I had to have it. . . . You'd have died if I hadn't got you away for a vacation."

Pauline had wondered for eighteen years. On the other hand, she was not surprised.

"I'll be about fifteen minutes. You go down when you're ready; Russ might be waiting," Marta said; and Pauline said: "All right."

CHAPTER VI

IF the rain held off, Russ suggested, they had just time to visit Waterloo before dark. Pauline and Marta were agreed beforehand to whatever he proposed. They were to dine in Brussels. "I thought Ernest might go out this evening, but he didn't," Russ said. "Ernest is a home body," said Marta. "Never so happy as when he can spend a quiet evening among his books. He telephones his wife once a day from the office, too. That's why she went to New York." "He really does," said Russ, chuckling at the accuracy of her light malice. "This is the longest time they've ever been separated. Ernest and Caroline went to school together, and were engaged at sixteen." "One of those ideal marriages," said Marta. "It makes your blood run cold. They have no secrets from each other, and trust each other absolutely. Neither of them has ever looked at anyone else."

Russ could not hold out. "That's true. Ernest told me he wouldn't associate with a man who had—had—" "Had been around," Marta supplied irrepressibly. The phrase was an authentic classic of slang.

"Yes," Russ accepted the gloss.

"He meant it—said it seriously?" Marta enquired, waiting open mouthed for the reply.

"Ernest says everything seriously."

Marta was overcome. "Then what—well, isn't he in the wrong flat?"

"That's what I told him."

"And he stayed? Have you undermined his morals already?"

"He took it as a joke. Nobody he associates with could be that sort of person."

"Then there's no hope; he'll think the best of us," Marta sighed. Pauline remarked as if to herself: "Believe it or not, I am waiting for a street-car."

"Certainly; he was very keen to meet you," Russ said.

"To meet me? What for?"

"Oh, he knows who you are. He's seen your picture in the paper." Marta was irrationally discomfited. "The poor fish—as if I'd let a picture go out that resembled me in the least! It ought to be a lesson to him." Pauline said: "It won't be. He was quite smitten, never took his eyes off you." . . . She saw again Keith lounging on the red corduroy sofa, his sleepy dark gaze fixed on Marta in her chair by the piano, where Joe Warner, his curly head shining under the shaded lamp, was ragging the Spring Song . . . "Cat!" Marta protested.

"He said you two were the most interesting women

he had ever met," Russ amplified. "I don't doubt it," Marta jeered. So she had spent years of drudgery, racked her poor wits to the utmost, to win the admiration of Ernest. They were incomprehensible, the people who wanted to meet you because they had seen your name in the papers. The very ones who were horrified if you revealed the least opinion that was not banal, sticky with conventional sentiment. Her insignificant, ephemeral ray of the spotlight had shown her that. They were pathetic, too. What they sought was obviously what they dared not venture, a vicarious bite of the apple. So they devised a protective obfuscation; they could take a joke. Oh, you don't mean that, they said . . . Still, if Ernest knows who I am, it's more than I do, Marta reflected. Who am I? The stenographer at the Great Western Land Office, or the waitress at the Commercial Hotel—Ernest wouldn't have been delighted to meet her; though there was more reason. She was young and cheerful; she took people on trust.

And who is Ernest? He's somebody, something—we recognize him at sight, though we can't put a label to it. . . . And we want to duck. . . .

"Aren't these woods gorgeous?" said Pauline. "So perfectly manicured." The undergrowth was cleared, and the lower branches neatly pruned; leaves put forth at the knots, close to the bark, suffusing the interspaces with a mist of green; Corot didn't invent that effect. Europe took its character from a thousand such slight differences, another scale of beauty, tamed and ordered.

You felt that this forest had its decorous limits, that you would presently come out on the other side. Exquisitely restful and breathing assurance; only if you had the wilderness in your blood, you would wake and long for it sometimes, long to break bounds. . . . Driving in the dark across the prairie, on her last visit West, Marta had roused to attention, like a deer when it is down wind. This is wild land—it has never been plowed or fenced. The scent was unmistakable, finer and fresher than any capturable essence, as pure as the taste of water, a smell of grass and tiny, pale flowers and immense spaces of clean earth and air, washed by rain and sun. Her native air . . . She thought, we belong to a sunken continent; lost Atlantis, submerged under the westward tide of the peoples of the world. Our little towns are drowned, too. One used to come to the end of a board sidewalk and step off upon virgin sod. . . . After us, nobody will know what it was like. Europeans think Americans are young; we're two thousand years older than they. In our own lives, we go back to—to Julius Caesar. He landed somewhere hereabouts when it was a primitive forest. Sitting Bull was Vercingetorix . . . They've read their history. We've been through it all ourselves . . .

Henri turned and addressed a question to Russ, who replied in French. He spoke slowly but without hesitation. Marta listened, marvelling. She didn't need to understand French to perceive that his accent was uniquely bad, so remote from any approximation of

the Gallic inflection that it became authoritative, majestic. The French Academy would not have ventured to correct him, at a loss where to begin. . . . "Shall we go on?" Russ left the choice to Marta and Pauline. "This is Quatre Bras." The rain had begun and the light was failing; they would hardly be able to see the actual field of Waterloo, which was some distance further. "Whatever you say." They were still displaying an unexampled docility. Quatre Bras was a cross-road in the woods; Marta tried to imagine red-coated regiments filing by, and could not. Why an army was better off in one place than another, more effective, was incomprehensible to her. . . . "Must have been somewhere here that Wellington used to go riding with Lady Frances Webster." Under the trees, the uniforms and velvet habits and plumed hats would make a gay show. "Wellington?" "He was a great squire of dames, ran after anything in petticoats. But he said no woman had loved him—not one. Told Harriette Wilson so. He never loved a woman, either; that was why. I don't believe any of the famous men of action ever did—really." Marta was thinking aloud. The little dry nutcracker soldier must have wished he could, guessed that the rest was not worth winning without it, or why did he say that? *Another such victory and we are lost . . .*

Harriet . . . Russ thought, was that the price of success? You couldn't go all out for it unless you wanted it more than you wanted any woman . . . That cut your

comb for you . . . Harriet—Nonie—Louise perhaps if he hadn't gone away . . . And all the others, taken together. Women . . . Well, he was out of the running. Fini. Not that he gave a damn for the doctors. . . . He wanted to wind up this job, that was all. Then it would be pleasant to have a few years to rest, talk to your friends . . .

"Who was Harriette Wilson?" Pauline enquired incautiously. Marta informed her: "I'm sorry to say Harriette was a hussy. An abandoned female." "Why not?" said Pauline. "I should love to be abandoned. And go into a convent occasionally for a retreat." Funny, thought Marta, that's just what they used to do. "Wouldn't it be better to reside in the convent, and climb out of the window once in a while?" Pauline held her ground: "I'd rather be a hussy, with time off for good behavior." "When you decide, let me know," said Russ. "Oh, if you want to know, I am one," Marta said, and was vexed at herself. Leave it alone. He doesn't want to know. The poor dear is tired. I've been there myself. It rests him to let us do the talking, and have Pauline hold his hand, and no consequences. . . . *We'll go no more a-roving, so late into the night.*

But *I* want to know, her impulsive self protested. I've got to find out. . . . Nonsense. *They ain't nothin' I GOT to do except die.* What for do I have to find out? Sheer vanity. Devilment. No, not wholly; it was the mixture of motives which distracted her. People want to be good because they think that it would

make life simple and clear. But they want it that way so they could start fresh complications. . . . Ten to one Russ had no recollection of that night. He's been on hundreds of parties, she thought. Thousands. Millions . . . Well, if I knew that, then I'd know what for. It would be settled. Or not . . . If we'd never met again—but we did. At vast expense and trouble . . . *What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop? . . .*

In the Grande Place, the peaked fronts of the old Guild Halls, as rich as wedding cake with tier on tier of sculptured figures, seemed asleep. The rain had lifted. They descended from the motor, walking softly on the wet grey flagstones, as in a cloister. The buildings enclosed their period and atmosphere inviolate, locking the ranks against any modern intrusion. If one went, the rest would crumble, betrayed to the time spirit.

"This is where the Spaniards used to burn heretics," Russ pointed to a small memorial set in the pavement. Marta averted her mind. If you let yourself contemplate the monstrous sum of deliberate cruelty in known history, the fact that it is a part of human nature, you wanted to creep into some hiding place and cease to be. She said: "Handy for postcards in those days. X marks the spot. Wish you were here. The Belgians have a lot of old scores. But I suppose they've washed out the Spaniards, after three hundred years, except for the formal record."

Russ said: "They have not. They hate the Spaniards

yet. It actually makes trouble when we have business with the Spanish branch, calls for considerable diplomacy in direct contacts." Yes, if you've been hurt, she thought, the fear is in your blood. She could not bear uncertainty, because of that long bewilderment which left her permanently dismayed . . . She conceded: "The Duke of Alva would take considerable washing out." She wondered if hell might not be an inescapable knowledge of what others think of you, after you are dead. Not so good for most of us. Then a mass would help, a kind thought, with music and candles. But Alva wouldn't be let go to his masses; they'd hold him here at the stake he built, by the strength of their hate. She was not a Catholic, had never been anything, nor wished to be; but the forms of religion engaged her intellect. Disbelief did not wash them out; the mysteries then became one mystery of the creative imagination: that all these gods and devils and visions of judgment should exist in the brain of man, if nowhere else. Like the idea of justice, of virtue, of mercy. Say it all began in the crude barbaric legend of a warrior chief or a wise matriarch, or in a child's trust in the omnipotence of its elders; and that it was passed on and magnified by untraceable degrees until it grew into the splendid and shining images of poetic myth, Athena with her golden spear, Saint Michael with the sword of the spirit: the process of transmutation remained inexplicable and marvelous. If it were only the insubstantial shape of what men would be if

they could, how came so pitiful a creature to desire so greatly? . . . She checked herself, feeling that she was boring Pauline and Russ by such ponderous and futile fancies, though unuttered. They were not in the mood for history, nor was she; they wished to make the most of their own hour, of one another. Holding hands, for comfort . . .

The restaurant alcove suited their modest demands better, a little space of which they could take possession. Marta leaned her elbows on the table, opposite Russ as he read the menu to Pauline. "Why, you have green eyes," she announced irrelevantly. "Like gooseberry jam." He gave her a full view, glancing up with good-natured astonishment, and she added: "I'm very fond of gooseberry jam. I never noticed before; the only time I ever gazed into your eyes it was dark. No, they're sort of turquoise colored, but green." The very light green turquoise which has only a faint wash of blue; she had been aware of their strangeness without perceiving the material cause. Set between smut-black lashes, they gave him a singularly ingenuous expression for a man of his age, a solemn stare, innocent and impenetrable. He made no reply except a smile, a flash through the mask. He thought: she's having me on again, the little devil, shuffling the cards. So he kept still. Not that he minded giving himself away to her; he'd done that completely once; but the sport was seeing how she would get at you next.

He went on ordering dinner, imposing his pronuncia-

tion on the waiter by force of gravity. "Do you study French?" Marta ventured. "I'll bet Ernest does—or anyhow, Caroline has a teacher in once a week. She thinks it's such an opportunity for the children." "She does. I ought to, at that, but I never get around to it." "You just picked it up?" It sounds, she thought, as if someone had dropped it, with a crash.

"Dug it out of a French dictionary, twenty-odd years ago, in Chicago," he said.

Extraordinary, thought Marta, what could have set him at it then, when he had no idea he would ever be here? It was for such surprises that she had always been interested in him; unexpected tastes, when to all appearances he was the tired business man. Reading Genji, or telling her not to miss "Saint Joan"; or that he had been to hear Wanda Landowska—his wife being musical might account for the last, but not for the French dictionary in Chicago, which must have been before he was married. "How come?" she could not refrain from asking.

"I wanted to read French novels." Again that half-defiant understanding subsisted between them. "Oh . . . that kind?" she said tentatively. He nodded; she had cut the high card. "Yes. That kind." She felt that he trusted her to make something out of the admission beyond the obvious interpretation; or if not, he couldn't help it. . . . He wouldn't have gone to all that trouble just for a risqué story, she thought. Not his line; I've never heard him tell one. He was trying to

find out something. Like me, years ago, going around asking questions. Asking them now . . .

The French, Russ reflected, were supposed to have worked out the answer, arrived at a decent adjustment of the relations of men and women, a racial wisdom refined by wit and art. He didn't believe so any more; he wasn't sure there was any answer. Certainly the French were more candid. They admitted the existence of the problem, as fit for intelligent consideration; and it gave them to think furiously. That didn't prevent them getting into every kind of a jam, from broad farce to *crimes passionel* . . . All you learned was reasoning after the fact. Whatever you did was wrong, so you deduced that you ought to have done something else, or nothing. Easy to say in cold blood; the next time would be the same. Well, he could think of it now; probably there wouldn't be any next time. He caught himself on the "probably," with an inward chuckle. The probabilities were against his having the time, the energy, or the chance. Given those, he would certainly go off the deep end again. And like it! . . . While you were hooked, you did what you must. His work supplied a comparison, the way the spark jumped, the kick of the live wire when the current caught it. Only that could be managed, checked in figures, even if no one knew what it was. But the wire, the spark, couldn't choose or refuse. With the right combination, it happened . . . And love, or even passion on its lowest terms, was an emotion out of measure. It took every-

thing, however briefly, and so left you somehow forsworn. That anyhow had been his own experience. He had always cared, a little at the least; it reached the core. Women seemed to have more control; they could twist the soul out of you, without involving themselves. Even so, they were in the coil; and when it got them, they risked more . . . Some men—he'd heard them say so—took it differently; cheap enough. Or didn't. But then—what did they get out of it? . . . The women he had been in love with still had a hold on him. And the others that he hadn't been in love with—not quite— This was the best break he'd had for quite awhile. If you counted women out, it was pretty bleak, a lonely business. You wanted someone to tell things to . . .

The French novels had filled a great many deadly evenings. They recalled the faded monotony of a furnished room, different rooms but indistinguishable in their sameness: a bed, a chair, a table with pages of figures laid out under an unshaded light, work brought from the office. And a "golden oak" dresser where a yellow-backed book, open face downward, made a spot of color, doubled in the mirror. The work helped. He had enough of a natural bent for mathematics to find satisfaction in the steady, orderly reduction of a problem to a practicable plan. After two or three hours of absorbed attention, or when the pattern emerged, his mind would snap out of it . . . About eleven at night is the worst time, when you are young and quick.

Especially if it's fair weather, maybe with a moon. On a quiet street, the lamps bloom in long rows of little moons, leading toward the city, alight and alive . . . Or if there is a sound of water lapping on the beach; he'd had one room near the lake front. Makes you want to strip and swim out till you drown. You hear your own heartbeats, your blood rises in waves . . . Then he would set himself to picking out the knots of the foreign idiom, guessing at the implications, till the words blurred . . . Five or six nights a week . . . And then there would be one night . . .

Saturday afternoon, Tip Kearney and Heinie Weissmuller usually gave him the high sign as they shut their desks. They'd meet for dinner . . . Let's go down to the Levee and give the girls a treat . . .

He used to write his letter to his mother at noon on Saturdays, get it posted and out of the way. His clearance . . .

Marta leaned back and her sandal grazed his foot. He pinned her ankle between his, and they both burst out laughing. She had never played that inane trick; the contact was an accident. But their amusement was intimate, acknowledging complicity in the instant response, while disowning intention. "Pauline considers us very common," Marta said. But she thought, with concern, I can feel even through double silk—is that high blood pressure? Fever. You get that way when you're too tired to stop working, all in. I went on

till I nearly killed myself, it's foolish. He does need a holiday . . .

"I can't get through by Monday," Russ said. He was finishing an important report, specifications and costs for a big contract the company had under negotiation. "But we can drive out for the week-end to a hotel in the country—it's a made-over chateau. I go there to play golf sometimes, in the Ardennes. If it suits you?" Nothing could have suited them better. "Then we'll go on over to England," said Marta firmly, "on Monday's boat," committing them. While he had the Vienna visitors to cope with, he simply would not have any more time; the least Marta and Pauline could do was not to tax his politeness by overstaying.

CHAPTER VII

"AM I seeing things," Marta asked, "or has that woman over there got a diamond stud in her nose?" "No, I see her too," Pauline affirmed. "She must be a Hindoo, and the man with her." The pair were otherwise inconspicuously smart in their attire; the bronze tone of their skins no deeper than a Lido tan. "Egyptians, most likely," Russ suggested. "In pursuit of the Children of Israel," Marta conjectured, after a moment of incredulity. "Once on the New York subway, Lida Deacon and I heard two girls talking some language we couldn't identify. They had a gypsy look, but they were dressed American style. Finally we were so curious we asked them. They were polite, and said they were speaking Syrian; they came from Tyre. I mean Tyre in the Bible, purple and fine linen—where King Hiram loaded ships for Solomon with ivory and apes and peacocks. They'd been educated in an American mission school, so they spoke perfectly good English, too. Fancy meeting Tyrian damsels on the subway, going to Brooklyn. Not that it's any queerer than you coming from Illinois to install radios or refrigerators

in the Vatican. Aren't you from Illinois?" "Mostly," said Russ. "I was born in Ohio, but we lived in Rockford. My father travelled a good deal, and parked us there." When his father was at home, there were scenes, and painful, injured silences. In his absence, Russ's mother wept frequently, and enforced obedience with the obscurely wounding prediction, you're growing up just like your father. "He made money several times, speculating, and lost it again; he happened to be broke when he died. I was fifteen, and we had hardly anything but the house we lived in." A gaunt wooden house on the edge of town, much in need of paint, dated by a meager cupola and fretsaw work around the porch railing. The apple trees in the backyard were lovely in spring. Out of mistaken kindness, he once assisted his two-year-old brother into the upper branches, incidentally alarming his mother into hysterics. She came to herself effectively with a strap in her hand. His father never whipped him. "My grandfather had a big farm in Ohio; we used to visit him. It went to my uncle; he'd worked it for grandfather, so he had the best right. If I'd inherited it, I'd probably be there yet; I've always wanted a farm."

"You wouldn't have stayed," Marta said. "Wouldn't I? Why not?" Russ seemed open to argument. The farm had been a fixed value in his boyhood. Security, standing ground. Reverses came at the age when a child begins to grasp the social meaning of money. The knowledge of past prosperity made him feel unplaced.

And there was something equivocal and humiliating about the position of a woman and children when the man was vaguely "away" for indefinite periods. It was one of those things nobody spoke of . . . What hurt most was that he had been secretly and strongly attached to his father, while forced to hear him judged, take sides. The last summer, when he was fourteen, was the happiest. His father had taken him to California; they spent a month in the high Sierras, cruising a tract of redwood, on a speculative option. . . . If they had owned the farm, he would have had his father . . .

"I dunno why not," said Marta. "You just couldn't. None of us could. We're crazy. Intermittently. What for did you dive off the Van Camp's houseboat? Alma told me about it." Russ uttered a sound of protest, with that indescribable gesture of repudiation which is addressed to oneself, a shrug, a scowl, a rueful lowering of the crest. Marta pursued: "Alma drove Russ over to call on some people she knew—he hadn't met them before—they had a houseboat. And lots of hard liquor. Russ took a powerful scunner against his host, tried to start a fight. He wasn't allowed to, so he gloomed at the dark end of the deck. Next thing they heard a splash; he'd pulled off his clothes and leaped into the Sound. Wanted to Get Away From It All. They fished him out, but he got loose and took another header. They hauled him up once more; I forget how Alma managed to tow him ashore. You wouldn't suspect it, to see him clothed and in his right mind. But

that's why . . . The boiler blows up. When it occurs to us suddenly that today is Friday and yesterday was Thursday and tomorrow will be Saturday. Pauline, too, for all she's a perfect lady."

Russ admitted: "When those things come back to me, I groan and wonder: did I do that? . . . But Van Camp was an awful pill. Anybody would have wanted to sock him."

"I threw a potted geranium at George once," Pauline said. "I never liked geraniums. Missed him, of course." If it had been a knife she held in her hand . . . Marta said: "You should have practised regularly. Mere amateur dabbling gets you nowhere. . . This will do me no good, but I cannot tolerate waste." She reached for the glass Russ had left untouched, in which the last bubbles were expiring languidly . . . His doctor's orders must have been peremptory, she thought. Russ used to be able to drink with the next man; not that he had been a souse, or given to protracted sprees like Pauline's husband, but on the week-end parties he kept up with the crowd . . . I wonder how much he'd had that night, she thought . . . The wild times, she had not shared more than once or twice. Wild within the bounds of an understood group decorum; simply they drank, danced, and made a sufficient noise. She did not, as a rule, drink at all. My constitution, she reflected hazily, wasn't framed to admit amendments . . . "I'm surprised," she said at a tangent, "that Ernest drinks. Surely Caroline doesn't?"

"Oh, doesn't she?" Russ said. "They believe it's not wrong as long as they drink together. Ernest's sister-in-law is the best two-handed drinker I've come across for a good while. She was here in the spring, and ran us ragged. Every night was a party. Ernest says she's so broad-minded that she doesn't realize how narrow other people are; one mustn't judge by appearances."

"A simple, childlike nature," Pauline said. "She must have money."

"Quite a lot," Russ smiled.

"How do they get it?" Marta asked sadly. "Is she Caroline's sister?"

"No, she is Ernest's brother's wife's sister; and she married some rich old duffer, divorced him, and collected a big settlement."

"Is it possible that Ernest countenances divorce?" They were beginning to gloat over Ernest, enumerating his points with the solemn joy of a collector.

"It was her husband's fault. I don't know how; Ernest asked us to be careful to avoid the subject; it was a great shock to her." Marta suggested: "Probably he drank." She tipped the bottle wistfully, not desiring more, but regretting that the evening was spent. The last glass had made her sleepy. Unbecoming, but it did not matter. In the car, returning, she resisted an inclination, compounded of friendliness and fatigue, to lean on Russ's shoulder. Pauline needed his attention. Her nerves are all shot, Marta re-

flected; the wine hasn't helped her much tonight. Sometimes it doesn't, when your mind runs away with you.

People drank for different reasons, which were at bottom the same, a fantastic assertion of freewill, in the teeth of the gods. The timorous took Dutch courage, the inhibited babbled confidences. They denied foreknowledge by blanking out the logical processes of the brain, the cognition of cause and effect. She found it sedative rather than a stimulant. Her follies had been committed in a very desperation of sobriety. At her highest pitch, there was no virtue in wine for her . . . When Chris said: "We must drink to the bridesmaids." . . . She had been in love with him for a year, or if one counted from the very beginning, for over two years. He remained unaware of the beginning. He could hardly have guessed, and she let it go unspoken to the last. How strange, she thought; it was because I felt he knew everything. Neither did she ever learn whether he had been drawn by a like attraction; or if it had been chance and idleness made him claim acquaintance. That the little girl recognized and spoke of her was a sufficient pretext, not a motive. She could count up almost exactly the number of their meetings. Hardly a dozen, and none of her contriving. What harm is there in a kiss, he said . . . No harm . . . She was sure he had intended none. He wanted to kiss her, perhaps he was curious to discover why he wanted to. For she was not—she recognized it then—the type of girl he readily admired. Singular, that was equally

true of Keith . . . It was as if Chris had set about taming a bird, because it was wild, coaxing it to perch on his shoulder. He alone divined that she was *farouche*, savagely shy, adopting as a defense the saucy air that duller men took for an invitation. He possessed an extreme degree of physical sensitiveness, that delicacy of tact in the literal meaning which, combining instinct and intelligence, becomes a specialized intuition. It was when he took her hand in his that she felt he knew everything . . . But he's married, he's married, she used to say to herself. You can't have him; he belongs to her. It does not mean anything to him; he said a kiss was nothing . . . She was glad his wife was absent. Evidently they were accustomed to protracted separations. They had been married ten years, and his was a roving profession. Marta did not know what his wife meant to him either. He had the grace of reticence. . . . You're wicked, you're bad, she accused herself, with childish honesty. It serves you right if it hurts. When you are with him you don't care. It would be the same whatever he asked. So you're just as bad, it's only because he doesn't . . . If he called you, you would go through fire to him. Literally. Like a sleepwalker . . . Not only that he counted for more than anything else; nothing else counted at all. A passion of the mind, by which the body was ignored. And since such things were of no importance, she performed her work competently, quite important work; she went here and there and was merry, had beaux . . . If she

met Chris, they never spoke of the last time, or the next time. They had to remain outside of time . . . When he came into her office and said he was going East for awhile, maybe a month or so, he did not give any reason, nor touch her, though they were alone together. For public occasions they had preserved intact the manner of casual acquaintances. She did not question him . . . After he was gone she walked up and down, wringing her hands. People do wring their hands, she thought, dimly astonished. I must get over this, I must. When I don't see him for a long time, weeks, I can make up my mind to it. I can't stand being pulled to pieces again . . .

Hugh Evans told her, three days later. On purpose, to watch how she would take it. So there must have been some faint rumor around the office. Hugh was the head salesman, a good sort, fond of the girls but experienced enough to realize when he had no chance, and too amiable to bear a grudge. Did you hear that Chris Jackling's wife died yesterday? He stared hard at her, inquisitive without malice. . . . She said no, she had not heard. Hugh said: He had a wire on Wednesday. She was dangerously ill. He took the next train, but he couldn't have got there in time. Another wire came this morning. . . . Now, Marta thought, I shall never see him again. It's over. Her expression was unaltered; it was her nature to be still under shock. She said: I'm sorry. He'll have a sad journey. The little girl, too . . .

Hugh was obliged to go back to his desk no wiser.

And this passive acquiescence lasted three weeks, until Chris walked in, without warning. He had just got off the train. There was a band of crape on his sleeve. Because of it, she remembered that his suit was of grey tweed. Can you have dinner with me, he asked. She ran all the way home, to put on her best frock. The restaurant had private booths, another thing that reminded her. And Chris ordered champagne . . . He must have needed it. . . . She had no idea what they ate, nor what they talked about. Not about themselves, nor of his absence.

When they went out he drew her arm through his, and she did not enquire where they were going. The street was almost empty of people. . . . *If you cross your heart you love me, And you promise honest Injun hope to die, Swear by all the stars above me, Lots of foolish reasons why . . .* He was humming a half-forgotten popular song, to himself; she could just overhear the words. . . . *And begin all over at the start, Then I'll let you kiss me, maybe, Honest if you cross your heart . . .* In his apartment, he exchanged glasses with her; that was when he toasted the bridesmaids. She had laid off her hat; they were standing beside a round table in the middle of the room, opposite a mantel mirror—a girl in a white serge tailleur, her hair slightly ruffled; she had turned toward him, not her head only but on a dead center, as if in obedience to a sense of direction. . . . His brown eyes smiled at

her over the rim of the glass. Sparklets of gold streamed upward in the hollow crystal stem. She tasted them when he kissed her and said: You know I've been in love with you for a long time. She said: I didn't know. He had never said it before, nor had she. You're going to marry me, he said. Am I? . . . They would have to wait a year . . .

He slipped her jacket from her shoulders, and she shivered. Are you cold? She shook her head. What is it then—I won't . . . oh! He guessed quickly enough. The other door, he said . . . She did not mind that he laughed; it was funny, if humiliating, this complete abdication of the despised flesh. She shut the door tight. At least she was neither faint nor physically distressed, only light and unreal. A rejection of material phenomena. She had not wanted dinner, nor needed it. She washed her face and mouth, and smoothed her hair, and went back . . . Better now? Chris asked; and when she finished her glass: Good girl. That was funny, too; she glanced at him sidelong . . . Her brain was intensely clear and she was perfectly happy. Of course she was damned. They would never be married. This was all. It was enough. To have had him say it . . .

Thou hast committed——

Fornication,

But that was in another country.

And besides, the wench is dead.

Well, she hadn't. She wished she had. Now, twenty years later, she still wished it. But it was in another country. And the wench was dead. The one who remembered, the only one who remembered that girl, was the third Marta, half asleep, on the way from Brussels to Antwerp.

I suppose, she thought, that the idea of being damned was invented as the only equivalent, by opposites. The least you can pay is your soul. And there is a kind of truth in it; you will not get it back, not the same . . . I know now that Chris was quite ordinary, except for his good looks, and his light touch. But when you know that, you've lost the rest . . . I wonder which of his women really got Russ . . . We shouldn't have stayed so late at that restaurant. Russ has put in a hard day's work, and with Ernest already quartered on him . . .

She said as much to Pauline, as they went to their rooms. "No, we're a relief to him," Pauline said. "When I went down, ahead of you, Russ was talking to those men from Vienna, at the desk. He shook them, didn't bring them over to introduce them; and he said to me: 'They'd be glad to join the party, but I'm not going to share you girls.' Wasn't that sweet of him?"

"Especially to call us girls," Marta agreed.

CHAPTER VIII

"I HAVEN'T got a souvenir for Jimmy yet," said Pauline, in the hopeless tone she reserved for trifles. She had had one of her white nights. Waking too early, with the impression of Cathy on her arm. . . . Her eyes were dry and shining, and she packed the wrong things absently and lifted them out of her suitcase again as if she didn't know what they were. "It is difficult, when a boy is too old for airguns and roller skates and too young to smoke," Marta said. "What is he interested in?" Pauline answered: "Machinery, and the stock-market. He reads the financial page and spends his spare time at the corner garage. I wish I had bought him one of those music boxes in Paris, with the enamelled bird singing, though they were so expensive. He has a pet canary, and he loves it." "He'll be pleased with whatever you bring him," Marta said, trying to construct a personality out of a canary, a garage, and the financial page. Everyone was made up of such incongruous bits, and yet the sum was an individual, unique and whole. "He thinks I'm a fool anyhow," Pauline said rather cheerfully.

"When David sends me flowers, or Clint Charles invites me to play golf, I shrivel under Jimmy's contempt. At my age . . . What I need is a keeper. He reminds me to put on my rubbers, and he caught a bad cold last winter, when the weather turned suddenly, because he got up and came in my room and laid his own blanket over me. I'm the last female on earth he'd have chosen for a mother."

"Don't you realize," said Marta, in amazement, "that the poor kid adores you?" "Me?" said Pauline, even more amazed. "Sure he does," Marta insisted. She had seen them together. A square-jawed, well-grown boy, keeping near Pauline unobtrusively and rather grimly, and asking for nothing more. He wasn't the asking kind. In no particular did he resemble Pauline; he was fair and serious and self-contained. "How do you know he didn't choose you for a mother?" Perhaps we do find what we need, she thought, even if it isn't what we want. The profound discords of blood kinship so clearly discernible in America, where there was no inexorable pressure of class to stamp out differences, had always aroused her wonder. The biological law of remote inheritance was only the mathematical formula by which the combinations were produced, a general agency rather than a cause. "He adores your frivolity," she continued, "though he doesn't always see the point. His wife will be as near like you as he can find. And she will think he is glowering disapproval until he stuns her

by proposing." "He doesn't intend to marry," Pauline said. "He can't imagine what people get married for. He avoids girls with great politeness." "Nobody intends to marry," said Marta. "No more than they intend to be buried. He'll know what for soon enough. . . . I daresay he thinks *you* aren't particularly fond of *him*." Not as you were of the others, she refrained from adding.

"But I've always been afraid of him," Pauline protested. "From the minute he was born, he had a will like cast-iron. You won't believe me, but when I had to wean him he nearly starved himself to death rather than take the bottle. He would *not*. The struggle lasted four days. I almost perished myself. He'd howl himself into complete exhaustion; he lost three pounds and was all thin and blue. When he dozed from weakness, I'd try again. He would take just one gulp and then wake with a shriek of rage and shove the bottle away. I walked the floor for hours at a stretch with Jimmy limp over my shoulder, and my sister Florrie following, ready to pop the bottle in his mouth whenever he closed his eyes. It was perfectly insane, a procession marching around with that baby until we were all ready to drop. We should have had a brass band. Only it wasn't funny then. I sent for our doctor—you remember old Dr. Newland?" Marta said: "Yes. He headed off pneumonia for me." A little dry grey man, as impersonal as God, but when he came into the room you felt safe. "If I'd had

pneumonia then I'd have turned my face to the wall and let go. I was about halfway through learning shorthand, and I couldn't afford to be sick. Dr. Newland gave me a prescription that started rivers of perspiration. It was forty below zero that night, and of course nobody was sitting up with me. I didn't dare move a finger from under the blankets till morning. My hair was wet and it froze. But I got better. Did Dr. Newland subdue Jimmy?" "No," said Pauline, "he laughed till he cried. He said he was sorry, but he had never heard of such a child, and then he doubled up and held his sides. The next day I took Jimmy to the hospital in Silverton; they tried to give him a sleeping draught and he fetched it up. So I brought him home again; honestly, I thought he'd die, and I was dead on my feet. Even George was scared."

"But how did you manage him?" Marta asked. "I didn't," said Pauline. "Our hired girl was a husky Swede. When I got back, she met me at the door and grabbed Jimmy. Yoost leave him to me, Missus, she said; and she shook him and set him in his high chair and brought a bowl of milk: That's enough of your nonsense, Mister Yimmy. He stopped in the middle of a yell, and drank the milk out of a spoon; Signe kept on dipping it for him. In a few days he was drinking from his mug. But not the bottle—never. How could you cope with a son like that?"

"He was defending his dignity," Marta said. "I

was a fiendish child, too. Worse than Jimmy. I howled incessantly, for nothing. My mother ruined my basal metabolism permanently, letting me have the sugar-bowl to shut me up. They didn't understand about diet in those days. I guess they'd have let me anyhow, and hoped I'd choke. Those psychologists who say that babies are exactly alike until they are 'conditioned' are fatheads. They don't know a baby from a pink-eyed fruit-fly. I stopped howling when I learned to talk, and I learned at fourteen months. After I could read I wasn't much trouble. I'm certain that what ailed me was that I was bored into fits, having to be a baby. I was bored most of my childhood." And miserable. A dull fog of depression crept over her whenever her mind reverted to those meager, anxious years of waiting to grow up, to learn, to do something. "It's awful to be a child. The other boys, his friends, bore Jimmy, don't they?" "Yes, of course. He leads a crowd, but whenever he's fed up with them he stalks off, or tells them to go home."

"Well, you don't bore him," said Marta. "Don't I?" Pauline remained doubtful. Marta thought, he bores her a little; he is at the inarticulate age, neither a child nor a man, and they are so close to one another, left to themselves, they are embarrassed by their affection, because they cannot express it. When they lost Cathy and Donald, their means of contact was broken. Parents cannot converse with their children,

they can only overhear and arbitrate among them. The only child is terribly isolated. There is nobody on his side. . . . It's comical that with all the talk of the Younger Generation about how tiresome their parents are, how *they* are bored, it doesn't occur to them that they bore older people.

Pauline said: "But Jimmy can't grasp the idea that I earned my own living—that I earn it now. He must assume that my employers are half-witted. And I *was* capable. When I went to Silverton, I had ten dollars left after paying my fare, and I'd brought Florrie with me. She was fourteen and I was nineteen. I couldn't leave her on the ranch; she had bronchitis every winter; she was never very strong. And I wanted her to go to school. I sat up all night with her in the tourist sleeper, she was coughing so. When we got there I found a boarding-house and put her to bed, and went out to look for work. I walked into Welsh & Hayden's, straight into J. K.'s office. He said, good morning, my dear, who the hell are you? I said I wanted a job. He said, what can you do? And I said, anything. I could, too. He said, can you take dictation with one hand? I said, don't be silly, your desk is a sight. He said, if you touch a paper on my desk, I'll fire you. When can you begin? And I said, now, and took off my hat and sat down to the typewriter."

"He's a queer fish," said Marta. "I suppose he did try to paw you?" "Of course," said Pauline. "But as if it were a habit, or showing off. So vulgar and

ridiculous that I couldn't get mad, only disgusted. When I snubbed him he'd grin, and talk sense. We insulted each other every hour, and I resigned once a month. Whenever he saw that I meant it, he raised my pay, and I had to earn enough to keep Florrie and myself. The odd part of it is that he's really a first-class lawyer, and straight; he never gouged his clients, nor was in any graft." Marta said: "I daresay the Sin against the Holy Ghost is bad taste. I half liked him. Or I liked half of him. He offered me a position, suggested I should study law." Pauline said: "He liked both you and me, separately, and was furious when he saw us together. He thought we were making fun of him." "So we were," said Marta. "He's so inconsistent. When he sets up as a stuffed shirt, his sense of humor trips him. In the middle of a burst of oratory, he'd catch himself up. That's why he got the governorship only by a fluke, and he'll never be Senator. I couldn't make out if—but what woman would have him? Ida Ritchie slapped his face, and he apologized. Then he discovered she hadn't slapped Floyd Jernegan, and he tried to get her fired. It was the most imbecile affair." "There was usually a peroxide blonde in the background," Pauline said scornfully. "Men *are* imbeciles. George suspected the worst. When we were married he ordered me not to speak to J. K. What good would it do then, after I'd been in his office four years, and out of it for two years? And besides . . . me! . . . But if I told Jimmy that I did the work of a

junior partner—I was articulated, you know—and really ran J. K.'s office whenever he was away, why, I plastered the state with mortgages, and I drew up briefs—Jimmy would think I was raving.”

Why wouldn't he, Marta thought. Pauline is Jimmy's mother, a being who exists only in relation to him. It is not the function of a mother to match insults with a future governor, nor to execute legal documents.

What staggered Marta was the picture of Pauline anxiously presenting feeding bottles to be rejected by her contumacious offspring. Pauline detested domestic tasks. When she did her share of the dishwashing, in the sketchy flat she had shared with Marta, she dabbed at them with the tips of her fingers. Neither would she sew, and she had no facile sentiment about children. Yet she was intensely feminine. Men worship the mother goddess. The feminine divinities are neither maternal nor hearth-tenders. They are Artemis the unpossessed, Athena who is pure intellect, and Aphrodite, whose virtue is passionate delight. They are proud and free. The quality of Pauline's young beauty was classic, with her lovely long legs, her flying glance, the flute notes of her voice. *Ah, for their sakes, so trapped and taken, For theirs forgotten and forsaken, Watch, sleep not, guard thyself with prayer. . . .*

But all of us . . . Marta knit her brows, tracing through the confusion of her experience a thread of pattern . . . An army of girls, without banners, in

mutiny. . . . Going out of the home, each alone, but multitudes at once. We didn't intend to go back, to be caught; we were leaving it behind forever. Child-bearing and drudgery and dependence. . . . Just as we grew up, the door was open. Our mothers hadn't had the chance. But they told us to run for it. And we did . . .

That was historic, Marta thought. Not the next generation, the spoiled adolescents who took it out in talk. Drinking their pap from pocket flasks, gin paid for by indulgent parents. Smarmy infants . . . Discovering "sex." Did they actually believe they were found in a cabbage patch? . . . We are not amused, thought Marta, detecting the mark of middle age in her disapproval. Maybe that was all a literary convention; but as such it had bored her to intolerance. *Hiyu cultus warwa*—too much talk no good. You don't stop to talk when you're making your getaway. Once we were earning our own living, the rest was argument after the fact. It's a definite mental stage. Like walking instead of being carried. Or having hands. You couldn't think without hands, you can't think of being without hands. You have to take hold of things before you can begin to think about them. They may tell us now it was a delusion, that we went to a more precarious dependence. They don't know what it used to be like for women. And anyhow, it worked for us. We had our adventure. It was fun . . .

The traders, she thought, searching for an analogy, went everywhere before the professed explorers, but

they didn't want any trouble, so their names are lost. They must have known one another, had their private agreements, exchanged information cautiously, maps and soundings, as much as it was safe to tell. Not too much . . . She remembered Ida Ritchie coming in at six in the morning; Marta woke at the sound of the key in the lock, and between her lashes watched Ida taking off her coat and hat, brushing her hair with long angry strokes, offering not a word of explanation. Ida had gone out with Floyd Jernegan. Marta knew the answer. Wherever they had been, they spent the whole night quarreling, nothing else. Ida was proud as Lucifer, with a blazing temper. Floyd can't get a divorce, Marta cogitated; he'd not be worth having if he forced his wife to it. And Ida—they can't go on like this. So it had proved. Well, it was Ida's business, not hers.

The girls in novels before the war were all pink and white paper dolls, nothing to do with her or Ida Ritchie or Pauline or Trix O'Neill. Probably there's an opposite discrepancy now, Marta thought. The girls I see look rather jolly. So nice and brown, and—yes, innocent. They don't know their luck, but they were born free. They seem to be growing prettier year by year, too. Flocks of pretty girls in their light draperies, like a procession on a Greek frieze. Marta envied them without resentment. Our adventure, she thought, was a little more exciting, opening doors when you don't know what's on the other side . . .

J. K. Hayden was historic. He'd be surprised to hear it. Men were extraordinarily oblivious to the tacit conspiracy of the mothers and daughters. They dismissed it with fatuous allusions to strong-minded women, presumably admiring only the feeble-minded; and when confronted by the accomplished fact, they didn't recognize it. Good morning, my dear, who the hell are you?

J. K. was intelligent enough to ask; that was why Marta remembered him so minutely, though he was difficult to describe. He was so muddled by temperament and training, with his deposit of early piety, his raffish streak, his lively mind, all at odds. He was a vestryman, made addresses to the Y. M. C. A.; he didn't drink or smoke; he was vulgar and outrageous; he paid his staff generously, and took his snubbing handsomely. He chewed gum while dictating to Pauline sonorous legal phrases that had come down from the Middle Ages. He looked comical in a silk hat and cheap in a checked waistcoat. His height gave him no presence and his lofty brow was discountenanced by an insignificant nose. He scowled and pursed his lips like a second-rate actor playing Napoleon, unable however to disguise the mockery in his eyes, round and opaque as agate marbles, watchful for the impression he was making. His sudden grin was that of a street arab sure of getting out of reach of reprisals . . .

Personally he did not enter into her life, or Pauline's; because of the accident of taste, or distaste; so she was

unbiased in appraising his abstract significance. He was a condition, a composite of everything they had to take into account, in the men's world where they had intruded. He was both for and against them . . . The two of them, J. K. and Pauline, or herself and Winthrop Shelby, or innumerable others, seated decorously on opposite sides of a flat-topped desk, sliding letters back and forth with the abstracted air of cardplayers, grave and intent. . . . It was like a game, in which they did not know if they were playing for points or stakes. And at intervals, still half abstracted, they looked at one another; perhaps when the day's work was done, and they became dimly aware that themselves remained, unfinished business. . . . She remembered sitting at Wint Shelby's elbow, waiting for him to think through some clause in a merger offer; she grew mischievously impatient, and when he looked up, with a sentence framed for utterance, she thought silently: You can't remember what you were going to say. You can't, can't, can't. He began twice, broke off, and then said, to her own complete surprise: "Oh, you go to hell," and reached for his hat and went out. When he returned half an hour later, she could tell he had had a drink—he wasn't a drinking man—and they finished the task, and made no reference, then or later, to his remark.

What do men want, what do women want, of each other and of life? If we could arrive at even terms, Marta thought, nothing to weigh the scales on either

side . . . But you can't; I did try. Not to have to bargain. . . . It was no good. . . . Pauline made a kind of bargain in marrying; not so good either. J. K. never married; Marta couldn't imagine he had got much out of his shabby makeshifts, not even with his millions and a governorship thrown in. Wint Shelby—Marta frowned again, and snapped the lock of her suitcase. Damn, she said to herself comprehensively, and to Pauline: "You use rouge?"

They had been reared in the conviction that cosmetics were immoral. Since rouge was unbecoming to her, Marta perceived that she had retained a trace of that simple faith, in spite of—everything. It had a special association, too, with Mrs. Hamilton, also immoral, and of unforgettable charm . . . A list of the things that shocked her still would be funny, Marta thought. Vestigial beliefs, like J. K.'s ineradicable fear of hell-fire. Frazer should have written a supplementary chapter to the Golden Bough. . . .

"I have to," said Pauline. For decency, not to show the naked face of grief. The telephone buzzed. "You answer it," she said in a panic. "I can't work those silly things," the hand-phone. Marta applied the wrong end to her ear, and turned it about hastily, sputtering with laughter. "What are you up to now?" Russ's voice enquired. He had the car waiting out in front. Pauline explained when they joined him. "I was telling Marta how clever I used to be. Now I don't even know how to use a telephone. Are you a

handy man—can you make a radio out of last year's bedspring and the insides of an alarm clock?"

He could not, he confessed, drive a car. He had never owned one. "So they made you chief engineer?" Marta deduced. Exactly, said Russ, somebody had to do the work, and there would be no sense in wasting a good practical man in what was politely called an executive position. The technical director's duty was to see that the work was done. . . . And he *is* the right man, Marta thought, listening to him suggest their route to the chauffeur. He hates taking orders, so he doesn't give them. . . . We want to get to Spa about dinner-time; which would be the best road, to see something on the way? Yes, by Liège, that would be fine . . . He's never had his own way before, and it suits him. He doesn't fuss, so they want to please him . . .

"You've got another chauffeur," said Pauline. She felt better already; the motion of the car relieved the tension in her head. Russ said the company employed two chauffeurs; and the business manager, Owen, had taken Henri for the day. Albert was English, a cockney, with the nervous underfed look of his kind. "Albert married a Belgian girl, and stayed here after the war," said Russ; and added casually, lowering his voice: "I think he's mad."

"What about?" Marta asked; "how do you mean?"

"A little off," said Russ. "On the edge, anyhow. He's got mad eyes. Aleck Owen is an irritable cuss; he

fights with his wife, and takes it out on Albert. I shouldn't be surprised if Albert drove head-on into a stone wall some day, shot the works, with Owen and himself."

Marta said: "There's a thought to hold. He may practice on us."

"Oh, I guess not," said Russ. They both spoke placidly. We're all cuckoo, thought Marta, careering off to parts unknown with a mad chauffeur; we would! An appropriately inconsequent finish, since taken by itself her life appeared to her a series of accidents, it might well end against a stone wall, in a country she had never intended to visit, because a man she had never seen had quarreled with his wife.

"I don't care," said Pauline. She was holding Russ's hand firmly.

CHAPTER IX

IT was going to be a lucky day; nothing would go wrong, not even the weather. Marta put her hat in the luggage net and tied her hair with a green silk scarf. "They're beginning to cut the wheat," she said.

"Those are oats," Russ corrected her kindly. "And you raised on a farm!" "A ranch," said Marta; the word didn't mean what she meant, but there wasn't any other; it was factitiously romantic, implying stage cowboys with sixshooters, wearing idiotic neckerchiefs like bibs. . . . What she meant existed only in her mind, two pictures, two aspects of the same landscape, a level stretch of time and space divided into short summers and interminable winters. She saw the winter scene through the chill square of a window, bleak with snow under a grey sky, month after month. But summer had the quality of a single day; she saw the prairie flushed with June, and herself in the midst of it, insignificant and safe, a child alone, going barefoot through the grass, which sprang again and retained no trace of her passing, no more than of a gopher whisking into its burrow, a mother duck leading her brood

to covert. The sloughs were shallow bowls; they had no banks, and in a rainy season the water overlapped the grass, and the striped yellow ducklings hid among the tall bents. The sky was of a fathomless soft blue, and the clouds white as cotton wool, with rounded outlines, came down so close that it seemed one might touch them by standing on a hill-top. Once only, in her solitary wanderings, she saw a wolf, not a coyote, those she often saw, but a wolf. Neither of them was afraid; the wolf knew that only a man with a gun was dangerous; it stopped a moment to make sure, and then padded on, taking an oblique course and watching over its shoulder till it was beyond the nearest rise. She picked a sprig of yellow lupin for its scent of warm honey, and went her own way home. . . . Nothing of this remained, they had plowed it under, fenced it away. . . . *Beauty vanishes, beauty passes, however rare, rare it be . . .* But the winters had been so long, she had been so miserable, waiting to grow up, to get away; those years had left a mark on her, a grey curtained corner of her mind, in which melancholy lurked; that was why she couldn't endure being bored, she was rude to bores. Because they went on and on . . . This came back to her, complete, between one word and the next: "But I meant the wheatfield back yonder, those stooks."

"Oats," said Russ. "Weren't they oats, Pauline?" "Certainly they were oats," Pauline supported him. "Unless she means rye or barley." "No, you didn't notice," Marta began, and broke off: "By the mass, and

'tis like a camel indeed. It was oats, rye and barley." Russ and Pauline regarded her with concern: "What do you suppose ails her? She was never known to agree with anyone before."

Marta was the odd one now, a tacit relationship established on the basis of possession. Pauline needed someone to hold to, literally. "By nature," Marta assured them, "I have a lovely disposition. With enough money, I'd be perfectly angelic. So would you, Russ; in fact, you are. Ernest eats out of your hand, and stray tourists follow you for miles, purring and shedding fox-fur on your best suit. You can hardly believe it yourself."

"I can't," said Russ. It was too good to be true. Twenty thousand a year, and his stock in the company worth a hundred thousand at the market. He told them. He was telling himself. "And eight years ago, as you said, I hadn't a cent—" "Good heavens," Marta protested, "I never—I wouldn't—I didn't know, for that matter—we were all rather hard up. I said you were only a poor boy." She thought, whatever you say, the other person hears something else. "Anyhow, I'm glad; nice people like us ought to have money—I'm not sure about Pauline. She'd get into society, and be unable to escape; years later, she'd be found petrified at a party, entirely surrounded by Ernest."

"Mrs. Owen wanted to give a party for you this

afternoon," Russ was reminded. "At the golf club. Maybe you'd rather—"

"We'd rather be here," Pauline brushed his sleeve conscientiously; it was her fox-fur.

"Do they have amusing parties?" Marta asked. Russ shrugged. Mostly cocktails and bridge. He seldom went. On his arrival, Caroline had given a party for him; the guests were blindfolded, and required to pin a tail to a drawing of a donkey on a numbered chart. At supper, you got what your number called for. "Mine was a bottle of lemon soda and a banana."

Baffled by the extreme improbability of plain fact, Pauline and Marta remained expectant: was that all? That was all; it was supposed to be great fun. And Russ hoping they'd choke, Marta thought. . . . Oh, well, he said, that wasn't so bad as the next time . . . "When I was locked in the maid's room for three hours."

"What," they naturally demanded, "were you doing in the maid's room?"

"Nothing," said Russ, in that sulky tone which was nevertheless engaging, as if he wouldn't have answered anyone else at all, and yielded to personal charm.

"The powerful Katinka," Marta suggested. "Did the maid lock you in and threaten you with a fate worse than death?"

"I don't believe it's really worse, do you?" he muttered, adding reluctantly: "The maid was out."

"Statistics show that the average term of life has

increased in our time," Marta said, assuming a disinterested air; she couldn't maintain it, and the three of them broke down at once. "I am the last person in the world to pry into anyone's private affairs," Marta resumed, "the very last, I keep right on when the rest have given up exhausted; so you'd better explain." . . . By degrees they extorted the story. Simply he had tried to leave the party early and unobserved, through the back hall, and opened the wrong door. Before he could retreat, Ernest barred the exit with a coat-rack.

"Couldn't you—" "No," said Russ. "It would have been all over the place next day."

"Why, it's a transplanted small town, from the Middle West," Marta exclaimed. And Ernest personified it. That was why they froze or fled at his approach. They had spent their lives trying to get away from Ernest . . . The American colony was just small enough, just large enough, to intensify its character, stew in its own juice, doubly turned in upon itself because it was a foreign garrison, and because most of the men were employed by two or three international corporations. Unavoidably they were informed of one another's incomes, domestic affairs, habits and expectations.

"You're just like one big family," said Marta, aghast. Or like a court. People, and parties, are the same everywhere, allowing for the scale. If it had been a state dinner, and one of the guests had worn his Order of the Sacred Cow half an inch out of line, the

king would have noticed, and all the equerries and gold sticks would have been in a dither.

"That's what Caroline said," Russ admitted. "She hoped I'd feel at home. She said Ernest was easy to work for. You see, Goodwin, the president, wanted me to make a survey of the different offices before I took charge. So he sent me around on special assignments first. I'm afraid it was a jolt to Caroline when she found Ernest would be working for me." Marta enquired idly if Ernest was an engineer. Russ said no, Ernest was in the purchasing and cost accounting department, but the two branches, technical and financial, were closely interlocked. He let it go at that. It was the sort of arrangement that imposed itself, and could only be understood from the inside. Of course there were jealousies, conflicts of authority. . . . He thought he could trust Aleck Owen to pull with him; Aleck wanted his step up, to the Paris office. There wasn't any head office yet, in a formal sense; Willis Goodwin carried it under his hat, with a directorate scattered about Europe. Well, there was himself, Russ, since his promotion. That was more than a step up, more than the money. He had made the grade. Earned his farm. And bought it, six months ago. . . . Goodwin was interesting. Ten years ago he had begun, just after the war, buying up and building up companies here and there, tying them together in a holding corporation, a cat's cradle covering Europe, with a thread running to New York. Twenty years ago Goodwin

had come out of Kansas City. How he had done the distance nobody knew but himself. Maybe *he* didn't. Some men have the gift of making things go. Goodwin said it was mostly luck, was cynical toward his own success. Said he got his start robbing the baby's bank. The Chinese do that, Russ thought, to fool the gods, or devils; whatever they own is worthless, insignificant, beneath notice. Joss talk. . . . Goodwin said, if you're out to convince a man, let him argue himself around. If you're out to get something done, let someone do it who wants to. *You* want to swing this Rome job, he said to Russ; go ahead. What you've got to deal with is men. Goodwin permitted himself moments of startling candor, especially when he had what he called the visiting firemen on his hands, officials or bankers with all expenses paid for a junket to Paris from Berlin or Budapest or Rome. "We've got to take these Wops down the line tonight; business is business." Russ suspected that Goodwin's indiscretions were calculated; nobody could be more solemn on full-dress occasions; all the same, he gets you.

"Ernest, the poor goop, imagines he is making himself solid with you," Marta surmised.

"I shouldn't wonder," Russ said. "He doesn't want to be shifted to the factory." Business is business . . . Business, thought Russ, is shepherding the visiting firemen to the Folies Bergeres, making allowances for Aleck's domestic infelicities, finding Ernest in your

spare room when you come home. Business is pinning the tail to the donkey blindfolded.

Marta suppressed an impulse of pity for Ernest. Whenever she laid plans, tried to direct events, that was where she landed herself. In Dutch. It serves Ernest right, she thought darkly, for the mosquito net, *my* mosquito net. God meant it for me; but even God can't do anything with the Ernests. "Wouldn't I be the perfect wife for a rising corporation man?" she said. "So tactful and thoughtful—don't you hate thoughtful people? The things they think of! Like Caroline."

"I guess you could if you tried," said Russ. He hadn't a doubt of it. So could Harriet. She wouldn't, and that was that. After all, would it have made any difference?

"George," said Pauline, "always asked my advice. And I said yes, I was sure he was right. He would talk for hours about sales territories and contracts and commissions; and every once in a while he would ask politely, am I boring you? He said he had the greatest confidence in my judgment. His stenographer told me, with tears in her eyes, that she had never seen such a devoted husband. She used to hear him telephoning to me. Usually that he might be late for dinner. He called me Little One." The stenographer used to telephone her, too, when George had been twenty-four hours late for dinner, vanished on a spree. Then, after a reasonable time, Pauline would take a cab to his favor-

ite speakeasy, and bring him home, and get the doctor to help her through with it; and the office staff would tell innumerable elaborate lies to postpone appointments. They were devoted to him. We were all devoted to one another. With tears in our eyes. Or if it wasn't devotion, what was it? . . . When George died, she sold the business. She knew it would go to pieces without him. And it did. His partner was a sober and upright citizen, but those virtues would not keep a business going and growing. George held it together. While she and the doctor and the stenographer held George together. He could manage anything but himself. . . . And I was, thought Pauline with dismay, a good wife. The fact was obscurely appalling . . .

Marta thought, but could I? Could she have made any kind of a wife, if she had tried, if she had had a chance? . . . A kind dependable husband to support her, and a cozy suburban house, afternoon bridge and golf on Sunday . . . The notion would come to her when she was worried about money, and provision for old age; when her work went stale on her, or she was ill and afraid of being disabled, helpless, with no one in the world she could lean upon . . . And she knew it wasn't any use. She would scream and jump out of the window. When she had met Wint Shelby again, and he was free—his two daughters were grown and married, his only son killed in the war; he told her frankly he wanted another son—and Marta could have had a divorce for the asking, she ran away again. From

Wint's house, once she had seen it, full of massive Grand Rapids mahogany dressers and brass bedsteads and actually a Turkish cozy corner on the stair landing, papier-mache battle-axes against red drapery sewn with bits of mirrors. Wint doted on every varnished inch of it from garret to cellar, wouldn't have changed a thread of the heavy filet lace curtains. . . .

Marta exclaimed out of the middle of her thoughts, because the three of them at that moment were enclosed in a fragile sphere of sympathy, so exquisitely perfect that it didn't matter whether they understood or not: "Words cannot express the sheer horror that overcomes me when I find myself in a good home. A happy family, and a radio, and a concrete garage. . . ." But why? What was the matter with her? Her own life was toilsome, solitary, insecure. She had made a wilderness and called it peace.

Russ thought, Harriet was the same . . . He asked Albert, was anything wrong with the car? No, sir, Albert replied anxiously, drawing up at a farmyard lane, but I'm not sure . . . The farmer leaned over a gate, and Albert interrogated him in Cockney French, with gestures. The blue-bloused farmer shrugged several times and waved his hand in a half circle. Under his breath Russ said: He'll never get his direction from one of these birds. They're born and live and die without ever going ten miles from their own land. The nearest market town is their limit.

Pauline said dreamily: "Isn't the country lovely?"

and ended unexpectedly on a high note of laughter. Her rapt gaze was fixed upon a litter of black and white spotted pigs rooting in a patch of turnips. "I really thought so—lovely—those pigs!" she gurgled. "Consider to yourself, regard them!"

Marta said: "But yes, I comprehend you perfectly. In effect, they are pigs of character; they possess that I don't know what. It's the heat," she turned to Russ. "We're not dangerous."

"I wouldn't bet on that." Russ extracted a road-map from the car door-flap. Unfolding it, he felt in his breast pocket, and said absently: "Oh, I forgot. I left them at the hotel desk."

"Left what?" Marta enquired.

"My glasses. I was afraid they'd get broken." Russ heard himself too late, as Pauline had.

"You checked your glasses at our hotel, before you went out with the wild women?" Marta demanded categorically. "Do I blame you? Oh, Pauline!" They had different ways of laughing; it submerged Marta like a wave, dropped her against the cushions, while she struggled for decorum, her face crinkled and her mouth pursed; if she let go she knew she did look like a rowdy. Pauline lifted her chin, and her eyelashes flickered; she grew pink, and held to Russ's arm. Russ drew down his head, his funny chuckle coming from deep in his chest. . . . But he *had* broken his glasses, the night he left Shanghai.

Saying goodbye to Louise James. In an otherwise

empty stateroom, not his, while his friends, including Wally James, her husband, searched for him around the decks, in the flurry of the hour before sailing. What would have happened, if his transfer had been delayed for a month or two, he was not yet sure. It would have been bad, a grand smash. He liked Wally, too. He thought of that, while Louise was crying against his shoulder. So did she. The last time, and the first. We couldn't, she said. But you won't forget me? . . . Her soft fair hair dipped in two peaks on the back of her neck . . . They heard Wally's voice in the corridor . . . So he had finished the night in the ship's bar. And he went through New York without letting anyone know. Because he hadn't forgotten Nonie either. I'll always be like that, he thought. Nothing for a woman to tie to. . . . He owed Louise a letter . . .

Returning to the car, Albert touched his cap. Under the vizor his eyes were blank and bewildered, as if he had forgotten the meaning of laughter, perhaps even of tears. "Albert probably thinks *we* are mad," Marta said. "Is that map any use?" "None whatever," said Russ. "It happens to be a French map. Do you mind not knowing where you are?" "Not a bit, as long as no one else knows either," Marta said truthfully. "Your left retreats, your right is giving way, the situation is excellent, you advance. You and Foch, Russ. All Pauline asks is a few pigs."

CHAPTER X

BUT this, thought Marta, can't be Liége. Not this grassy hill, rising from flat meadowland and tillage, all open to the sky, where anyone might walk freely. It was a profoundly peaceful spot. . . . Only to get to it they had to go down into the fosse and up again. . . .

The fosse makes it a fortress, Marta thought, or is it a fort? Yes, a fortress, feminine, within its maiden girdle. A dry moat, cut down so cleanly that they came on it as a surprise, though it was full ten yards wide and deep, ringing the hill, and cool as a cellar. The concrete facing was honeycombed with dungeon barracks behind iron gratings, dark and empty now. Alder shoots grew from the broken pavement, and grass feathered the upper edge against the blue. In the stillness, a grasshopper chirred. Marta's thin silk jacket felt cold and smooth across her shoulders. They climbed the jagged steps into the sun.

It must be that she had expected turrets and battlements. There were none. Worthy citizens, followed by their young, strolled sedately among the scattered clumps of willows. A decorous couple might be sweet-

hearts. The low-built little city drowed on the horizon a mile or so away. In every aspect, Belgium was utterly peaceful. They've had to fight so much, Marta thought, they do want peace, from the bottom of their souls. . . . "But where were the big guns?" . . .

"Right there," Russ pointed. She might have stubbed her toe on the muzzle of a great gun. Thrust up through a tangle of blackberry vines, it looked like the end of a mislaid culvert. Beyond it was an enormous iron dishpan upside down, cracked in two, sunk even with the sod. The bushes leaned over it, receiving it back into the order of nature. One of the masked batteries, Russ said. In action, it had been designed to rise for a volley and drop again into its pit for safety. The utmost precaution of defense. . . . The concrete base was heaved and split beneath it. At the first assault the German field batteries had shattered it to this wreckage of dead metal and stone. . . . After the war the Belgians made no attempt to repair the fortress, Russ said; it wasn't any use.

They found two or three other guns jammed in the rubble, and speculated idly on the means of loading and sighting. Yet it did not seem real, not Liège . . . Not here, Marta thought, where she was walking on grass, and willows grew densely green. It couldn't be . . . Because for her the bombardment of Liège had occurred in New York . . . Where you could never walk on grass . . .

At Fortieth Street, when she emerged from the sub-

way every morning, she used to stop to buy the latest extra. Every morning, during those August weeks, she stood in the hot street, by the corner of Bryant Park, walled in by the tall grey towers, and it seemed as if they were rocking and falling, falling, falling. The headlines in the newspapers brought them down. Black streamers across the page: Liège Under Fire, Liège Surrenders, Fall of Liège. The guns of Europe thundered in her shaken mind. There was nothing secure, nowhere to run to any more . . .

She had been sick and sad and alone and penniless; she had given up her youthful hope of happiness, and was starting over again, with new work, on pure courage; and then Liège fell. . . . It wasn't any use . . . Folly. Like an ant in an earthquake. I mean, she explained to herself, for she always thought lucidly, the ant would say that the earthquake happened to him! In spite of reason, the pinnacled city crumbled in her soul, the towers bowed and fell. Because it answered to her own infinitesimal griefs, came precisely then, when she perceived her girlhood was over, spent for nothing. . . . Because, she thought, I could not hold Chris, and married Keith for pique, and found Lowrie Ives was dishonest; and I caught the flu—but you can die of the flu, Lowrie did, at Camp Meade, and I never heard till four years afterward . . . Well, what else are all the songs and stories about? Experience is personal, everything happens to the individual. Troy was sacked for a runaway wife. Or say it was for the odd bushel

of tribute corn, a trifle anyhow, objectively . . . *Laura, to his lady, was but a kitchen wench . . . Marry, she had a better love to berhyme her . . .*

So it was *my* city that fell, she thought. . . . We begin with an enormous faith, so absolute that we are unaware of it, that tomorrow will bring some unimaginable completion and delight, for which we were born. And when it comes, we shall be happy ever after. We don't believe that the old were young in their time, or that we shall grow old. If we did, how could we set out so bravely? But then I knew. . . . *Lost, lost, all lost . . .* I've never since been sure of anything for an hour.

And yet the grass is growing again over Liège. And I went on, I've lived another life, clean separate from what went before; Pauline is the only link, and for years I didn't even hear from her. And I'm happy now, this hour. In a different way, aware that it won't last either. Only the grass will always grow again, over everything.

Whether this was sad or comforting she could not tell; it was both. She had always loved the grass. Having run barefoot every summer of her childhood, she still had a sense of its kindness to the tread, even through her sandals. Without grass the earth is lifeless and inhospitable. Its simplicity is infinitely complex, the fine shoots mingled with innumerable herbs and flowerets too small and common to have a name, each minutely exquisite and humbly sweet. As indescribable as happiness, in which all the emotions are

blended, even the ghosts of old sorrows, like last year's grass sheltering the new growth . . .

She had never felt she belonged to New York; one couldn't take root in granite. It was temporary, a penance, a strange doom. When it was worked out she would go away and sit down to rest in the grass. She would be glad she had seen it and glad it was over. That's what Russ has reached, she thought. . . .

They had moved away from him unnoticeably. She received a definite impression of him, standing with his hands in his pockets, on a hill-top, looking after them with the shadow of a smile. The attitude was significant. He used to pull against the tether, she thought; but he doesn't any more. Whether it is his promotion, or just being tired, he's peaceful, too. Pauline and I haven't come to it yet, we still want something to happen. . . . She wondered what she looked like to others, what image they retained of her; the equivalent of Russ's hard-schooled quiet, or Pauline's glimmering gaiety, which grazed the surface of things like a swallow dipping and rising over water. What was her own quality, or had she none? You couldn't know yourself. I'm obtuse, she thought, I blunder, I'm so *stupid*. . . . "Have you got a pin?" Pauline whispered, though they were well out of hearing, out of sight.

"A pin—what for?" Marta made a sketchy useless motion of searching. "The elastic of my knickers is done bust," Pauline muttered tragically. "Wouldn't

it—" Marta had no pin. There was a historic transformation; she had not even a button about her, everything she wore pulled on, wisps of silk tied with a bit of ribbon. Women used to be clamped with whalebone and triple brass, bristling with pins. Our moral support, Marta thought; if it hadn't been for that . . . It was a state of mind. . . . So I lost Chris . . . How many angels can dance on the point of a pin—damn them!

Picknickers infested the thickets. Marta and Pauline slid halfway down a steep bank overgrown with sapling birches, and Pauline nervously contrived a knot. Then they rested awhile, seated on a convenient ledge, while Pauline regained composure. The fosse was below them, and a road beyond that, where people passed at intervals, obscurely visible through the branches. "The wretched thing went just as I stepped out of the car," Pauline said. "But you're never safe. Our house in Seattle was on a boulevard of lovely big trees; nobody could see into the upstairs windows from across the street. One morning I was in my bedroom, about to get dressed. It was a nice warm day. I had a nervous feeling suddenly, and I looked out. There was a man sitting on a branch with a saw in his hand. He'd gone up to trim the tree. He wasn't doing any sawing right then . . . All the time you were poking about those accursed guns, I was calling on providence. . . . I suppose Russ would have picked them up politely." While I meditated on the fate of nations, Marta thought,

Pauline was worrying about her knickers. Well, so would I if they'd been mine. Abstract ideas come last in the order of the day. If Archimedes had stepped on the soap at the critical moment, he wouldn't have discovered the Eureka, or whatever it was.

Pauline said wistfully: "When Russ comes over to England I'll keep out of the way. It's awful of me not to give you a moment to yourselves."

Marta said, with unwilling honesty: "Russ isn't pining to see me by myself." She would rather not have considered it at the moment, but she couldn't deliberately deceive herself. Often she examined her soul, under no compulsion but the desire for truth, and a dim hope of amendment, for the appraisal left her aghast. It wouldn't be so bad to be downright bad, she thought ruefully, and there must be an austere satisfaction in being lofty and disinterested; but I'm always trying to acquire merit at bargain rates. . . . Vanity, curiosity, a discountenanced coquetry, and something else, she found. . . . Something that eluded definition. . . . You're pretty low, she summed up. . . . Only there is something else, that's what makes it so difficult. Impossible even to be comfortably low. Pauline and Russ aren't clear in their minds either. Maybe not so low. Russ wouldn't have another man in the party either. He wants our undivided attention and admiration . . . If Pauline will leave it alone. . . . A breath might dissolve the bubble. Out of their weariness, their disenchantment, their defeat, they had together created

this fragile happiness, by asking no more. That was the condition of it, as the magicians stipulated drawing a circle, saying only certain words, not looking over your shoulder.

"You wouldn't," Pauline urged touchingly, "have had as good a time without me." The flash came to Marta; this is important to Pauline, symbolically. Playing over again the hand she lost once. She needs to win against me. She imagines—she ought to know better, but it's because of Keith—that I can have any man I choose, with hardly an effort. And do anything I please, scot-free. And don't I wish she was right! My highest ambition is to be the heroine of a trashy novelette. . . . If Pauline believed she could, if she had confidence, she might go back and marry David. Drag him to the altar, and serve him right; I mean, for his own good. . . . Now will *you* leave it alone? Try to act like a lady, even if you aren't . . . Besides, Russ isn't . . . She met herself slipping around the corner, and suppressed a moan of comic dismay as her stricken conscience confronted her unregenerate instinct. There's the lowdown on you, she told herself. He isn't. If this be virtue, make the most of it. Why don't you eat cake?

"No, we wouldn't—I wouldn't," serenity returned to her. The pattern of leaves against the light, a bee rocking tipsily on a flower, gave her a double pleasure because Pauline was there. I *am* stupid, she thought; Pauline wants to see Russ by himself, once at least; of

course she does. It is a necessity of friendship. An infinite variety of relations exist, each unique, with its special qualities. They seem to conflict because we are subject to time and space; we cannot do two things at once nor be in two places simultaneously, but that is a limitation of expression, not of feeling. You can't have all of anyone. All would mean nothing, a blank page, an echo. Why are we friends? *Because he was himself, because I am I.* The years between, Pauline's husband, her children, her work and her other friends, have not changed us to each other. Russ has been married, has had I don't know how many women, loved three or four. That is himself, the person I like. And we have each our own understanding with one another, a particular equation. When a group of friends meet, as each one enters not only the sum but the nature of the total is altered, a new equation is arrived at; but the several relations remain, to be resumed again . . . She remembered meeting Alma for tea, having snatched the time out of a crowded day. I haven't seen you for a week, Alma said; I've got to be home in ten minutes. The simple phrase gave Marta an extraordinary lift. They sat for ten minutes, and talked inconsequently, with pauses and random answers, of an Ibsen revival, and whether skirts would be longer, and if it would rain over Sunday. What they meant was: You are there, it is you, I had to be sure. You know my mistakes, my faults, my failures, and you accept them as inconsequential, inseparable from me.

"Come to that," Marta added in fairness, "Russ might prefer that I kept out of the way." Pauline brightened, but said doubtfully: "The way I've been draping myself around his neck, he must think I'm—" Marta consoled her: "He seems to like it. Don't worry; he's been ruined before. Russ ain't got any morals, but he's decent. It would be all right, no matter what. You know. . . ."

She trailed off vaguely, unable to formulate a distinction she felt clearly, which traversed the usual categories. A question of integrity, perhaps. In the Church, an odd heresy recurrently gave trouble: that if you were in a state of grace, you could not sin. Perhaps it sprang from the observed fact that an action derives its quality from the person who commits it. Barring, of course, meanness and cruelty. . . . The grace of sinners was upon Aucassin when he chose to go to hell with the companions he preferred on earth, the goodly clerks and knights and stout men-at-arms, the sweet ladies that have two lovers or three, the harpers and poets. *They that go into Paradise, with them I have naught to make* . . . Yet it didn't do to reverse the rule arbitrarily; nothing so obvious. This natural sweetness might subsist with the strictest conduct. And it brought together the very extremes. . . . My mother, Marta thought, was fond of Mrs. Hamilton, and wouldn't speak ill of her even after she found out . . .

Having lost sight of her starting point, Marta concluded: "I wouldn't care what you did. . . ."

"I wouldn't care if you committed murder," Pauline exclaimed, with the vivacity of relief. If Marta said it was all right . . . Like all gifts, Pauline's fine social sense carried its own penalty. Her will was quicksilver, in its delicate response to the pressure of immediate opinion.

"Well, I haven't—yet. As the man said when he read the Ten Commandments," Marta exculpated herself. They rose and gravitated back toward Russ.

"I came near it once," Pauline said surprisingly. Marta enquired interestedly: "Where was the body discovered?" She couldn't imagine Pauline harming anyone. In the midst of their one incredible quarrel, distracted, astonished and helpless as they were before the treachery of events, Marta had been none the less conscious, as an isolated impression, that Pauline struck the classic note even in her grief and anger; it illumined her beauty like sheet lightning; she arraigned the gods for her mortal plight.

Pauline said: "In the Commercial Hotel in Silverton. When I went back from visiting you at the Coast, I stayed there a few days. Lucien Hubert came to see me. We left the door open and talked for awhile. Soon after Lucien left, the shrimp of a night clerk rapped on my door. I had no idea—when I opened it that creature said: You have a man in your room; and he snooped around. I said, you had better make a thorough search; and I took him by the coat-collar and shoved his head under the bed; and then I hustled him

out along the hall, it was only a few steps, and threw him downstairs. I hoped he'd break his neck. He didn't; but I telephoned instantly to the manager and made everybody on the place apologize."

"Mojee!" said Marta, retrospectively stunned. Pauline said: "Lucien was such a dear. He had the most perfect manners. And clothes!" "I see what you mean," Marta agreed. She had been very slightly acquainted with Lucien. Yet she recalled him distinctly, a tall young man, rather thin, with aquiline features and an air not so much of being somebody as of belonging somewhere. Like one of those anonymous "period" portraits of which it is impossible to say whether it is the artist, the subject or the style that pleases. . . . And Pauline used to mention him in her letters. "You and Lucien. . . ." Marta thought aloud. Pauline said: "Oh, he was a Catholic." French-Canadian, that was it. More French than the French, in a sense, having preserved, in their cultural isolation, the pure seventeenth century type, both peasant and aristocrat. La Salle, Frontenac, Du Lhut, adventurers who carried the tone of the Court into the wilderness, might have looked like Lucien. They probably didn't, but they might have. Pauline continued: "His family had sent him West because he had a touch of t. b. It didn't stop him from racketing around; I suppose he thought he might as well have some fun while it lasted. He went back home next year. I heard later . . ." She let it go, preferring to recall how much alive he was,

seeing again the bare white-walled hotel room, so transient, so impersonal, and the two of them sitting casually on the edge of the bed, a thin kind of bed with a white cotton honeycomb coverlet. Lucien held his motoring cap and gloves rolled together, his hands locked about his knee; he was telling her some ridiculous anecdote of Rich Anderson and his bull-terrier . . .

The reason Lucien had come to her room was too subtle and too simple for explanation. She'd been away a month; Lucien happened to see her at the station when she returned; he was taking the same train out of town for the day, and could only say so hurriedly as he swung up the steps. He found her in her office next day; she didn't hear him enter; he startled her out of a mood of lucid desperation. She had stopped in the middle of typing a bill of costs, staring at vacancy, at the chill knowledge that Keith didn't matter any more and she might as well marry George Gardiner. Lucien's greeting brought her back; they hadn't exchanged two words when J. K. Hayden called to her resonantly from the inner office, requiring a mislaid document—mislaid by himself—and following the request with a personal appearance. He took for granted that Lucien's errand was to himself; the occasion was lost. Pauline could only breathe an unpremeditated: damn, and Lucien managed to answer: The same for me, as he was taken in charge. So, that evening, Lucien came. He didn't offer any pretext, and everything they said might have been over-

heard by the whole world without embarrassment. Lucien must have known about Keith, maybe about George, too. And they were both quite aware that the hotel regulations didn't allow his presence. They had at least a right to speak to each other. In spite of holy church, the shades of their ancestors, sentence of death, her own disastrous folly, and the fact that she was going to marry George. The night clerk had grossly miscalculated his own importance . . .

"We were friends," Pauline said, her light sweet voice giving the phrase a special value, so that it seemed to linger on the summer air.

I suppose, Marta thought, that's what I want to know . . . Whether she and Russ were friends. Not lovers, that wasn't on the cards, in this life. But whether it was *herself* Russ had told his soul to, or if it might have been any woman easy enough to respond to his momentary need and nearness, spinning over Brooklyn Bridge, at three o'clock of a New Year's morning. . . . But it's nonsense, she thought, impossible to be sure. It won't work out; I can be sure of Alma, of Pauline, because it's either one thing or the other. Between a man and a woman there's an unknown quantity that not only varies continually but can't be separated from the other factors and alters their nature. We're a little in love with all the men we like, she thought. It doesn't take much to tip the scales. Only it was weighted dead against us. As it was with Pauline and Lucien. Pauline is a little in love with Russ now.

As she was with Lucien . . . Friendship is personal. Love, passion, don't seem to be. We recognize our friends, we fall in love with strangers; they remain strangers.

Where did we get the idea that there is one right person? Or say there were more than one, but a right combination? It might be true, and we make mistakes because of the incalculable odds; everything is against us, time and tide, the stars in their courses. We can't afford to wait for either ripe judgment or luck. *Youth's a stuff will not endure.* There are so many barriers of circumstance, money, race, religion, family. . . . As if it were a bad joke on us, setting us to hunt for the needle in the haystack, the point of the joke being that the needle is actually somewhere in the haystack. Poor old Dizzy said seventy was the age of passion! He could have been right; at seventy, you ought to know your own if you find it. And then it's too late. . . .

Now she considered it, she couldn't think of any man Pauline should have married, unless it was Lucien Hubert. They were essentially suited, she could see them together; they had the same kind of distinction, sensibility, charm. And they did meet, and still they hadn't a chance. . . . Perhaps I'm making it up, Marta conceded, making up Lucien; he may have been quite different from my notion of him. Of those I do know best, I can't think who anyone should have married. If I'd married Chris . . . She couldn't imagine it; she had never been able to imagine it. As for Keith . . .

well, she had proved that there at least are some people you *can't* marry. Proved it by marrying him. . . . She shook herself imperceptibly, pouting her underlip, pff! as if blowing away a dandelion globe . . .

Russ was waiting for them, coming to meet them. Pauline put her hand to her waist, and she and Marta began to laugh. Russ said, with amiable mistrust: "I suppose I'm not in on this?" "Oh, you might be," Marta assured him mysteriously. "Destiny often hangs by a single thread." Pauline gave her a glance of outrage and appeal, and turned deep pink.

CHAPTER XI

MARTA retrieved her manners. "I mean, we were just wondering how come we're all here, simultaneously." At Liège, precisely, where none of them had any specific reason to be, or none that they could yet discern. As if they had been sent separately upon some mysterious pilgrimage under sealed orders. "Starting from where we were," she amplified, "and changing at waystations, to converge at a given point. If you look back it doesn't make sense. Do you ever?"

"Often," said Russ. "I wake up afraid I'm still in Rockford, that that's where I belong, and they've found me out."

"My first chance to go to New York I had to refuse," Marta pursued. "Partly, though, I held back because it didn't seem possible that one could go to New York—that it existed." This was before she became acquainted with Pauline or Keith, before her second meeting with Chris. . . . Yet it may have been crucial; the suggestion took root in her mind. Perhaps it *was* possible. . . . "Then I tried to persuade Pauline to come with me; I couldn't face it alone. She simply paid no attention to

me." Pauline reflected grimly that she had been unable to contemplate leaving Keith. Within a year he had gone out of her life forever. "Finally I did," Marta continued, "and gosh, how I dreaded it. I had to go somewhere." Because she had married Keith. Pulled down the roof. "And Pauline hasn't seen New York yet; but I dragged her along this trip, screaming. Maybe it doesn't matter which corner you turn, you get to the same place in the end. Or maybe if on October tenth, nineteen hundred and four, you had caught the yellow street-car instead of the red, you'd now be foreign adviser to the King of Siam or managing a chain store in San Antonio. I doubt if I'd have had the moral energy to buy my steamer ticket if Nonie hadn't delivered an invitation to look you up when I got here. Twice. So you brought it on yourself. If you did tell Nonie . . ."

"Sure I did," said Russ. "Several times. Mira Hunt heard me. She asked why I was so set on it. Nonie said: 'Oh, Russ and Marta always liked each other.'"

He had answered her question unasked. She wasn't even fishing for it, but talking at random. And if she had asked, she couldn't have been certain how far politeness constrained him. . . . Nonie must have broken off—or at least, Nonie and Russ must have lapsed into placid friendship . . . They couldn't be still engaged. . . .

The riddle of events was insoluble. Whether or not they moved inevitably, however deviously, to an ap-

pointed end. . . . The law of chance governing the toss of a coin has no sequence. But neither has a coin any illusion of choice

The solitary sentry disregarded their departure. He was unarmed, and taking his ease. They lingered again by the unhewn granite boulder beside the road, translating awkwardly the plain inscription. It recorded that those of the Belgian garrison who were entombed by the bombardment had been left undisturbed. The green hill was their grave and their memorial. *They are forgiven as they forgive all those dark wounds and deep; their beds are made on the lap of time and they lie down and sleep.* Marta thought, I suppose they had their troubles, too. . . .

Albert threw away his cigarette to open the car-door respectfully. He fought through the war on this front, Marta thought. So he could escort tourists over the battlefields afterward. He can't make sense of it either. It stunned him. That's what's strange about his eyes, they're empty, only half conscious. Noise must be his nightmare. The strangest thing is that in every other respect he is just what he would have been if the war hadn't touched him; a chauffeur in Belgium instead of in England. But if he has children, they'll be Belgian; and they wouldn't have existed, not those children—it's enough to make you dizzy to think at all. . . . The back of Albert's head, narrow and pathetic, seemed to her to contain Albert's destiny. Yet since he was a link in an endless chain, the consequences of shifting him arbi-

trarily were incalculable . . . She leaned out for a farewell glimpse of the fortress, diminishing into a serene memory as the car glided away . . .

Why the fortress should have been raised precisely there rather than anywhere else on the plain, why an army might not march around it, was beyond the grasp of the nonmilitary intelligence. . . . But we do the same in everything, Marta thought. We start at random and come on trouble; then we smash ourselves against it. The obstacle, the desire, is fixed in our minds. Our families, our jobs, the places we hate and go on living in; I hate New York and I stay there. I tried to go back, though; that was a mistake; the past is past. . . . Out of a million men, I set my heart on one; nobody else would do. So did Pauline. And Russ—I suppose it was his wife until he got her, and then she was the obstacle, he wanted Nonie. By the time he was free, Nonie must have changed her mind. Perhaps she only promised to marry him because it was impossible. There must be some insuperable aversion to marriage, deep down in her mind, that she is unaware of; anyone who really wants to marry does; Nonie has had plenty of chances. She is attractive to men, she plays with the idea, but stops short of marrying. Or anything. . . . It's in your blood and bones, maybe not exactly what you'll do, but how you'll do it. Nonie is domestic and Pauline isn't; neither is innately conventional but both are virtuous; Pauline married and Nonie didn't.

“You gave me such good advice when you wrote to

me in China," Russ was saying. "Advice?" Marta exclaimed. "Great heavens, did I? I would! Well, as long as you didn't take it . . ." But he had, Russ said. Not advice, exactly . . . He did not enlarge upon the topic, finding it too complicated. It led to Louise James. . . He had slipped Marta's letter in his pocket when he dressed for dinner. Four nights that week he had dined out; five of the six women at table he had met at one or more of the other dinners; he was paired with the wife of the manager from his own office; all the men he had done business with during the day or met at the club. Louise was the sixth woman, on his left; she and Wallie were new arrivals; Wallie was with one of the mining companies. The manager's wife was telling him about her cook; they all told stories about their servants, pidgin humor, and how of course the number one boy takes a commission on all supplies. When he turned to Louise she invited him to dinner, next week. He said involuntarily: I'm not going to any more dinners. In the course of his apology, he showed her Marta's letter. And the three of them, Louise, Wallie and himself, made up a party for the following Sunday, to ride out to a Chinese temple in the country, see something of China itself.

"When this Rome contract is put through, that the report I'm working on is for, I'm due for a long leave," Russ said at a tangent. "I think I'll go around the world, come back by way of China." He would keep his promise to Louise.

"We all wrote you," Marta cut back. "Alma told me to. You never answered." He hadn't answered anybody. How could he, if he didn't write to Nonie? "Wasn't Ernest in Shanghai?" Marta asked. "You had somebody quartered on you, some phenomenal bore, a pure young man like Ernest; Nonie said so. A Christian Scientist or something. . . ." "New Thought. He used to sit and rock, in a rocking chair, for hours, holding the thought. He *was* like Ernest."

"Ernest," Marta pronounced judicially, "is like the Catholic Church, omnibus and ubiquitous and forever. From China to Peru. He regards the French as a frivolous people, fond of dancing and light wines. I consider him a public menace. He rouses one's worst instincts, makes one want to roll in the gutter. A nice wide gutter with plenty of fresh mud and running water. I really don't know why—it's not anything he does—"

Russ said: "Yes, it is," and yielded another anecdotal pearl for their collection. "In their home town, Ernest and Caroline owned a double house and let half of it to another couple. When the husband was away, the wife used to go to the movies. Ernest and Caroline watched and saw her kiss her escort goodnight in the porch. Next day Ernest gave her notice to move. It was his duty to indicate disapproval of such goings-on. He asked me if he ought to have informed the husband."

"You mean to say Ernest told you this himself?"

Marta demanded incredulously. Russ said: "That's when I took a scunner against him." The ensuing pause was fraught with moral indignation. It was funny, and it was how they felt. . . . Marta thought, you have to worry about the rent and wash the dishes and get the children to school and rush to work in the morning, and soon you'll be old and tired and all the moonlight and the roses will be gone to waste; and if you lean out of the window, pick a flower, wish on a star—there is Ernest peering obscenely through the curtain—yah, I saw you!

That's why even the injured husband seems somehow in the wrong. None but the participants can know with what quality of emotion they have invested their fault. *Nevertheless you, O Sir Gawwaine, lie. Whatever may have happened these long years, God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie . . .* Russ and his wife probably got thrown out of court on their divorce suit because they couldn't bring themselves to give away what they had shared. . . .

"If you go around the world," Pauline was struck by an agreeable contingency, "you'll land on the Pacific Coast." San Francisco, Russ said, to which Pauline rejoined: "Why not Seattle? And stop over a few days—it's lovely, isn't it, Marta?" In every way superior, Marta affirmed positively. "And Pauline would meet your boat at the dock, with banners." Russ received this amendment to his itinerary with flattering readiness. He didn't, now it occurred to him, ever want

to see San Francisco again. He'd been there. The company sent him while he and Harriet were on the edge of their separation. She remained in New York; they conducted a hopeless correspondence, compact of misunderstandings and unresolved difficulties; and in the middle of it, of all humiliating absurdities, he caught the measles—that hadn't done him any good either, left him with his eyes bothering him and his heart missing a beat occasionally—and in the hospital he could not write. He forbade the office to let Harriet know, on the pretext that it would worry her; but really because he couldn't cope with the situation while he was running a temperature, with occasional mild delirium. The first letter they gave him when he was well enough told him that Harriet had accepted his silence as meaning there was no more to say; she had given up the apartment and was going abroad. She expected to fill a concert engagement in London. Part of his salary was being paid to her account anyhow, and she sold the furniture. Saturday night after his discharge from the hospital he went on a bust, passed out, and a girl he had picked up took him in charge. Rather a jolly girl, but he had forgotten her name. San Francisco was a dimmish nightmare, altogether. If it hadn't been for his mother he'd have chucked his job there; one of the men in the office was leaving to go up to Seattle and start in business for himself, and wanted a partner. But he couldn't. Not with two women dependent on him. He'd always have to pro-

vide for Harriet; she was too impulsive to take care of herself. And his mother, of course, while she lived—his brother was married, had only a small salary as city clerk, and a growing family . . . So Russ had never been in Seattle . . . Besides, he'd be glad to see Pauline again. . . .

"When?" Pauline enquired, tenderly brushing a fresh deposit of fox-fur from his sleeve. Next Easter, Russ hoped, with the mental proviso, if he got this Rome job through, and if he could stick it till then. He'd have to. Then the holiday ought to tide him over another year. And after that, his farm. . . . In the morning, after a hard day, waking was like coming back from very far; the least bit beyond would have been too far. Some place of stillness and conclusion.

"We could go up the Sound, or to a golf resort," Pauline planned; "you play golf?" "There's nothing else to call it," Russ conceded. "Average around a hundred and twenty-five." He took it as a prescription for fresh air and exercise. Aleck Owen's exasperated passion for the game furnished Russ with mild diversion. Aleck wanted to make a million dollars, and bring his score down to eighty something—and then what? . . . "Splendid," said Pauline. "David won't play with me, I'm such a dub. I'm trying to break a hundred." She would do it or perish; it was a test. She played on the public links; David belonged to an exclusive club; he would have to offer to obtain a membership for her—or he wouldn't . . .

Her clear straight brows came together in a brooding line. Oh, David was a snob to the bone; she did not need a test; but if she gave him up, how should she cheat herself that there was something ahead? Use him for that, and despise him . . .

This course presented obvious difficulties, for at moments she did despise him, appraised him with cold clarity as a cautious small-town time-server, grey and thin, grey-minded, thin-minded, with his grey moustache, thin grey hair, grey suit, white slip to his waistcoat—he seemed to diminish, fade, vanish. He ceased to be; and she might pass a week in this peace of apathy, which always followed after a revulsion of furious contempt for him. But when he telephoned, made a stiff apology for whatever his offence had been, sent flowers and other peace offerings, indifference softened to forgiveness; his hesitant voice brought him near, as when they dined together, with candles on the table, in their particular corner of the Rainier Grill, and his rather nice blue eyes lighted with a belated appreciation of her catpaw strokes. She could reach him slyly, through chinks in his habit of clichés. And it was a pleasant game, but to find him even entertaining, she had to allow him some worth . . . With George she had been on equal terms, paid her scot. So, at the last, had he. They were quits. . . .

“What is it?” she was waked to the present by the car stopping. Albert indicated a stretch of stone wall beside the road, protection against a marshy dip of the

terrain. Albert's cockney accent frequently eluded her unaccustomed ear. Oh, another historic spot—neither she nor Marta could recall later exactly which of these mournful places they had viewed, or in what order. Dinant—Tirlemont—no, that was earlier—no matter, each had the same story of unarmed hostages facing a German firing squad. Impossible to realize; the blood did not cry from the ground; it was just a stone wall, with houses beyond, a village of three or four farmsteads. They knew they ought to express some suitable emotion; Albert took on a certain pride, an air of belonging here. He had a right.

Pauline thought strangely, what should we do without death? Only that makes life tolerable, gives it dignity . . . If you've honestly tried, you fail of course, but death balances the account. None the less she was afraid. She wondered why Marta wasn't. Or Russ—he resents it when he thinks of it at all, but he isn't afraid. . . . Marta was thinking, there are other things so much worse. . . . Russ was thinking, they had their hands tied behind them, I suppose. He moved his own hands involuntarily; he had a sense of bonds, yet without straining; he clasped his fingers loosely on his knee.

Thought stopped there, against that stone wall. It wasn't in the least terrible; it was simply so. Restful, rather. It stood. The burghers must have felt it at their backs at the very last, solid and on the whole friendly.

Marta and Pauline made vague sounds, as a courtesy to Albert; and he drove on with quiet satisfaction; or so Marta imagined.

CHAPTER XII

HE should, Russ said, with no sign of contrition, have wired to the Chateau d'Ardennes for rooms, but he hadn't, and very likely there would be none, so late on a Saturday, at the height of the season. They could telephone from Spa and learn the worst. It came out as he expected. There was no accommodation to be had in Spa either, for the same reason. Citizens and tourists were stoutly barricaded behind beerglasses along the pavement cafés.

Russ returned to the car to report his lack of success, adding as a duty theretofore overlooked that Spa had been headquarters of the German General Staff during the war. And the Kaiser abdicated here. They accepted this information in the spirit in which it was offered, saying yes with an intonation of remote beatitude and remaining placidly in their seats, waiting to be disposed of at Russ's pleasure. Spa would have done well enough—snug and merry under its trees—another would do equally well. There had been an earlier intention of dining at a country hotel dedicated to golf, which existed at a negotiable distance from Spa, if they

could find it. Unless they were hungry and would rather dine immediately, Russ qualified. They said they weren't hungry and would leave the decision to him.

The brain, thought Marta, is gone, utterly gone; I am rather hungry, but it seems of no consequence whatever. . . . When Chris took her to dinner, the crucial occasion, she remembered, he enquired if she would have some more celery; and she regarded the empty dish and asked in turn, was that celery? There was a Lady of Roussillon who ate her lover's heart unaware, served to her by her jealous husband; then he told her, saying: Do you like it? and she answered: Very much; naught else would have any relish after such delicate fare; and she flung herself from the tower. Now why did that come to me, Marta pondered; it wasn't what I was trying to bring back, but near it. Ah, it was what Trix O'Neill had said, poor Trix, whose best fortune was her early death. When she called Marta Ariel, and then retracted it. Trix put her hand to her forehead and said slowly: Something eats your heart, do you know what? Marta said: Tell me. And Trix said: It is yourself. And *They* ask: *Do you like the taste?* . . . Marta thought, we three have eaten our hearts, and that is why we understand one another. . . . But this would be nonsense if I said it aloud; it is one of those things the poets must say for us, for prose will not contain it; poetry is a separate language.

Russ trusted that the golf hotel might have room for them, and fatalistically refrained from pursuing the enquiry by telephone. It was simpler, in his immediate mood, to let Albert drive them there. Albert believed he knew where the hotel was. His confidence was misplaced. They drove on and on through the long serene twilight, toward a phantom castle upon a receding hill top, which they assumed must be the hotel. Overtaken at last, it proved to be a ruin. By dead reckoning and baffling colloquies with indifferent peasants, they came to the conclusion that they had overshot the mark. Albert grew visibly nervous, and Russ assured him several times that the detour didn't matter. Privately Russ added to Marta and Pauline: "He hasn't been on the right road once today." The right road for where, Marta enquired, after due cogitation. For anywhere, said Russ. "But we weren't going anywhere, were we?" she propounded. Except the Chateau d'Ardennes, which wouldn't have taken them in if they had got there . . . Logic and reason, she concluded, are useless in the conduct of life.

They might have to sleep under a hedge, said Russ. They said that would be lovely. It seems there was a travelling man, said Marta idiotically; and they were seized with a giggling fit, slumping together against the cushions in a general collapse from lack of nourishment, fatigue, and loss of morale. "Maybe I planned this," said Russ. "You are completely in my power. You'd have a long walk back." "I have no intention

of walking back," said Pauline. Albert turned, slightly alarmed by the untimely hilarity and increasingly harassed at having gone astray. He now held the opinion that a crossroad they had passed fifteen minutes ago led to the hotel. They agreed that it did.

"Don't worry," Marta resumed to Russ. "I'm sorry to have to give her away, because it is impossible to defend oneself against the imputation of virtue, but Pauline is really a good woman."

"I am not," said Pauline indignantly.

"It's not your fault," said Marta, in fairness. "It is your misfortune that you were born with an innate passion for the conventions. This inhibits your other natural impulses, so that you have to find a lofty motive before you can go ahead—and then of course you are obliged to proceed in the opposite direction."

"I do not," said Pauline, not quite certain what she didn't do. "Why should you accuse me of such horrible motives?"

"Me?" said Marta innocently. "All I said was that you always Acted for the Best."

Pauline could only protest: "You've got me so mixed up—" But is it true, she began to wonder; and at dinner, she admitted there might be an element of truth in the charge.

The crossroad actually led to the hotel. They dined in the atmosphere of disapproval evoked by latecomers to a table d'hôte, with the waiters hurrying in warmed over dishes, anxious to be off duty. An Englishman in

knickers, solitary at the further end of the spacious *salle*, did his bit toward deepening the depression. He isn't stuffed, Marta whispered, he moved one foot. They "set" that way when they sight Americans. Pauline choked; the lone Englishman reminded her slightly of David. "You're right, as usual," she said suddenly. "But it's too much, the way you take everything to pieces. And are right about everything."

"My epitaph," said Marta, "will be: She was right, as usual. But I will impart my secret to you. If it's statistics, I make 'em up as I go along; and if it's facts, I rapidly tell people something else in place of what they were talking about. Like Heine; when he had no news to write to Berlin, he recited the names of the seven chamberlains of King Ahasuerus. But what do you mean I was right about?"

"How I invent motives," said Pauline. "Of course," said Marta soothingly. "We all do. But it's not true that everyone has two reasons for every action—the real reason and the reason they give themselves. Because both reasons are real." Pauline continued: "The woman who comes in to get dinner for me and Jimmy is a widow, Mrs. Hanley, with flocks of children. Her oldest girl finished business college lately, and couldn't find work; times have been slack. I spoke to David of this deserving widow and what a help it would be to her if the girl had a job. David expanded his chest and said I was so sympathetic, and he'd speak to the manager of a company he had an interest in. They took

the girl on. I told David how kind he was, and he said it was nothing; and Mrs. Hanley burst into tears and said David was a true gentleman—he loathes hearing other people's troubles or about the poor!—and she'd never forget it. I hoped she wouldn't, for I had pulled the wires so she'd be grateful and not let me down about feeding Jimmy when I want to go out to dinner with David."

"Never mind," said Marta, "you're a much nicer person than I am. And Russ—what he's thinking this minute would make you call the police." He met her eyes, and though the mask was up, he colored perceptibly. "I guess Liège is our best bet," he said.

He won; the Hotel del'Europe took them in when they reached Liège again, after ten o'clock. The night concierge was patient with their unreasonable demand for three rooms with baths. Three baths?—he had only two, and left them to settle the allotment, Russ offering the use of his bath to the loser. Late as it was, they couldn't bring themselves to part abruptly. After extensive wanderings about the deserted halls, they found themselves in Pauline's room.

"They don't seem to care in this hotel," said Pauline, shedding her hat thankfully. Marta established herself on the bed, for a final cigarette. "It would be no place for Ernest. Anything might happen."

"Not to Ernest," said Marta. "He is a moral man. That's why he is moral, because nothing would happen to him."

Russ said: "I'm not sure—I suspect that Ernest and Caroline aren't always strictly moral." Marta exhibited acute interest: "Which of them—with whom?"

"Both," said Russ, "with each other."

Marta sat up and draped herself over the footboard avidly. "You shock me. I must know all." Pauline moved her chair: "Let us draw closer." "What do you suspect?" Marta demanded. "Can such things be? Give us the revolting details. When, where and how? I can bear anything but suspense. Just an outline—to begin with."

"Well, Ernest had a nervous breakdown. And the doctor prescribed two months in a sanatorium—without Caroline."

"But that wouldn't give him a nervous breakdown," Marta argued, "if I know what you mean."

"Wouldn't it?" Russ paused for further consideration.

"Be reasonable," Marta urged. "You know for yourself, there's nothing like a—a bad conscience to induce untroubled slumber and a good appetite."

"Then why *did* he have a nervous breakdown?" Russ enquired reasonably.

Marta answered: "Can't you see? It's ghastly; they hate each other. They don't know it themselves; they don't dare let themselves know it; they don't know the difference. But of course they hate each other."

"You may be right as usual," Russ said. "It was

after Ernest tried to murder Caroline that he was sent to the sanatorium."

"After he tried to murder—" Marta and Pauline ceased, gazing into abysses of horror. Ernest and Caroline have children, Marta thought. Recovering by degrees, she asked faintly for precise particulars. Russ was not in a position to vouch for the accuracy of conflicting accounts of the episode; whether Ernest had choked Caroline, or endeavored to throw her out of a window, or both. The sanatorium enabled friends and physicians to hush up the story; Ernest was demonstrably ill. "Ernest never referred to it directly," said Russ. "But he did tell me that only his religion had saved him."

No appropriate comment occurred to Marta or Pauline. "I need rest," said Marta. "Good night," she faded unobtrusively toward the door. Russ, she thought, might be glad of a few minutes' grace to say goodnight to Pauline. Let Pauline take the trick; though nothing of itself, it had an ulterior significance for her.

Russ missed his cue and rose; did Marta know the way to her room? It's awkward, thought Marta, walking beside him down the dim corridor; as far as Russ is concerned Pauline and I might be Siamese twins. She can't move either; the situation is set. Go on, be a lady. . . . Russ drew his hand from his pocket absently: "I've carried off Pauline's key." The infinitesimal pinprick she felt startled Marta. Oh, yeah, a

lady! *More than queen of cats!* Just for that, you'll eat it and like it. . . . They were at her door; she said, "Come in," and while searching for words, as elusive as blown thistledown, she pulled the curtains, took a cigarette from her handbag. Russ's gesture, as he offered a light, caught her attention. "You're very tired, aren't you?" She heard herself saying it, felt simultaneously, with utter consternation, the blush that rose to the roots of her hair. Russ stood smiling and looking at her. "Pretty tired," he said.

"Would you like—" she began again—*damn!* Both feet. . . . "I mean, Pauline—isn't she good company?" "She's a peach," said Russ. Marta advanced in a vacuum. "She had a ridiculous notion of going to Berlin alone; she fancied you asked her here out of politeness. I told her you made a point of inviting her, were delighted." Idiot, she addressed herself. "Of course I was," said Russ, obviously deriving some private merriment from the colloquy, though of what nature Marta failed to determine. "So I thought maybe you'd like to take Pauline to lunch or something . . . without me . . . When we are back in Antwerp, or in London. . . . It would give her a different impression—besides, you might want to yourself—" You meant well, she concluded silently.

Now, Russ thought, what is the little devil up to? . . . And Marta thought, that's torn it. He has no idea why it matters to Pauline. I can't recite the story of our lives to him in five minutes. It would sound even

more feeble-minded to explain that he's to take Pauline to lunch because eighteen years ago Pauline was in love with Keith and I married him and therefore it would encourage her to go ahead and marry David for his own best interests. So beautifully simple . . . Ask me next, do you care for celery? . . .

"Are you trying to hand me over to Pauline?" He let down the mask; he was teasing her.

The whole affair was past mending; she could only laugh and laugh. "Over my dead body! I said for lunch—" "Or something," Russ prompted. Check, thought Marta, you can call and raise him; he isn't—" *Jamais*; I'd speak for myself. Only my religion saves me, like Ernest. Look here, you won't breathe to Pauline that I suggested lunch—or anything? She'd slay me." She laid her hand on his sleeve, rather anxiously; and he put his arm around her, kissing her cheek. It was an answer.

But he turned in the doorway, showing what he still held in his hand. "I'll have to take back Pauline's key."

Left alone, Marta put both hands to her head. If there's any way of making it worse, she thought, no doubt it will occur to me later. What can he suppose except that I was —Oh, well, what of it? Cheer him up a bit. I haven't got ten thousand dollars but your proposition interests me, as the man said when the Black Hand threatened to kidnap his wife. . . . *And maybe I was* . . . No, I did mean well, so whatever he

thinks, it's coming to me . . . Oh, hell, of course I would if . . . There again, to elucidate that *if* would take volumes, libraries. . . .

She had left her book in Pauline's room; she was used to reading herself to sleep. Impossible to go and get it. The reason why not, she thought, would fill volume forty . . . These square European pillows are a nuisance . . .

You'll never know, thought Russ . . . I believe she would . . . This was the number; he rapped discreetly. "Who is it?" Pauline called . . . There was a curious pleasure, too subtle to be sensual, in listening to the almost inaudible sounds of a woman dressing hastily, bare feet light on the carpet, the sigh of silk. Pauline appeared, clasping a yellow brocade kimono over her breast, her eyes bright and startled. "Oh!" she said. He held out the key: "Sorry. I took it away by mistake." "Th-thank you," she said. The door shut again.

Pauline wouldn't, thought Russ. But Marta . . . You can be fairly sure if they won't, but not whether they will . . . *She didn't come to breakfast at the Waldorf* . . . In his own room, he didn't bother to turn on the light. A moonbeam glimmered across the mirror; he shrugged and uttered an inarticulate sound. You bet you'd do it all over again, he said to himself. . . . Commencing immediately . . .

CHAPTER XIII

“Russ had my key last night, and when he brought it back I just snatched it and slammed the door,” Pauline lamented. “M-mm,” said Marta, “I know—I mean, he said he had it. In the hall.” She peered at her melon. “I might have asked him in for five minutes,” said Pauline mournfully. “There’d have been no harm. . . .” If Marta said there wouldn’t . . . “None whatever,” Marta assured her. “Why didn’t you?” Pauline said: “I thought it was you knocking. The instant I’m alone, I tear off all my clothes, so I slid into a kimono—and there was Russ.” . . . Marta could see him. She giggled. He’d be trying to figure it out. At least, Pauline had cleared herself, by the width of the door. . . . Marta thought, he can only assume that at intervals of eight years I have a brain-storm, with variations.

“I couldn’t sleep anyhow,” said Pauline. “Marta, when Russ comes over to London,” she rushed through her request, “couldn’t I have one day?” Marta heard her with familiar astonishment. It’s uncanny, Pauline actually can read one’s mind by flashes, whenever one

is off-guard. And instead of being any use, it confuses her. Because the mind is a deep pool, froth and ripples and straws on the surface and God knows what down below, water-weeds and drowned things. All I can do is watch and listen and piece together from the outside and then make my mistakes and let it go at that. But she can't help shifting and changing in response.

"All right," said Marta, powerless in the tangle she had made. Russ would certainly catch her in the least attempt to manage him. Left to chance, the arrangement might occur naturally, if Pauline were free to accept, assured that Marta didn't mind. Marta really didn't mind. Like that immortal featherbrain, Mrs. Bennet, she didn't mind anything. . . . She felt, inexplicably, as she used to when she was eighteen, comparing notes—about men, of course—with Susie behind the screen at the Benton Hotel, as chaste and as unmoral as children. *We were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise, and the door stood open at the feast . . .* She had never recaptured the mood since she fell in love with Chris. Till this moment. She hadn't recognized it immediately . . .

"You'll see Russ again in Paris, and next spring in New York," Pauline extenuated. She might, if he didn't have to go to Rome. "You're likely to see him in Seattle first," said Marta. She hoped sincerely that his Easter leave might not fail. The sea voyage was exactly what he needed; and why shouldn't Pauline

have a few days? Pauline grew radiant, expanding into plans. We're positively dithering, Marta thought, and didn't mind that either. Pauline has to keep a kind of game going constantly; whenever she stops she remembers the children. She uses David and Clint Charles for it; even her indecision is part of it. And Russ is dependable, he won't let her down. . . . "Is that golf resort in the mountains?" Marta asked, with genuine concern. "Maybe altitude is bad for high blood pressure—or is it the opposite?" Pauline was stricken. "I don't know, I'll consult my doctor; we could take a trip on the Sound instead, or to Victoria." They were seriously engrossed, prescribing and consulting—he did look better than in Paris two weeks ago, but then he had a cold—when Russ paused in the entrance of the coffee-room. He had changed to a summer tweed, his eyes were clear, his smooth face as fresh as his collar. They stared at him as he came toward their table; they stuttered over their good-mornings. "How are you?" he became conscious of the crossfire of their scrutiny. "What is it—have I got egg on my tie?" Pauline bit her lip; Marta hiccuped and smothered herself with her napkin. "Oh, my goodness," she gurgled, "excuse it please, we—" They broke down, giving a disjointed account of their solicitous conversation. "We were taking the greatest care of you. We had practically tucked you into a wheel chair, and were bringing you soup and jelly, probably red flannel petticoats—and we looked around and there you were,

blooming with health and growing younger before our very eyes, just out of a bandbox. Egg on your tie!" He couldn't pretend to scorn such honest flattery, but carried it off creditably. "Well, in Milan I dropped a forkful of noodles inside my waistcoat—those Italian noodles are about three inches long, and *hot*—I had the darnedest struggle . . . No, thanks, I had breakfast sent up."

They had only to register before leaving, a formality omitted the night before. Too late, Marta closed her passport; Russ was reading it over her shoulder. She glanced at Pauline's. "For heaven's sake," she exclaimed, "talk about growing younger—"

Pauline was unabashed. "What could I do? David offered to go with me to get my passport, and I've been lying to him about my age for years."

"How you keep tab on what you've told that man I can't imagine," said Marta bitterly.

"It does require constant attention to detail," said Pauline, with modest pride. . . . Marta thought, I'm forty-one. The number prolonged itself in her mind like the muffled sound of an iron door closing slowly. Pauline was a few months older. Marta was charmed, she was exquisitely exasperated by Pauline's subterfuge and her own instinctive rise to it. As if they could, by turning a leaf or the stroke of a pen, reverse the movement of the spheres. . . . Still, David believes Pauline. Because he wants to, on his own account . . .

They emerged into the drowsy brightness of Sunday

morning, fresh with the watery smell of washed pavements and sprinkled bay-trees. A concierge had already fetched out a chair and settled himself for the day; a housewife in felt slippers crossed the street leisurely. You'd say, Marta reflected, that Liège is the sort of place where nothing ever happens . . . Albert was ready with the car. He drove with restored confidence, naming villages to indicate that he was familiar with his route. They thanked him while rejecting the information instinctively. Even in Paris, Marta realized, she had not wished she could speak French. How restful not to understand, to remain ignorant of the griefs and anxieties which every mortal carries in his breast and betrays by the most casual word, by a gesture, an inflection.

They would lunch at the Chateau. It had been built, or owned, Russ said, by King Leopold, the old king. Out of profits extracted bloodily from the Congo blacks, no doubt. He had yards of white whiskers, Marta contributed irrelevantly. And Cleo de Merodé. . . . Wearing a tipsy crown and disreputable ermine robe, the old king existed, remote, unreal, and horrid as an ogre, in the Sunday newspaper supplements of her childhood. They blew across America like red and yellow leaves before a rising gale, filling a need for color and sensation in those pure, empty spaces. Her oldest sister's beau used to fetch them, with the weekly mail. In Arcady . . . How Alma startled her once by

saying that she did not desire perfection in human nature; it would be dull. Yet Alma is good, kind, unselfish, gentle. . . . Then virtue is not enough even for good people? Something in us craves danger and change and violence and the breaking of laws. *Now may the devil take my soul, quoth King Henry, for God shall not have it.* Not by compulsion. . . . Marta wished the child who was puzzled by Cleo's madonna face and ropes of pearls could have known that some day she would lunch at the ogre's castle. She would as soon have expected to fly. Well, she had flown, too. With Lowrie Ives. At dusk, they were so far above earth that it dropped out of sight; they were alone in the ether, except for a single star. She could remember reading of the Wright's first flight. So she could also remember before that. It left one gasping, to think of belonging to both ages—to have seen the world swing out in space, and nothing to steer by but one far-off nameless star . . . She had had enough. She wished, perfectly content, that there might be no tomorrow for her. The world is such a lovely place, she thought; and the two thoughts somehow did not seem to be contradictory. How fantastic that one can think in the same breath of God and the universe and lunch and whether or not one would . . . She leaned back in her corner placidly, with her hands on her lap. Russ couldn't be expected to play up to both of them. He'd get his wires crossed. Pauline needed the assurance of contact. She was ready to fly to bits with nerves,

after two bad nights. Marta knew the signs. She had been through it herself.

Pauline said, as if to a spoken cue, she had waked at four. There was a chime every hour. They, she surmised, didn't hear it. They wouldn't! Marta was sorry, she had not. Though she was craning her neck to observe a wayside tavern perched on a bridge, she caught the merest flash of Russ's glance toward her; he then gazed straight ahead. He had not heard the chime, he said. Or anything . . . He had hoped that maybe . . . There he was, lonely off by himself. But nobody cared . . . Slamming doors in his face. . . .

Marta was drawn to attention as if by a spring. He was ragging her over Pauline's head! She had an impracticable impulse to box his ears. The motion of the car swayed her against his shoulder; she muttered, too low for Pauline to hear: "You son-of-a-gun—insulting a helpless woman!" She felt him laughing, though his features remained immobile; the contagion seized her. Oh, oh! . . . Pauline regarded them injuriously: "Yes, you are the kind of people who drop off the moment they lay their heads on the pillow, and don't know a thing till they wake next morning. Let me tell you, you didn't know anything when you went to sleep, either." That finished them; they uttered suffocated sounds of exceeding mirth. "Idiots," said Pauline, and immediately succumbed.

"We got that," said Marta, drying her eyes, too demoralized to offer any defence. She was a woman

scorned . . . Russ thought, then that wasn't what she meant last night, or it wouldn't strike her as funny. You *can't* tell . . . Albert turned to assure them, by the landmarks, that they were nearing their destination. They said: "Yes, isn't it?" with half-witted intensity.

The forest of Arden—it might well be. The stately conventional phrases of romantic literature became actual; dappled glades and velvet turf, shaded by magnificent trees. The light grey stone façade of the chateau was frivolously cheerful, innocent of history, swept and garnished. Tables were set on a terrace, under a vast orange-striped awning. The clean live sensation of the gravel lingered with Marta as she consulted the menu. "I will have this." She was obliged to point to the item. "I can't pronounce it." *Truite a la meuniere*, Russ told the waiter, with an accent that admitted no argument.

"Which?" Pauline enquired. Trout, Marta translated. Pauline wasn't listening; she repeated: "What is it?"

"A trout," said Russ, "is a fish. About that long."

"I thought it was a fish," said Pauline, and ordered chicken.

In heaven, Marta thought, one doesn't need to be clever. It's a state of being. One contemplates—a rose, a cloud, a tree. Mostly trees. And one's friends are there. She shifted her feet, to dislodge a pebble from her shoe. It was like wading a brook . . .

Of course . . . That was it, precisely . . . We've come

so far, she thought. So far, it's no wonder we're tired. Starting in a prairie schooner and covering the last lap by aeroplane. There and back. Americans are adaptable; they have to be. But there is a limit to what any organization can assimilate. To experience all the stages of civilization in one lifetime, from the nomad to the machine age, demands the utmost . . .

In half a lifetime, actually. She was seven, the year the family moved West, part of the last great wave of emigration that overflowed the continent. They had been drifting westward ever since she was born. She had no recollection of her birthplace; it was only a name, Sault Ste. Marie, a pretty name. They had got to Utah, she hardly knew how or why, except that her father started with some vague intention, abandoned midway, of going to Oregon. Perhaps because it was the furthest possible destination. He seemed to cherish a fretful, almost imbecile hope of reaching, at the world's end, a land of Cockaigne where one didn't have to accept responsibility, adjust oneself to necessity and one's neighbors. Marta was sorry yet that they hadn't reached Oregon. She had never seen it, and it was to her a lost inheritance. She knew she would have loved it; she loved all that northerly region of the Pacific—a kind country, breathing odors of balsam, fruitful and serene, where air and water and sunlight are as soft as summer rain. She had not loved the prairie. . . . But they had turned to the prairie instead. . . . Six children there must have been, the baby in her mother's

arms. Her mother sat with her father in front; the children were stowed under the bowed grey canvas, on the bedding rolls. The pots and pans clinked in a box beneath the seat. When they were tired of the slow clumsy pitching motion of the wagon, going on and on, the horses halted and the children scrambled down to run awhile.

It was her feet that remembered the slithery crispness of the grass and the little puffs of dust in the wheelruts. The dust came up softly between her toes, and cloud shadows moved along beside the wagon. Birds, too, ran ahead on the road, then rose and flew away. Prairie dogs stood upright beside their burrows, squeaked curiously, and vanished. In the Bad Lands there were long stretches rough with broken lava, and a horned toad under a sage-brush. It was delicious to splash through a creek; that was what the gravel of the restaurant terraces brought back, the feel of the pebbly fords, with the water riffing by her ankles. The horses drank leisurely—she remembered the horses so well; they were almost members of the family. An unmatched pair of geldings, very different in temper but with a dumb affection for each other, an equine friendship. They were called Buck and Barney. Buck was a deep-chested bay, lazy and strong and good-natured, but with a runaway streak. He wasn't fond of work, but in an emergency the wilfulness that made him bolt occasionally made him throw himself into the collar and fetch the load or break the traces. There was a

sculptural quality, the very form of power, in the slow ripple of his shoulder muscles when he was doing his best. Barney was a bright sorrel, high-headed and nervous, with a free eager stride, but wanting weight for the heaviest business. He fretted and tossed his forelock and was always six inches in advance of Buck on the level, but when the pull came, he looked sideways at Buck with confident intelligence, as if to enquire: how do you do this? how do you set yourself so solidly? . . . Now she thought of it, Pauline reminded Marta of Barney, and Russ of Buck . . . And it came back to her that her father had bought Buck and Barney from the Standard Oil Company; those were hard times, and the big corporations must have been reducing equipment, laying off men and teams. Very hard times, the Nineties, a depression that was like the trough of a wave; the temporary slackening or intermission of energy which released a spume of unemployed to spill over the remaining margin of the frontier. There it spent itself and settled.

The next wave was to turn back eastward, the great industrial swell that caught Russ, with his first job, and landed him ultimately here in Europe . . .

But the child who was herself, Marta, who watched the horses lifting their wet muzzles from the ford, resuming the weight of the harness, knew no more than Barney or Buck why they must plod ahead on that long road. The old Fort Benton trail, broken by the wagon-trains of the fur-traders; did anyone but herself now

know the name of the I. G. Baker Company, of St. Louis, whose sixteen-span bull-teams took all summer going from Benton to Edmonton, when St. Louis was a frontier outpost? She had heard it from the old-timers, from Bowie Hamilton, who was born in St. Louis and orphaned on the Oregon trail, his father and mother killed by Indians, himself, two years old, saved by a squaw and rescued months later by Miles's troopers. But that was history when she heard it, not quite real; it belonged to the day before yesterday. One day at a time . . . If it was near sundown when they came to a stream, they camped. The campfire fluttered, beaten down by the enormous darkness; the children faced it in a solemn half-circle, holding their tin plates for flapjacks and bacon, blinking at the blown flame, and listening to the rhythmic tearing sound of the horses grazing. One always faces a campfire. Then oblivion descended; she had no memory of ever going to bed . . .

How little she remembered of her own life. No more, comparatively, than of the road from Antwerp to Liége and thence to this pleasant terrace. It was too far within the given time. People meant most to her, stayed in her mind. She would always remember being here with Pauline and Russ.

"You'll burst if you go on drinking that Vichy," said Pauline. "Look, I'm sure that's one of the men we met at Jane's party!" Taking the points in order, Marta replied: "Somebody has got to drink it. Do

you mean your boy friend, who said you were a woman of experience? . . . It can't be the Vichy; why do I imagine the awning is descending on us?" Pauline shouted against a southing of canvas and a small babel of surprised outcries: "*No*—not that crazy kid—" because she couldn't stop herself quickly enough. They stood up, a general movement, distracted by reaching for purses and scarfs.

It wasn't the Vichy. Lifted and dropped by a wanton gust, the awning began to collapse slowly and portentously, in orange-striped billows. Waiters sprang to the guyropes; the majority of the luncheon guests returned provisionally to their chairs. Pauline and Marta and Russ went across the sward toward the forest.

"What about Jane and the boy friend?" Russ wanted to know.

CHAPTER XIV

“You know Jane—” Marta paused; Russ did not know Jane. Marta realized the peculiarity of Americans, that they are indescribable. There are no categories, neat tickets of caste or type. By a dozen handy generalizations the European can be sketched, and the outline filled in with idiosyncrasies to make a recognizable portrait. Not an American. Obviously then, Marta perceived, no European can understand a word that an American says. Not even the English, especially not the English, since we draw from the same vocabulary with wholly different associations. *The Hippopotamus reminded the Ancient Greeks of a Horse, so they called him the River-Horse. What a Horse reminded them of is unknown.*

Possibly the Ancient Greeks were really talking about crocodiles.

Americans understand one another, over extraordinary reaches of diverse experience, because the angle of incidence is similar; or perhaps because they have learned to expect the unexpected, the unpredictable. After years of intimacy, her friends could still surprise

her by an allusion to places they had been, occupations they had gone through, their family origins. But the surprise was superficial, as when one meets a friend in a new hat, or on a train. . . . She recalled an Englishman in Silverton, who came early to tea and caught her on her knees scrubbing the floor, her arms dripping with soapsuds. The cleaning woman was incompetent; Marta hadn't the heart to discharge the poor old slattern, and used to do the work over after her. As she made herself presentable, removing her overall apron and the stains of toil in the bathroom, Marta had smoothed out a grin also. What distressed Captain Lowndes was not the sight of a woman scrubbing a floor, but that he should, incredibly, be paying a social call upon a scrubwoman. He had been an officer in the British Army, the regulars, and resigned his commission after losing his private income; with what remained he had tried ranching, not very successfully. By assumed naivety, Marta had maliciously extracted from him the admission that he considered himself declassed, no longer a gentleman, since he had to groom his own horse. Obviously then he depended upon externals for his self-respect. An American feels himself essentially the same person through all vicissitudes, and is broken only if he feels he is unequal to the occasion. It was Captain Lowndes who had said to Trix O'Neill: The only thing you and I have in common, Mrs. O'Neill, is that we live in different houses. Marta and Trix had speculated in vain what he was

endeavoring to express; but it might be the nearest he could come to epitomizing America.

Well, she could say that Jane was a small-town girl, from Huntsville, Tennessee, where Jane's father owned and ran a garage or filling station. Jane was very fond of her father. She had no Southern accent, though she did have a magnolia complexion, and an enchanting little pug face, lips slightly curled and the bridge of the nose flat, gold-brown eyes, dusty-gold hair coiled in two snailshells over her ears, and a figure like an etherealized broomstick, a straight line perfectly balanced. She was a stylist, an arbitress of elegance in the capital of fashion. Duchesses, if they wished to be smart, must wear what Jane approved. The men who laid ambiguous siege to her usually ended by proposing honorable matrimony, unaware that it was a tribute to her invincible schoolgirl innocence. They fancied they had surrendered to her chic. They knew too much of the world to know anything else. No woman who wore her clothes, such clothes, with such an air, could be other than *mondaine*. They were reduced to bewildered and sometimes mean resentment when she wouldn't marry them either.

If Russ met Jane, he would recognize in five minutes what she was: unsophisticated, honest, and chaste, a nice girl by homely small-town standards. Her clothes were her job, and she was competent at it. She would have scrubbed a floor thoroughly, if she set about it.

"Well, anyhow, Jane threw a party to welcome us

to Paris. Didn't occur to her, the dear, to give us time to shop. Did I tell you what the milliner said about my hat? Madame, that is not a hat, it is a calamity. I nearly perished under it, being introduced to Jane's best assortment of vicomtes. I'd be glad to have the beaux Jane sweeps out. They couldn't believe their eyes. The lad who got stuck with me just drank morosely. But Pauline's young man, driving back from dinner at the Moulin Bicherel—all I know is that she didn't turn up at our hotel till an hour after me. I gathered that he was quite violent—" Mildly embarrassed, Pauline murmured that he was ridiculous. She made an unconscious gesture of appeal for discretion. He had been outrageous. Without the slightest provocation . . . Alone at last! And in Paris! Young girls, he rejected her polite evasion, bore me. Now a woman of experience like yourself . . . How do you know I am a woman of experience, she protested, with what breath remained to her. She had, actually kicked him on the shins; and he lost his hat. Rough-house. She would have been more angry if he had been less persevering. He insisted they should go on to Henry's Bar, or to supper; that she should see him off for Havre in the morning. He argued with her, hatless, on the steps of the hotel. . . . But she thought, he couldn't have played it through if she had seemed to him too old. . . . She did not want men younger than herself. That would be the last indignity. No begging for mercy, kneel down with composure, lay your head on

the block. It's soon over . . . She wondered whence that image had come to her. Out of a picture, or a book . . .

Now a young girl really would bore Russ, Pauline hoped. A whole day of her, anyhow. With us he doesn't have to make an effort; he can say nothing, or anything, whatever comes into his head. What was he thinking? About Marta and herself . . . Pauline wished, with an intensity that startled her, that Marta would go away. Marta was too strong. Even when she was indifferent, when she was abstracted, she exerted some force. . . .

Marta said: "I'll come back and report if that hill is worth climbing." Give Pauline a break; why shouldn't people have what they want? She had got her wish. . . . You asked for it and you got it! . . . Her mouth turned up at the corners with appreciation. No embarrassment or constraint could survive the awful candor of Russ's tacit accusation. What's the seventh commandment between friends? . . .

The circle of shadow cast by a lofty oak gave an illusion of privacy and privilege. Russ crossed his hands under his head, resting his eyes in the impenetrable greenness of the foliage, fold upon fold of green. Without looking after her, somehow he could see Marta walking away, her low-heeled white sandals seeming to choose their own way over the turf. Alone and self-sufficient as a cat. She put it over on you just the same, he thought, with a queer personal satisfaction.

Well, you've been razzed by an expert. She's kept you guessing nine years . . . Pauline, too, sitting with one hand spread on the grass, had an air of readiness for instant departure. Her brows were arched into faint crescents; she held her head like a deer. He perceived for the first time that Pauline had been a beauty, had still the quality of beauty. Why, she was like Nonie, really like her, not in any physical aspect, but herself. And Marta was like—

He smiled sleepily at Pauline. Oh, my God, she thought, dazed for a moment. Life is not—not tolerable. One ought to die, or have no memory. Perhaps Keith *is* dead. I hope so.

But there is no proportion in it, she thought, with the lucidity that follows the cessation of violent shock. No measure between the object and the emotion. What have our souls to do with it—if we have souls? With being in love . . . Keith never pretended to be anything but what he was . . . Two or three evenings a week he used to come up to the apartment, bringing Joe Warner. Joe was the sort of amiable boy who comes second, makes one of a crowd. He played the piano. They all talked through the music, or didn't bother to. Marta often took up a book. Keith lounged on the red corduroy chesterfield, with his eyes half shut so that Pauline couldn't be sure he was watching Marta across the room. The first time she noticed it, she knew that she had known it for a long while. Joe was holding down a closing note as it sang into silence; Marta

looked up, leaving her book open. What was that? Play it again. It was new then, catchy. When Marta moved, Keith's expression changed. He had the same trick as Russ of smiling with his lips closed and full, almost sulky, asking . . . Then it was for that, for his eyelashes, she had wasted her youth. . . . *Hush up, baby, stop your cryin', for you got another papa on the Loueyville line* . . . Marta went on reading. She hadn't seen. And it made no difference. She didn't have to do anything. She could walk away, and make them think about her because she was gone . . .

Russ said: "Those Minerva cars are pretty stiff in the springs. The company has to buy them because they're Belgian manufacture." Sheer muscular fatigue was rather pleasant, and the fresh air was tonic.

He was grateful to Pauline and Marta that they didn't fuss, ask sympathetic questions or offer advice. In the past, he had seldom been seriously ill, and he was never interested in it. He was impatient of pain; it had no mystical compensation or virtue for him. It was a fact, but accidental and material. His mind dealt with it as with any other inconvenience or interruption. To get through the day's business he shoved it aside by sheer will. He thought, scientists say we are nothing but machines; but when the machinery goes back on you, why do you still feel essentially complete? He had used and been used by his senses, yet he had never experienced that sickness of the spirit in antagonism to the flesh of which he had read. There was no division;

that made it the more strange that the emotions which were most intimately bound up with the senses proved not to be dependent on them. The senses were a means . . . He liked women, Pauline and Marta for instance, no less and no otherwise. He had never been able to do without women. Often he had thought it was a weakness, a failing; but why? Women had had him, no doubt of it. But it wasn't the most beautiful women had moved him most. When desire failed, the attraction remained. After all, you couldn't have anything without being had. All living was possessive: friendship, work, the delight of a summer day—the sky was wonderfully blue against the solid green of the leafy canopy . . . No, he wasn't sorry. Not, at least, for his sins . . .

“Jimmy,” said Pauline, at once relieved and remorseful about Marta, “has bought a second hand flivver. For twenty-five dollars. I had a letter from him yesterday. Can you imagine? I'm afraid he'll meet me with it at the station when I get home. It must resemble the taxicab of the Marne. I must buy a real car.” . . . She would learn to drive. So when Russ arrived, she could take him about. She knew the roads; David had an expensive car and a serious chauffeur. She described aloud where they might go, and Russ listened receptively. “You really are coming, aren't you?” she asked suddenly, with charming anxiety. “Sure I am,” he said. “I wish I didn't have this Roman job on hand; I'd take a week off right now.” To

be with us, Pauline thought. "There's a summer hotel on the Sound," she said, "where they have a pear tree beside the porch, and one can dine outside and see the water. It's almost lovelier than this." . . . At home, Russ thought, each spring the apple blossoms fell like snow in the unpruned orchard, the back lot. He used to lie with his hands under his head looking up through the foamy branches, planning how when he grew up he would travel like his father. The old apple trees must have been cut down long ago. He did not know if the house was still standing. Probably not. A dismal, shabby house. It was sold, when his mother went to live with his brother. Twenty years ago—not so long actually, but it seemed so. Yes, two years before he and Harriet were married. Harriet wore a blue tailored suit and a hat with a sweeping feather.

Looking back, he was puzzled by an invariable element of surprise, astonishment. Why surprise, in merely remembering? Because of the completeness of the change. In twenty years the visible aspect of things had been absolutely transformed, not overlaid, as here in Europe, where the structure of the past could still be discerned beneath the surface of novelty, century upon century, on the foundations of a thousand years. Two thousand, in Rome . . . Not in America. That which had been was not. Mysteriously, those things which had belonged together ceased together. Scroll-work verandas, lace curtains, bicycles, willow plumes, composed into a background, clear and remote, for

Harriet. Whether or not it was because women had meant so much to him, it was in the figure of a girl that he discerned the keynote of that style, that genre. Just the gesture of picking up her skirt at a muddy crossing, the tilt of her chin, implied all the rest. It conjured up the street: overhead wires strung above the traffic, drawing thin lines along the four-storey greystone fronts of the business blocks, spinning out like a web past the smug avenues of bow-windowed mansions, toward the edge of town, where vacant lots spaced the small wooden houses, with unmown front yards, and pickets missing from the fences, and children loitering through sagging gates. . . . Though he hadn't been back for twenty years, he knew as certainly as by visual evidence that no trace of this period remained. Even if a few of the actual houses had been spared, they would be effaced by what had happened around them.

Queer that the memory of his home town should tie up with Harriet. She had never been there. They met and were married in Pittsburgh. Harriet Gwynn, a Welsh name; so many of the coal-miners had come over from Wales. She got her musical aptitude with her Welsh blood, and her first training with the Bach choir at Bethlehem. . . . Pittsburgh was all the small towns grown bigger, identical if one allowed for the enlarged scale. Even New York was, then. It wasn't now. It was like nothing that had ever been in the world before. . . .

Beyond the hill, Marta sat upon a mossy root pro-

jecting from the bank of a ravine that was also a birch-grove. She occupied herself by observing a family party of tourists filing through the woods on the next hill. They were nicely graded in stair-step sizes, father, mother and five offspring, uniformly well-fed and very solemn. She decided they were not Belgians. The father's proud stomach and cropped square blond cranium seemed Teutonic. Would Germans come to Belgium for a holiday? It seemed unlikely. Yet there were Germans in Paris. They could be Swiss. Of course, the Swiss Family Robinson. Searching for turtle eggs and cocoanuts. . . . She smoked another cigarette. Half an hour would be a reasonable, unnoticeable length of time. Then in London she had to look up somebody, she forgot who, but any excuse would serve for an afternoon and dinner, leaving Russ to Pauline. Filled with benevolent intentions, she sauntered back, making a circuit. As she approached slowly, two or three words of Pauline's became audible, gave Marta the drift of their conversation. She joined in: "That was Alexander the Great's idea."

"How do you mean, Alexander the Great?" Pauline took her up, rather coldly. "If he ever had an idea, which I doubt."

"He had one," said Marta. "He was loafing in the sacred grove of his native town with the local philosophers; and he gave them a brief outline of his plan to unite Greece, subdue Persia, loot India, and march on Rome like Mussolini. Oh, yeah, they said, and then

what? Then, Alexander said, he'd come home and repose in the shade for a nice long chat with his pet philosophers. And they said, isn't that what you're doing now? Why exert yourself so much to get back where you started?"

Nevertheless, Marta thought, Alexander went. . . . And Pauline and Russ, under the oaks of the Ardennes, must circle the globe to meet again under a pear-tree by the Pacific. It seemed both inevitable and worth while . . . "Did he do it?" Pauline asked absently. Marta said: "Yes." Russ gave her a sidelong glance. . . . Alexander never came back. But he might have, Marta insisted to herself. . . . "There is a grass-road over the hill," she said, "a pretty walk; I wonder where it goes. I followed it for about half a mile."

"Why didn't you keep on?" said Pauline. And she meant it.

Don't, *don't*, Marta thought sharply . . .

When she was startled, Marta reverted to the habit of her childhood, of all young wild creatures. They do not flutter nor make a sound; they become still . . . *My daughter hath a devil* . . . She had a little jack-in-the-box devil. It sprang out when anyone "jumped" her; it would rush every barrier. Over, under, around or through, whatever was forbidden. It wanted to know. Only if she caught it quick, in that instinctive pause, she was safe. . . . Once is enough, she thought, to put your life on the toss of a penny. A dollar, to be exact. That happened to be the only coin Keith

had in his pocket. Did I do that? she echoed Russ silently. She had never told a soul of that bet. It was worse than wicked. Light-minded. It would not send you to hell, but to limbo.

She sat down tranquilly. "Where is your farm?" she asked Russ. "Near New York?" Quite near, he said; about two hours upstate. So he could have his friends visit him, herself, and Alma, the old crowd. . . . "Like Genji?" she suggested slyly. She suspected the truth, that in his mind he had both his wife and Nonie—and heaven knows whom else—down in the guestbook. "I'd be the Lady From the Village of Falling Flowers; you remember she wasn't important, you can't even make out how she got into the story, she was merely among those present. Listen, Pauline, why can't you get leave next Easter and visit me, and we'll both visit Russ?"

"That's a date," said Russ.

"Oh, maybe I could," Pauline glowed again. Safe now, Marta thought.

Falling flowers . . . The image of happiness was to her a bowl of roses set on a table of polished wood. She did not know if it was an actual memory or a symbolic fancy. Two or three petals had fallen; they were white, crisp, unfaded. Another detached itself and floated down, an accomplished perfection, and in its noiseless motion the only measure of time. What we want, she thought, is to fix forever that moment of completion; we have created the arts to circumvent

change. That's what Russ's farm means to him, a repository for what he values out of the past. Even though change is a necessity of the spirit—no matter, the truth is made up of contradictions. . . . And this, she thought, is the moment. Today . . . You couldn't have anything more. . . .

CHAPTER XV

IT lasted out the afternoon, and through the return journey. They went direct, a much shorter distance; twilight overtook them. A disk of thin silver became visible in the moth-colored sky . . . A silver dollar spun in the air. . . . A white rose petal floating down. . . . *And the moon is wilder every minute: Oh, Solomon, let us try again!* She had spoken aloud. Russ turned to her. "What did you say?" "Nothing," she answered inconsequently; "it was Yeats." Russ wouldn't have read it. (But he had heard) . . . *Time being one with chance at last* . . . It never is, though. With Ernest added to the odds. . . .

Because of Ernest, they would dine at the Grande Laboureur, instead of the apartment. "Does Ernest appear at every meal?" Marta asked. "Absolutely," Russ replied, taking a morose satisfaction in the completeness of his affliction. "Unless there's a club dinner. He started making engagements for me. I told him he could break them again; that I had to have my evenings clear. So he said he wouldn't invite guests for dinner more than two or three times a week. Berthé

hates him. She carefully sorted out his laundry and handed him the bill." They meditated on Ernest, with a tinge of emotion approaching respect.

Russ dismissed Albert with thanks for choosing the interesting sideroads, off the tourist track; much the best way to see the country. . . Russ *is* sweet, Marta thought. And he must have had a good time. Assuring Albert that it was a brilliant idea to get lost!

They secured a corner table. "What have you got?" Pauline scrutinized the dab of green selected by Marta from the vast tray of hors d'œuvres. Jellied eel with fennel sauce, Marta said. "Fennel sauce?—how do you know?" Marta admitted meekly: "I'm just guessing." Pauline couldn't bear it. Probably it *was* fennel sauce! Though Pauline had never heard of such a thing. At Fontainebleau Marta had corrected the guide on a point of history. What chance . . . Pauline exclaimed, in despair: "When does our boat sail tomorrow?" Seven, post meridian. "I shall have to spend the whole day buying presents!" Marta suggested that she could get a present for Jimmy in London. If it were only Jimmy, Pauline rejoined darkly. The whole family. . . . How many? Marta enquired.

Pauline began counting on her fingers. Her sisters, Florrie and Myrtle and Stella, her brother Jim, three aunts, seven cousins, five nephews and nieces, and half a dozen friends, especially Vi Charles. Her short upper lip lifted; oh, most especially Vi, whoever else she omitted . . . These last cogitations she kept to her-

self, while piling up numbers in wilful exaggeration. But you couldn't exaggerate the essential numerousness of a family . . .

Marta chimed with these conclusions. "A mere handful. I have thousands of relatives. How about you, Russ?"

Not so many, Russ replied vaguely; it made no difference. Marta agreed. It was The Family, belonging to it, that signified. You did, irrevocably, belong to it. Mysteriously, fatally, you were bound to people with whom you had no other tie, no common tastes or sympathies. There was almost a conviction of original sin in such complicity. Why? . . .

Russ added that he had one brother and one sister, now widowed. "She married a preacher," he said, with apparent irrelevance. He had in mind that the family name was said to be of French derivation—another reason why he had learned French—and there was an undocumented tradition of kinship with the founder of Girard College, who stipulated that no cleric might ever pass its gates! His father used this as a pretext to evade churchgoing. His mother had an angry sort of piety, strictly literal. Golden streets, heavenly mansions . . . With bow windows and Brussels carpets? his father asked. His mother said such blasphemy was enough to bring a judgment on them. And before the innocent children. . . . Russ "took after" his father in features; and his mother used to whip him, innocent or not. For disobedience: loitering after school, for-

getting the chores. Excuses aggravated the fault; that was "answering back." As he grew older, the whippings did not hurt severely; but when he wouldn't cry, she ended in tears; and that was worse. I've given up my life to my children, she said. What rooted injury, what deep resentment, made her take such pains to cross the pleasure of others? You couldn't know much about your parents; in a way you didn't want to. His mother was born in Kansas, of Abolitionist, temperance stock. But he was amazed, bewildered, when, after he was grown, he learned that his father and mother had made a runaway match. She had come "East," to Ohio, to attend a sectarian seminary; she graduated out of a window to a midnight marriage. . . Dear knows, there wasn't any particular need, his indiscreet Aunt Lorena explained. But she married your father to reform him. She was studying to be a missionary to the heathen Chinese. They've been spared a good deal . . . And he was in Shanghai when his mother died in a small town in Illinois. The cable came in the middle of the morning. He read it repeatedly as if it were a code to which he had lost the key. Then he put it in his pocket and went on verifying a trial balance. At four o'clock his second assistant, a young Chinese who had learned his excellent English in a mission school and went to Yale on the Boxer indemnities, reminded him that it was mail-day; had Russ anything else for the bag? Russ said, wait, and began to write a letter: Dear mother—. Automatically, as he had writ-

ten her for twenty years. Twice a week, until he came to China; then by every boat. One page, according to a formula designed to avoid commitment or offence. . . . He couldn't write interesting letters to anyone, couldn't put anything in a letter. Something happened, shut down on him, when he confronted the blank paper. . . . He crumpled the page, said: Never mind. It was over. He had been tired for some time, but then he really felt it. . . . His mother was buried beside his father, after thirty years. He looked like his father, except that his eyes were blue—green, Marta said—like his mother's. . . . The Chinese, he thought, put up an ancestral tablet, and make offerings. They know what they have to do . . .

“My grandfather Lindsay,” said Pauline, “was a Scotch atheist—can you imagine? But he used to keep the Sabbath by wearing his kilts.” She stopped on the verge of telling that her mother took exception to the sporrán, and insisted that grandfather Lindsay wear it on the side! She pondered again why she had not loved her mother. Her mother's favorite phrase was, “I always say,” and it was true. You knew in advance what she would say, because she always said it. There was a flat positiveness about her which overrode rejoinder. Her highest praise was: They don't put on airs, they're just as common as you or me. Pauline hated the word; why should anyone wish to be common? She hated being poor, the drabness, the dead level. . . . Her father used to sit a trifle sideways at

table, looking out of the window, while her mother talked. Then he would rise quietly, reach for his hat, and go out. He had a light step, for all the heavy work he had done.

“There was no religion in our family, but some of them could see ghosts,” Marta contributed . . . We’re all talking like Mr. F.’s Aunt, she thought cheerfully. As between themselves, it was of no consequence what they said; the words were counters expressing a value quite other than their intrinsic content. But why did they seize upon such detached trifles when they approached that tremendous subject? Partly because one item had no more importance than another out of the aggregate; and even if you produced every fact in your possession, they would not make a whole, would not carry the emotional and private weight under which one’s spirit fainted. . . . Literally, her kindred within the second degree of consanguinity must number nearly two hundred. *Remember the pit whence ye were digged and the rock whence ye were hewn.* Perhaps the simple arithmetic of it brought home how inescapably one was involved in a universal doom. . . . But no, it was more than that, more definite and personal. . . . A pain multiplied, blunted with use into a permanent ache. So one chose to remember only jackdaw gleanings, which conveyed nothing except—except unrelatedness. True that grandmother Cooke did see ghosts, or believed she did, and could charm beasts, bridle a savage stallion the men dared not approach. Grand-

mother Fletcher was illiterate, an Irish peasant girl. Grandfather Fletcher used to recite Homer, an English version, of course, it must have been either Pope or Chapman, while he followed the plough. . . . *And saw, in the farmer's wagons, the chariots hurled on Troy* . . . Uncle John was a drummer boy in the Civil War; Uncle Richard had three wives, and rested under a negative suspicion of bigamy; Aunt Sarah was no less than five times married, in a dubious succession of divorces; Uncle Daniel at fifty went to the Klondike and was not heard from again; Aunt Anne died desperately seeking to evade the curse of Eve and her husband thereupon hanged himself in the barn; Aunt Nettie possessed the exotic accomplishment of making flowers of hair; Aunt Martha left home at sixteen, went to Denver in the early days, when it was a boom town . . . To this most legendary aunt, who died of cholera in Mexico City before her namesake was born, Marta owed a vague assurance that had sustained her through childhood. Girls could, they *could* escape, and she would. Like Aunt Martha, who had worn silver heels to her tiny slippers, and had made her own money by running a store (a Fancy Bazaar it was called), and a hotel . . . She would and she did, at seventeen . . .

But what were all these people to her, who had never seen them? They were a roving, marrying, rather shiftless breed, poor and indifferent honest. Typical, perhaps, at their level. None, unless Aunt Martha, had

risen above it; none had gone to jail or the poorhouse. They didn't seem to try to do or be anything, except to go on from day to day. Their drift and dispersal was typical. That, she thought, was the American way, in their time, in ours. Suddenly the family as a social unit dissolved. Its economic function ceased as soon as the children were grown to maturity. The individual could exist as such, moving about in safety, picking up a living anywhere. There was nothing to stop them, except inertia. But the direction was pure chance. As against the class and clan tradition of Europe, it was anarchy. Actually an equally natural law operated, a centrifugal instinct, such as bursts a seed-pod violently that the seed may scatter. The result was an enormous release of energy, a flowering of talent; and also that secret grief, that sense of guilt, as of an undischarged obligation, springing from the inherited moral sentiment of family solidarity, with no fixed duties to acquit it. . . . Did I ask to be born? the children protested, with genuine anguish. Well, thought Marta fairly, maybe you did; who knows? . . .

How much worse then to have that deep source muddied and poisoned . . . She couldn't think of her father without terror. Not physical fear, for unlike the others she had never been afraid of him, but "the dark night of the soul," described by mystics who have lost the presence of God. Her confidence in the goodness of the universe had been destroyed. For her mother was good, was innocent and gentle; and everything

was against her. I ought to have—but what should I have done? Marta asked herself, for the ten thousandth time. She had no right to drag her mother away, or even persuade her away, from the rest of the family . . . Marta didn't understand them; how could one not *try*? . . . Generations of women had endured the intolerable, for the sake of their children. They were wrong, Marta thought, with cold conviction. Better drown them in the rain-barrel. Better for the children. A woman had that right. Just as a man had a right to die fighting rather than be a slave. A duty, indeed. . . .

But you couldn't help people, you could only hurt them, it seemed. And when you went away yourself, there was that weight pulling at you forever. . . . Her father was in himself the whole inscrutable problem of morality and conduct. He had not broken any of the commandments; he had merely blighted the happiness of ten souls, himself included, by an incessant tyranny, in ways too petty to describe, a grudging, futile egotism. He did not even take liquor . . . While Russ had been drunk, and waked in the wrong bed, and probably, like Jurgen's unregenerate parent, worshipped a stone image in Porutsa! And was decent, kind, and sensitive . . . And he ducked his head—she hadn't missed the gesture—when he was reminded of *his* family . . . Marta recalled that her mother had been fond of Mrs. Hamilton. Probably Marta owed something to Mrs. Hamilton, too . . .

"Was it your grandfather Lindsay who took morphine?" Marta asked Pauline politely. "No," said Pauline, "that was grandfather Norcutt. It did wonders for him; he lived to eighty-nine. His mind wandered; but why not? I think I shall try it myself. You haven't a shot about you, by luck?" Russ said he was sorry, he had left his in his other suit.

Marta refilled Pauline's glass. She perceived it wasn't altogether a joke. The waiter offered the menu. Dessert? Pauline pushed back her chair. Her throat contracted; she was dizzy. It would pass, but she didn't want to break down here, lay her head on her arms and give up. Or on Russ's shoulder. . . . If she could do that . . . For two nights, or was it three, she had not slept except by snatches, and sleep is the last refuge. Tomorrow they were going away. Always, everything came to an end; and then there was nothing. She must get to her room quickly, take aspirin, a wet towel on her forehead, wear through one more night; usually it did not last more than four days at most. "I have got a headache," she said, with that gaiety in her voice which nothing could quench. "You won't mind if I run out on you? Finish your dinner."

No, Marta thought, anything but that. It will be very bad for her, leaving us here. They were standing, anxiously. "We'll all go, if you'd rather," Marta said. "But we can't let you go alone. We'd just sit here worrying." "Certainly not," said Russ, and took her hand. Warmth and comfort flowed back to her. "I've

changed my mind," she said. "I'll finish my own dinner." But they had no inclination to linger in the restaurant. It was too public for their mood; they were a little sad.

Marta proposed walking to the hotel; possibly it would benefit Pauline. The apartment, Russ mentioned, was nearer. Maybe Ernest would have gone to bed.

Marta went a pace ahead, sniffing at the green cool dark smell of the chestnut leaves. Now aren't you thankful you didn't go to Berlin? she asked Pauline. You'd have loathed it anyhow. It's the sort of place Ernest ought to live. "Then you go," said Pauline. "And take Ernest."

Sacred blue, said Marta, the jack-in-the-box answering for her, this is too much. (It was wholly comic now, the toy devil rose to the joke.) "In New York," Marta protested, "for years, the entire population of seven millions rose in masses to prevent me ever speaking to Russ. Alma stopped me going to breakfast with him. At the Waldorf. They wouldn't even allow me to elope to China with him, a simple thing like that. But I can be pushed just so far. And Ernest is the limit." She was petrified by the echo of her own words. Shut up! You've had too much . . . Oh, well! After last night, what's the use of saving the pieces? Give Russ a laugh, he's got it coming to him. She marched on ahead, her elbows akimbo. If he was there, she would cope with Ernest, and let it be a lesson to her.

The big room was lighted and empty, as they entered with the stealth of mice. "He *has* gone to bed," Russ whispered, glancing down the hall. They closed the door. Two doors ought to protect them. "Will you have some more champagne?" "Yes," said Marta firmly. It would keep her occupied. "And I'll read a good book." She picked one from the table. Russ recognized it by the cover. He brought the champagne, and deftly eased out the cork with his thumbs. You used to put the champagne corks in your pocket. Tip Kearney did . . .

"Caroline sampled that," he said. "She couldn't make out what the stories were about. What did Hills Like White Elephants mean? I told her she wouldn't like it if I told her. She insisted. Then she was insulted, and took Ernest home." "She would. I see why you keep it on the table," Marta said. "Oh, here's a New York Tribune, good as new, only twelve days old."

She hid behind it, in the wing chair. Across the room, Pauline and Russ were whispering and laughing on the sofa. They broke off presently to call to her: "Any news?" "Amalgamated Haywire 13¾; American Soup and Fish 792 ex dividend, partly extra, split four to one." "She's reading it upside down," said Russ. "No, but I can," Marta replied with dignity. "I can drink champagne upside down. You mind your own business. Steel rails are heavy, and large shipments of prime eggplant have arrived in the market. Coolidge

says Independence Day is the Fourth of July. Make mine the same." She retired again behind the outspread pages with a full glass, and considered how to manage a cigarette also. . . . Russ is looking at her knees, Pauline thought. She looks cute. Small women always do. . . . Marta read conscientiously an article on the Interstate Commerce Commission. The railroads aren't happy either, she thought. Nobody loves them. Russ and Pauline were kissing. With fervor. Marta did not require ocular evidence. "You *will* come to Seattle next spring?" Pauline was saying. "You promise?" "Positively," Russ answered. Marta thought, it's your move. She tucked the book under her arm, slid around the table toward the door, and shut it softly behind her.

The hall was dark, which was awkward. They always save on lights over here. If I crash in on Ernest by mistake, all will be lost. She had observed that the door of Russ's room stood open. Straight ahead. A crepuscular square indicated the window, and gave her bearings. She set the glass on the bureau carefully. The light is over the head of the bed. . . She stumbled over a low chair, and held her breath. This cord—holy angels, it's the bell-cord! Suppose Berthé comes running, or the fire department. . . . This must be the light. . . . It was.

The celestial cloud of mosquito net sprang into being. The coverlet was turned down chastely, and Russ's pajamas, of white silk, lay across the foot. . . . No, you

are not to be silly. But the mosquito net . . . She removed her jacket, stacked the pillows, and made herself comfortable, with the book. Through the mist of white, all the objects in the room became insubstantial as a vision. She was wistful, resigned, and rather noble, and she giggled at herself suddenly. But she hadn't spoiled the day . . . If Russ wants to kiss Pauline, that's their affair, not yours. . . . She began to read, and after a page, became sufficiently absorbed. She read through one story and began another, being a rapid reader.

"Brownie, why did you—" Russ appeared in the doorway. He stood in the middle of the room, considering her with that steady shadowed look, under his brows. "You're a lovely liar," he said, offering no exegesis. Marta sat up and he came forward and caught both of her hands, pulled her to her feet, holding the net curtain aside. He let go her hands. . . . Why, he hadn't known! And he, too, wanted to know. She could not go back on what she had given away, and she didn't mind. She shook her head. "It was true." Though he was so near, so intent, he did not touch her again. She was glad he didn't. No fair. Call it a day . . . "Gotta go home," she said, and returned to find Pauline waiting, flushed and faintly embarrassed.

There was a cab-rank at the corner; and Russ said goodnight after putting them in a cab; they forbade him to escort them to their hotel.

CHAPTER XVI

Who was it called sleep the little death, Marta wondered; it should have been parting . . . Since this was their last day, Russ took time off for lunch. They sat near the window, in a booth with low partitions. Several men nodded to Russ as they passed by to further tables, men from the office, he said, offering them no encouragement, much less an invitation, to stop. His obstinate intention of keeping his two women to himself was flattering. Marta thought, he couldn't give me away today with coupons. No takers. She propped her chin on her palms, to support her heavy head. A distant glance at the mirror had horrified her. As a final touch of irony, she had been the one to spend a wakeful night. For no reason, except that she was not sleepy. If it had been practicable to get outdoors, out of the town, and wander through the fields till morning, she would have been less exhausted. She wanted to lose herself in the dark, to be part of the night, listening to the soft sounds of harmless creatures in the hedges, feeling the coolness of the dew on her hair, till dawn and sleep overtook her. In the half hour

when the world is composed of grey light, not yet resolved into its daily substance, peace would come, and her mind cease ranging abroad on its Luciferian errand. For it was her mind that demanded all satisfactions, insisted on its pound of flesh from next the heart, would have her "taste any drink once." It was during such hours, when cut off from action, that she knew what had more than once compelled her to pull down the pillars of her life, for if there had been anything to do, she must have done it. . . . When she was worn to a rag, it stopped. Everything about her had stopped.

Russ was the better for his holiday; Pauline had visibly recovered. She had managed to sleep till six. She always woke at six, she said, if not earlier, for spiritual examination. Four was best, but between six and eight she could touch upon the main points, the important boners. "If I had sold my house when property was high, if I hadn't bought TNT at 75, and so on," she ticked them off on her fingers airily. "And if David ever finds out about the TNT after having warned me. . . ." No need to mention, Keith, George, the children . . .

"I stayed awake," Marta said, "inventing a patent noodle-strainer, to be attached to the waistcoat or shirt-front. I'll bet Ernest's repose was broken, while I was wandering around falling over the furniture. Or hadn't he come in yet?"

"Oh, yes, he was in. This morning, he said that if he had expected us, he would have waited up."

"O God, O Montreal! He didn't, honestly, say that?" Be still, sad heart, and cease repining, Marta commanded herself. You can't win. In the beginning was Ernest. . . . "There's a man coming over to speak to you, Russ," she noticed.

But, she thought, it seems to be me he is—Facing the window, she could not see very well, except the blank glitter of eyeglasses—and who of her acquaintance would be lunching in Antwerp?

"My God," she exclaimed, "it's Ernest!"

Russ and Pauline regarded her with alarm as she wilted against the wall, open-eyed and open-mouthed, with Ernest bowing across the table, reaching for her limp paw, which she yielded automatically. Their confusion was dissembled by the usual inanities of salutation . . . Ernest unconsciously verified Russ; he was sorry he had turned in early last night.

"We were afraid we might disturb you," said Pauline, with sweetly poisonous candor. "Marta did almost go in and wake you."

"I wish she had," Ernest assured her.

"Didn't I?" said Marta. "Then who was it? I got into somebody's room." She felt like a dying fish. Ernest was even more sorry they were sailing at seven. He hoped to see them again; wasn't Brownie returning to Paris later? Russ had said so. . . . Marta thought, then Russ wasn't merely being polite, he meant it. He had asked her if she wouldn't come back from England after Pauline's departure. . . . He cer-

tainly did not mean to ask Ernest to lunch; and presently Ernest removed himself. Marta pressed her hand to her side.

"He called me Brownie," she muttered. "He believed it was a cry of joy when I shouted his name! Where did he spring from? He didn't come through the door, he was here ahead of us. He couldn't—he couldn't have been in the next booth, and heard us?"

"No, he couldn't," Pauline glanced over her shoulder apprehensively. "Wasn't it terrible? After we had strewed him in fragments along every back road in Belgium."

"Oh, worse than that," Marta said. They knew what she meant. They should never, never have seen Ernest again. They hadn't left him a rag to cover himself. "I nearly perished," Marta said. "I'd sooner have had a sock on the jaw. Like Russ handed me when I wanted to snoop around the apartment."

"But you said you didn't want to," Russ took her up.

"What do you mean I said I didn't want to?" Marta echoed blankly.

"You said: 'Not that I want to,'" Russ repeated. "And I put out my arm to stop you, because I didn't want you to if you didn't want to."

"This," said Marta, "must be a rehearsal by Moran and Mack. I asked Pauline if she wanted to come along, and said: 'Not that I want you.'" He hadn't known! Well, he knows now! "I'm sure you wouldn't

strike a woman except in self-defence," she conceded.

"I thought—" said Russ, and let it go at that. She couldn't tell what he thought.

He expected to join them in London on Thursday or Friday night. They had that to anticipate. The report should be finished by then. Before his recent promotion, he could have managed a week off, and would have. When he was twenty, and getting fifty dollars a month, sending fifteen dollars of it home to his mother, he supposed that if you reached the top you could do as you pleased. You could, in fact, do anything but . . . He couldn't even remove Ernest from his spare bedroom, have his apartment to himself, or choose his own guests. . . . And on fifty dollars a month, what could you do? His whole life, everybody's he supposed, had been conditioned by money. You certainly didn't get twenty thousand a year for nothing. People will hardly speak of money because it means so much; and when they do, they daren't tell the truth. Money is the mathematical formula of both physical power and emotional relations. Like the technical problems worked out in his report. He got a severe pleasure from the practical difficulties, given the authority to handle them his own way. But that was the least of it. On paper, it came out in figures; there were men behind the figures; and what each man would do singly was quite another matter from what you could get them to do by playing them with and against each other . . . And beyond that, the job had an ulti-

mate importance to him. It wouldn't only justify him with Goodwin, it would give him a certainty about himself. He'd have that, if it were the last . . .

Goodwin needed the report a few days before the end of the month to give him time to go over it. "There's a conference on the first, on the international debt settlements," Russ said aloud.

"What has your report to do with—" Marta began, and broke off. After a cogent pause she said: "They used to do it with three shells and a pea, didn't they?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Russ replied, with appreciative good humor.

"No, it's not a nice way to say it," Marta agreed. "Stabilization is more refined. Or the Jones Plan. Anyhow, what is the taxpayer for?"

Pauline was not paying strict attention; she enquired: "What are you talking about?"

"I don't know," Marta decided.

"Then eat your damn bun and keep quiet," said Pauline.

"You've got the idea," Marta agreed.

Russ hadn't expected Marta to catch him out; but she usually did when you didn't expect it, he thought. He was undisturbed . . . Brownie and Alma were the silent ones, not literally, but they didn't tell. They must have talked to each other; of course they did, since it was Alma prevented Brownie keeping her one appointment with him. (Why?) Just as he remembered that untasted breakfast, so he had known how

close Brownie and Alma were because he had once seen them saying nothing at all. He was there when Brownie sidled into Alma's apartment and found a chair for herself while Alma went on mixing a cocktail. He had always wondered about Alma, too; probably Brownie was the only person who knew . . .

They had lapsed into silence; they didn't want to dwell on the imminence of seven o'clock. "My boat sails on the twenty-second," Pauline exclaimed suddenly, tragically. If Russ didn't come over this weekend there would be no other for her. "I wish you had taken a later reservation," Marta said. Impossible, Pauline replied; she had to be home when Jimmy's school term began; and besides, the Schaefer's had made the arrangement for her to sail on the same boat. "After the lies I've told them, dodging them over here," she said, "Mrs. Schaefer would be furious. She never forgives people who won't let her be kind to them! And I'd rather not lose my job for awhile." Marta did not grasp the connection. Pauline's job was semi-political, in the office of the state film censor. "It's one of those things," Pauline sparkled wanly. "Herman Schaefer owns several theatres, and has some influence; but one time when his side was out, George did him a good turn in a local row. Saved his launch from being confiscated. The sheriff seized it at the dock, with a load of booze—the launch, not the sheriff. George's partner was the son-in-law of the state prosecuting attorney, so Schaefer came to him. George was

glad to oblige, because Schaefer would place the insurance on his theatres through him. Neither of them suspected that it was J. K. Hayden who really fixed it; I went to J. K. myself. George would have hit the ceiling. J. K. thought it was a great joke, George being jealous of him. But then when I needed it, Schaefer used his pull for me; and so did his wife. She belongs to a Good Government League, and the Women Voters, all the women's clubs. An uplifter. She believes her husband was framed; he told her it was the engineer of the launch had smuggled the liquor aboard. Probably he believes it himself by now. So you see . . ."

"How do you censor movies?" Marta asked. "What part of a movie is more horrible than any other part?" "I don't," said Pauline. "I'm the office manager. But sometimes I sit in when one of the regular censors is on vacation. You do it with a stop-watch. Any—er—anything that lasts longer than five seconds is immoral. And everybody has got to be married. I hope," she said radiantly, "that Mrs. Schaefer is seasick clear across the Atlantic. If she isn't I shall be."

Pauline got them through lunch. Her tact was worthy of much greater scope than her circumstances afforded. David must be a fathead, Marta thought. Men are, about women. They let nearly all the beauty and wit go to waste, behind department store counters, in kitchens . . .

The afternoon was dimly destroyed by packing, and Russ came with the car at six. He went aboard

with them on a pass and they leaned on the rail watching later arrivals embark, for distraction. A drunken man engaged the second purser at the gangplank in an argument that verged on a quarrel, in loud incoherent Dutch or Flemish; they couldn't fathom what it was about. Two or three friends took sides, or attempted to pacify him. People pushed by, with growls of annoyance. Pauline whispered suddenly: "It's a trick; one of them slipped his ticket back over the rail to another." . . . A bugle sounded, all ashore. They did not say goodbye.

On the quay, Russ turned twice, and waved his hand, the last time as he stood framed in the darkening entrance to the baggage shed. He went to the left, and was obscured by a truck; his feet remained visible, by the clearance of the wheels. He walked slowly. An archway afforded them another momentary view, with the street beyond. He had his hands in his pockets and his soft hat pulled down a trifle. He was gone.

Pauline and Marta moved to a bench on deck and sat down. Passengers continued to press forward, in the wake of burdened stewards. The evening was overcast, with a distant threat of rain. The Scheldt flowed smooth as cool lead under a misty sky. The spire of the cathedral rose lonely in the distance.

It's only till Thursday, Marta thought. But there must be a last time, and once you've learned that. . . . Her farewell to Chris had been spoken on the street,

a chance encounter. Chris was with another man. They stopped a moment, exchanged light common-places; they laughed. She remembered the parasol she was carrying, green pongee with a tassel on the handle; she tipped it forward precisely in time, and went on with tears sliding down her lashes . . .

Moved by an associative impulse, she said to Pauline: "I wonder if I'd recognize Keith if I met him again. I think so, if he were walking or dancing; did you ever notice that he walked like an Indian?"

"I'd recognize the sound of his step," said Pauline. "I ought to—the hours I spent listening for it on the porch, ready to spring to the door. Fool!"

"When she heard we were separated," said Marta, "his mother wrote me to read Isaiah four eleven forty-four; I mean, I lost the letter and forgot the number of the text; and what on earth do you suppose Isaiah prophesied about Keith?" They giggled in spite of themselves. A light breeze chilled them through their thin crepe dresses, and drove them below.

So they did not see Russ, as they might have, once more.

CHAPTER XVII

“You know, when you ran out on us last night—” Pauline hesitated, baffled by the difficulty of explaining that there was nothing to explain. “We thought you’d be back in a minute, and we waited, and then Russ went to look for you.” They had drawn apart; the play was over . . .

“It didn’t matter,” said Marta. “I was reading.” As she used to . . . For eighteen years she had wished to make a similar explanation to Pauline. If Pauline would believe her now. . . . “I must learn to yodel,” she remarked, and sprang into the upper berth while it was inclined conveniently. It receded again, and she balanced on the edge, apologizing to Pauline: “Was that your face I stepped on?”

By the rolling motion, they guessed the ship was out of the river and breasting the Channel. They were unaffected, being good sailors by predestination. They had never seen salt water until they were grown. Admiral Nelson succumbed to seasickness until his last voyage; what would a vocational director make of that? Marta reflected ironically on the vain and inex-

tinguishable hope of mankind, that ultimately their ephemeral affairs may be regulated by the light of reason. An orderly procession from the cradle to the grave. . . . Utopias chilled her to the marrow. Even if they were workable—but in fact they would be paradises for stuffed shirts, whose sole ability consists in wedging themselves into official positions. Marta yanked furiously at the tucked-in blanket of the berth, and wondered why she chose such inapposite moments for intellectual speculation. There was a deduction, or a premise, she wasn't sure which, to the idea she had been pursuing; she had almost got it. Yes . . . It is absurd to expect man to define his objective, according to his capacities, and govern himself accordingly. How should our artless first ancestor have known that he desired to become an astronomer, a bootlegger, an architect or an aviator? There were no such animals; it was necessary to invent them. There was only an unappeasable passion for the unknown. . . . "I shall stay in bed for days and days when we get to London," she said, giving over her philosophical excursus. "Ernest came near being the death of me. I'm hungry, too; wasn't the dinner vile? No mistaking an English boat." "I hate the English," Pauline responded, sorting over a sheaf of letters forwarded from Paris. "How can I write to a man who calls me Dear Lady?"

"David?" Marta revived inquisitively.

"No," said Pauline. "David sticks to the yours received and contents noted style."

"Manly and straightforward," said Marta. "You know what he means. Dull without you, love. Does he sign his full name?"

Pauline exhibited signs of embarrassment. "Oh, you know, David isn't his real name; it's a kind of joke."

"For heaven's sake," Marta hung over the side of the berth and fixed Pauline with an accusing glance, vertically, like the eye of God. "You can't," she said, "you *can't* have been stringing that man along for twenty years!"

Pauline attempted a futile evasion. "But you don't know who he is."

"Sure I do," Marta affirmed. "Why I didn't spot him sooner—it's Maynard Crockett!" David—Davy Crockett. Pauline's guilt was manifest. "Great snakes," Marta summed up. "I will say you're both persistent. You win the cuckoo clock. All this time he's been trying to ruin you, and you—" "He isn't trying to ruin me," Pauline protested, with a creditable amount of dignity. "He used to," Marta said. "And you spitting sparks—" Marta checked herself for inaccuracy; Pauline's attitude had been averse disdain, the cold shoulder and scornful lip. But did she despise him? or was the affront deepened by an unwilling liking? It's hard to draw the line between insult and compliment, Marta thought. Is it playing safe that makes the difference? I respected Wint Shelby because he never hedged. Didn't even ask what I did

with his letters. So I burned them. And Floyd Jernegan used to hand me unsealed notes for Ida.

"You said David stalked along the street like a pair of scissors," Pauline recalled obscurely. "I must have been giving you moral support," Marta conjectured. "I'd forgotten—I suppose I did see him occasionally. Wasn't he one of Mrs. Lundy's occasionals? The fast crowd. Silvertown boiled with scandal; it's comical how the kids now think they're wild. But I never heard much about Crockett except from you. Wint Shelby said he was a singed cat. How on earth did you manage, with George?"

"Honestly, I didn't," Pauline still defended herself, though her upper lip lifted mirthfully. "There was nothing; where would we . . . At George's funeral—it was perfectly frightful, after what I'd been through, with the family assembled, and his lodge as pall-bearers, and a sermon about our departed brother, and I was suffocating with the smell of dye on my crape veil and of the blanket of lilies—*lilies*—and everyone saying how wonderfully I was bearing up—oh, you can't imagine—but the old lady next door, that George loathed because he said she sat at her bedroom window with opera glasses, well, she invited herself over and told me I must live for my children and trust in the Lord, and my husband would meet me in Heaven. When my only hope is that I may never meet George again, here or hereafter. I'm sure he feels the same. I couldn't face him, with him knowing the low-down

on me. For days and days after the funeral, I felt as if he did know; he seemed to be all over the house. In a funny way, really funny, as if it struck him so. And I know exactly what he'd say: 'I always suspected there was something between you and that cagey bastard Crockett!'

"Did he suspect?" Marta enquired. "Not really; there was nothing to suspect," Pauline repeated. "Once in a long while David phoned to ask how I was. Or if we met by accident. But George was jealous of everybody. With the most ridiculous notions—no woman who smoked a cigarette was straight. Though before we were married, he was one of the wildest . . ."

"Why did he object to you writing to me?" Marta asked. "Wasn't I straight?" "He didn't object to *you*. It was on account of—oh, he thought I might hear from Keith again. Through you. He didn't say so; unless he was very drunk he never mentioned Keith. That's how I knew. He'd bring up J. K. Hayden, because he knew that was nonsense. I got so I paid no attention. I don't know why men make such a fuss. What does it matter?" She made her airy gesture, brushing her finger-tips together, as if dispersing a trace of dust.

And that is the truth, thought Marta, with astonishment. What does it matter? . . . It's hard to believe what we *know* to be true. The realization is like bumping into a solid object. As if we had delusions of godhead . . . When they are past, the heartbreaks

and triumphs and defeats become equally inconsequential. Whatever hurt too much we refuse to think on: cut our losses. There is no remedy but oblivion. What was just bearable is turned to comedy by distance and detachment. The rest is a pathetic treasure such as girls hide away in bonbon boxes: bits of ribbon, fans and favors and snapshots. A silly tune, a phrase of endearment, a day like yesterday. . . . Even if our whole lives had been different, the sum would be unaltered. Supposing Pauline had married Keith . . . Marta said abruptly: "I always wanted to tell you, Pauline, I never gave Keith any reason to . . . I never thought of him, no more than of Joe Warner. We were all used to one another." On terms of familiar indifference. She would have said Keith couldn't be attracted to her: not his type. To her Keith and Joe were on the same footing; they had the run of the house, by Pauline's leave. Her total knowledge of Joe Warner comprised only two items; he was a curly-headed boy who played the piano. And Keith was a boy who called on Pauline. They didn't concern her, nor disturb her. . . . One evening a fuse blew out; Keith offered to fix it. By the light of a candle, he succeeded in disconnecting the telephone. On another occasion the adjustable gadget of the Chesterfield jammed or broke; Keith and Joe spent several hours lying on the floor, with screwdrivers and wrenches, removing quantities of bolts and assorted hardware they couldn't put back again . . . "That Saturday you

were away, Keith came to take you motoring—”

“He knew I’d be away,” said Pauline.

Marta experienced that peculiar arrested sensation, a cessation of time, which came to her with the not infrequent revelation of her own density. She was, indubitably, stupid beyond Pauline’s comprehension. . . . Of course, he must have . . .

“But I didn’t,” Marta said. How should she?

For Marta, Keith existed only at one remove, as it were in Pauline’s mind. Thousands of times Pauline asked, shall I marry him? Shall I give up seeing him? There was no need to answer; she wouldn’t have heard. Marta supposed it happened to everyone; the Greeks regarded love as a madness sent by the gods. When it was over one was left empty as a dry cicada shell clinging to a clover stem. Or to a book. . . . Pauline decided to marry Keith. Then she changed her mind. One could not say she broke the engagement; the term was too definite and limited for their relation, which was anything Pauline chose to make it. Except one thing—she wished the choice to be his. She must have been the only person in the world who possessed any influence over him; but it was of a singular kind, as if she were wind or weather. He was not amenable to the ordinary modes of pressure or persuasion. Perhaps not quite human. Even beyond the fact that he had been spoiled by a widowed mother with money, and by other women . . . It may be that a perfect physical endowment is amoral. As if Keith existed in

a continuous succession of those moments which come to most of us but rarely, lying in the sun, breasting the glassy green curve of a breaking wave, galloping over turf: when the intellectual faculty diffuses into pure being. Morality and the sense of responsibility are intellectual. Keith was as instinctive and indolent as a healthy animal. Not vicious, for his tastes were natural; nor cruel, on the contrary, he avoided painful encounters. It is extremely perplexing that he obeyed the injunction to take no thought for the morrow; that he was like an angel, which is created for pleasure. He was a bad lot.

Marta had no insight into his character then, and pretended to none. He was not her affair. She had an impression that he wasn't good enough for Pauline. He would never make money. An odd commentary on virtue. And yet money is a measure of worth, of devotion even, since we must exchange for it time and energy, the stuff of life. Blood-money—there is no other kind. . . . Still, Keith would probably inherit a small competence; and in any event, there was no help for Pauline. Marta was unable to help herself. She had no counsel. Pauline might manage best simply by continuing to see Keith until she tired of him, wore out her illusion. What destroyed one was the desert space of separation . . . The situation was unaltered by Pauline's change of mind; Keith called as usual.

Marta was reading when Keith came in and asked for Pauline. Apparently at a loose end, he hesitated

before transferring the invitation to Marta. She qualified her acceptance with a precautionary lie: she must be back before dinner. Let him off easy. She supposed he was constrained by courtesy to ask her. A refusal might wear the aspect of a snub. Courtesy between them was a barrier, not a means of approach. . . . She was not unwilling to go; she'd enjoy the ride, though under the necessity of "making conversation." She had never been alone with him before. . . .

Even yet, she was unable to determine whether or not the rest was accident. Certainly Keith wasn't responsible for the preposterous hats women used to wear, insecurely skewered to a top-knot by lethal pins. In the open car, Marta retained hers only by clutching it with both hands. . . . The radiator needed water. Or Keith said it did. Marta had heard the name of the roadhouse where they drew up. It was a weather-beaten wood-built country hotel, with no visible means of support. One of those left-over monuments of a small town that the railroad had taken away. Nice girls didn't go there. Keith's inflection, when he suggested she might go in and arrange her hat, was in key with what she had heard . . .

Beyond the lobby was a public reception room. Keith opened the door for her, and reversed the motion halfway, interposing his broad shoulders to screen her from the observation of anyone within. She had a glimpse of several people, and an impression that Keith had recognized them. The desk clerk's blank discretion con-

firmed it. Keith was no stranger. The clerk entertained a hypothesis that there might be a mirror upstairs; and seemed to dematerialize after conducting them to the landing and indicating a room number along the hall. . . . With her hair streaming, her hands full of combs and pins, and Keith leaning against the door-jamb, scrupulously not crossing the threshold, Marta took a malicious advantage of the ambiguous situation. Did she want anything? A cocktail? Keith grinned amicably. The suggestion was too suitable to resist. Why not, she said, the drinks are on you. You're bound over to your best behavior. . . . He fetched the tray up himself. They drank standing, as a stirrup-cup. Only Keith's eyes strayed, drawing hers, to a card tacked on the wall: Rooms must be vacated by eight a. m. He set down the glass and said the car ought to be ready. . . . As they passed the desk, Keith seemed to choke suddenly: *Huh!* Marta was tying her veil and missed the bewilderment of the clerk; weeks later, Keith told her . . . They weren't in the place twenty minutes.

Oh, Keith was a bad lot. And she was completely implicated. They hadn't exchanged a word that might not safely have been repeated to Pauline. . . . Marta was candid with herself even then; she wasn't a nice girl, and didn't want to be. It would have bored her. She used the conventions when they suited her, to serve her own purpose, twisted them deliberately against the original intention of classifying women. It was no-

body's business what she was. . . . She must tell Pauline they'd been motoring, which would deprive the incident of future significance.

So she was reading again the next afternoon, Sunday; and called out, come in, when she heard a knock. Most likely it was Pete Olson. He worked in the office, and lived nearby. He had been asking Marta's advice on the most effective means of disengaging himself from three girls at once. A literary impulse, projecting itself in epistolary form, had triply entangled him. Marta called him Pete because he looked like Struwelpeter. She had cheered him with the assurance that his Dulcineas were either half-witted or trifling with his affections . . . Since the whole staff was young and mostly unmarried, the office was vitalized by an undercurrent of private lunacy; they were but mad nor'-nor'-west; when the wind was southerly they knew a hawk from a handsaw. They got through a great deal of work, and got away with murder on the side, as a mutual protective association. The boss, Floyd Jernegan, had a rare talent for overlooking what did not concern him. Marta alone was aware that his poker face dissembled a rich appreciation of the sideshow. Marta took a friendly part as a matter of course; the work, the ragging, belonged to that separate world, and had no connection with her inner life. She felt she would have died, literally, if the office had known about Chris . . . She confided in Pauline only, who didn't listen, who turned to her a rapt abstracted countenance and trans-

posed the theme to Keith. Marta saw the forlorn humor of it. But when she was alone she had to read.

"I never thought of Keith at all," she repeated, and realized that Pauline could not imagine not thinking of Keith. She had thought of nothing else. To Marta, Keith was, until a certain moment, insulated from her attention by those indefinable reasons which primitive peoples recognize by the taboo. An object so awkward that it becomes sacred, to be avoided and ignored with the utmost respect. Relations-in-law, and the husbands, wives, lovers or friends of one's friends, come in this category. They are bores because of it. When Keith called without Joe, Marta removed herself quietly.

CHAPTER XVIII

How difficult, how impossible communication is, Marta thought. . . . At the moment, she and Pauline were about four feet apart in space, with no material obstacle to confidences, and no external distraction. The difficulty lay in the fact that an emotional truth is clothed in circumstance, and derives from a series of untraceable causes dating back to creation. To make it understandable, and the action resulting from it, one would have to reconstitute the universe as it was at precisely that interval of time, with the auditor in the center of it and gifted with omniscience. Now, for instance, Pauline, in a chrysanthemum kimono, was propped against the pillows of the lower berth, frowning slightly at a handful of letters scattered over the coverlet. Marta lay flat on her stomach in the upper berth. A curtain swayed, a draught from an invisible source blew on her bare shoulders. The white-painted box of a stateroom in which they were confined slanted crazily on the Channel waves. And if later Marta were to endeavor to explain, say to Alma—though she wouldn't, but say Alma, whose receptive sympathy was

unfailing—how futile this attempt at explanation had been, she would be impelled to describe these externals, as if they were important. And they would convey nothing to Alma. Their significance was purely associational, not valid outside the minds of the participants.

Just so, when Marta spoke to Pauline of Keith, the name evoked intimacies in which Marta had no part. They summoned to mind wholly different scenes; the effort was vain . . . Or was it? Pauline's clairvoyance was the more startling for being intermittent. She said: "After you'd gone away, and Keith was going, the last day, he took me to lunch. I don't know why. Nor why I went." She lied; she couldn't face the knowledge: his motive. "Except that it didn't matter. I'd got over it. And I thought what an attractive young man he was, as if I'd never seen him before."

"Yes," said Marta, amazed. Pauline had voiced exactly what she had in the back of her mind. "He was no damn good. But attractive." She had become aware of both qualities simultaneously. At a certain moment, on a Sunday afternoon, eighteen years ago, when she looked up expecting to see Pete Olson, and it was Keith who let himself in.

The apartment was so devoid of any pretension to taste that finally one ceased to notice it. She could recapture it only as a background to some particular scene. The wallpaper and rug were distressingly efflorescent; there was a table, a desk, several chairs, an upright piano, and the red corduroy sofa where she

sat with her book laid on her knee. And Keith pausing with his hand on the doorknob, as if habit had brought him so far, and he could not determine whether to go or stay.

She must have barred her mind to any other inference. So she saw him objectively, and was struck by his extraordinarily graceful slouch, which he could afford, being so admirably built. Five foot ten, a hundred and sixty-five pounds. His features were not strictly handsome, though he had a fine forehead, broad and candid, in contradiction to his rather heavy jaw and wide sulky mouth. He did walk like an Indian, the sliding step of the natural dancer. The new dances were evolving about then; some of them originated in the West, and Keith learned them almost before they were invented. . . . Marta said: Hello. Pauline isn't back yet. He crossed over and read the title of her book.

What do you get out of this? he asked. . . . Poetry . . . Perhaps he meant, what is it that absorbs your whole attention? . . . Like music? But how . . . She was annoyed at herself for being drawn into discussion, for the inanity of the argument.

She said, Listen: *This flower that smells of honey and the sea . . .* Because it had nothing for him but the music; the ghostly and elegiac sentiment would not touch him. . . . *Out of the world of the unapparent dead, where the lost Aprils are and the lost Mays . . .* She tried to pitch her voice to the note heard by her inner

ear when she read to herself. *Make him hear it. . . .*

The book lay open on the floor. She kicked it under the sofa, out of harm's way. Held so close, she was conscious of a detached admiration for the flawless finish Nature had bestowed on him. Most of us lose it in childhood. He possessed it in mature perfection, as if for once the intention were fulfilled. What was remarkable was the tone and texture of his hair, his eyes, his olive skin. Like his eyes, his hair wasn't a flat black, but the darkest brown, the color that painters use, with no high lights; and fine, thick, straight, so that it lay as it was brushed. Even at the edges the clipped ends were not coarse. He was holding her crossed hands; by contrast, his were very brown and if anything too shapely for a man. It was his hands told her. Too much . . .

She stopped resisting; she wasn't going to have a scuffle. They must not, that was all. . . . Instigation of the devil. You did things just because you must not, of course. To find out . . . But there were some things you really must not do . . . He wasn't in earnest; it was curiosity, pique, a dare; he was laughing . . . Are you going to cheat? he asked . . . They always said that: be a good sport. It exasperated her. What did it mean, what obligation? . . . Let me go, she said ambiguously, and I will. . . . What else were they doing? She wanted to anyhow, a perversely chaste impulse, for the sake of his *beaux yeux*. She kissed his eyes and then his mouth. Once.

He walked across the room and stood staring at her. He was dead white. She wouldn't have believed he could lose that brownness. What did you do to me? he asked. She shook her head. It had happened to him. She wouldn't have believed that was possible either. Not to him. He said: Who taught you that? She had never seen anyone so pale. As if he were about to faint. You're in love with Chris Jackling, aren't you? Pauline must have told him. Not any more, she said. She made some defensive gesture. He said: No, I won't—I couldn't stand it again. . . . Good night.

He'll be over it tomorrow, she thought, unable to face any other contingency.

She could not disentangle the sequence of events, nor exactly how long it lasted. Less than a month. She had no means of avoiding him, nor he of speaking to her. Twice he managed brief asides, two singular declarations. I'd like to wring your neck, he muttered, accepting a cup of coffee. And again as she sat in her accustomed place, near the piano, Keith leaned down to offer her a light, and said under the music: Will you marry me? She answered in the same violent whisper: No! Shut up!

Her purpose was concentrated on keeping it from Pauline. Because Pauline wouldn't believe the truth. She wouldn't, Marta realized acutely, hear it. Marta found an excuse of business to go away for a week to the branch office at the Coast, leaving no address. . . . When she returned, Pauline mentioned, as if it were

rather a joke: Keith's been on a tear. Then he's cured, Marta thought; and sank into emptiness again.

But he wasn't. When he telephoned the next day she recognized a measure of right in his flat statement: You've got to talk to me. She answered in the same matter-of-fact tone: All right, four o'clock at Webster's livery, tell them to saddle the grey for me, shorten the stirrups. . . . She used to ride occasionally. Very few people did, though less than twenty years since Silver-ton was a cow-town, a casual sort of ranching center. Things changed so quickly . . . If Keith wasn't accustomed to riding, she thought, he'd have to keep his mind on it. But he rode with natural ease.

It was all wrong. She was still at a loss to relate that afternoon to *anything*. Then where did it belong in her life? . . . Open country began at the edge of town, so they did not need to follow a road. Along the river grew scattered box-elders and firs, and in sheltered nooks between the low hills. Keith grinned and said: I'm on my good behavior. They tied the horses. The dry clean prairie sod smelled of the sunshine, which was like thin golden gauze. Keith stretched out comfortably, propped on his elbow, his unstarched silk collar miraculously fresh. He said gently: Will you marry me?

But why? Marta had a clear and detached picture of herself. A girl in a brown duck riding skirt, short jacket, and strapped pumps. Not even a pretty girl. A strand of straight light brown hair had blown out from under her shapeless soft hat, tickling her nose.

She tucked it back, a habitual gesture. Her round face had a temporary wind-tan, a biscuit tint; with her yellowish grey eyes, no color became her, and rouge made her look sallow. Her hair wouldn't stay up, and no style that was genuinely smart suited her. She wasn't so thin then; Keith said the best that could be said of her, that she had pretty hands, and a neck like a dove.

She replied again: No.

Keith said: You will, though. She suggested: Pauline. . . . Good heavens, he said, Pauline chucked me. You know all about that. What more could I have done? . . . He had been willing to marry Pauline; he accepted her decision. That let him out. . . . Marta got the impression that he had always obliged any woman, within reason; she doubted if he had ever seduced one. (Yes, one.) He was genuinely amoral, indifferent even to the challenge of virtue or vanity. . . . He said to Marta: You're the first girl I've ever been in love with. Or thought I was. Or said so.

She took him up: I supposed you were bravely over it. Last week . . .

He grinned again: It was no go, he said. You've got me. I was drunk for a couple of days, that's all. I couldn't. . . .

She said: Well . . . But you have . . .

He said: Sure. And maybe you have. I don't know, nor care. Not if you were a hooker. Will you marry me?

A conviction was forming dimly in the depths of her consciousness that she would shortly, in any event,

be going away. She had already tried to persuade Pauline to make the venture East with her. They had overstayed their time in Silverton, or missed their chance. Whatever else happened, Pauline and Keith would not marry, not after this. So Pauline might soon be ready to go. . . . Marta lied, making terms. Six months. Then if Keith were still of the same mind, she might marry him. She gained a half agreement from him of a month. He was not to try to see her alone; and if he gave Pauline cause to suspect them, Marta would never speak to him again . . . Rubbishy phrases. Picked up from cheap fiction probably, utterly insincere. Sincerity would be saying what you mean. You don't know what you mean. . . . Keith was fairly honest.

He said: If I can. He took her hand and kissed the palm submissively. I'm all in. May I put my head on your lap? She touched his hair with her fingertip and he shut his eyes and turned his face against her white silk blouse.

Riding back, he seemed entirely certain that she must marry him. And she was equally sure his infatuation wouldn't last. They drew these opposite convictions from the same premises. After leaving the horses at the stable, she forbade Keith to see her home, and walked through the high airy darkness. A fitful wind carried the scent of dust. Passing sprinkled lawns, she smelled white clover. It wasn't late, not ten o'clock, but a cloudy moonless evening, and honest folks were abed. Who lived in these rows of respectable small

houses? In the four years of her sojourn, the town had grown from ten thousand to forty thousand; and out of that number she was acquainted with perhaps a score. She had aided in bringing the thirty thousand there, which was fantastic. She had a very serious and responsible job. Her employers, Jernegan, Shelby & Sundstrom, owned half a dozen companies, close corporations: a land company, a coal mine, grain elevators. They had sold to settlers thousands of acres of land; she had made out the deeds. They had built forty grain elevators throughout the state, on an initial cash capital of five thousand dollars. She knew, for she kept their personal accounts, opened their letters, signed their names for them, drew on their private bank balances. A queer hobgoblin sort of job, being a shadow, living in other people's pockets. Listening to them think. Then at half-past five every day she went about her own simple affairs, powdered her nose, flirted, read poetry, broke her heart. While the town expanded around her, more and more houses were built; people moved into them and began to raise families. Going to the office, Marta would stumble over water-main pipes or avoid excavations, with mild surprise and a tinge of annoyance. She liked the town better when it was small. The high ideal of the Chamber of Commerce, which yearned for a population of a hundred thousand, was repellent to her. Suddenly she had become a stranger. She was not part of the town, though she had been part of the making of it. With its future

she had no concern. It seemed to her inevitable that she should go away, as it seemed to Keith that he should marry her. Absurd. She was so much older, Keith being only twenty-four while she was twenty-three. And solitary, in the dark, blown about by the gusty wind. When Keith "bowed his comely head," acknowledged himself beaten, it took the heart out of her. Nobody was immune. Even if you were no damn good . . .

They had forgotten about dinner. She would have to rummage in the kitchen for a crust! She wondered if Pauline would be home yet. She wanted to see Pauline, just the same. You belong to your family in spite of yourself; your friends belong to you in spite of everything.

Pauline was home. She said at once, in that gay quick voice: Why didn't you bring Keith on up?

It would have been as futile to lie as to tell the truth. Marta did neither. She said scarcely anything. She wanted to tell the truth. Pauline could not hear. And what Pauline said Marta was unable to remember, not a word of it. Probably because the words did not signify. It was the lack of meaning that made the scene so hopeless. After a useless protest, Marta became coldly sullen. . . . The illusion of first love is that it is unique, so it excludes sympathy, and carries with it a sense of divine right. A sublime non-sequitur—you must love me because I love you . . . Nevertheless, Marta knew now that she had been wholly in the wrong. She should have told Pauline in the beginning.

What hurts most is the isolation, being left out, deceived. To hear by chance. . . . Rich Anderson had seen Keith and Marta riding out of town. He mentioned the fact to Pauline through mere loquacity. Marta had a recollection of reining in at the bridge for Rich's car to pass.

No doubt they should all have known better. One knows better than to be struck by lightning.

When Pauline was gone, Marta sank in an inert huddle on the sofa. She went to sleep there presently, lacking a sufficient incentive to go to bed. While Keith, the next day, was asking her again to marry him, she was quite numb, genuinely light-headed with inability to think. . . . Sometimes since she had reflected, it would have been more sensible—but that wasn't what he wanted. No more than it was what she had wanted from Chris. They did not, in a literal sense, want anything. They had it, however briefly. A moment perishable and immortal, beyond judgment and above material satisfactions. And with the dignity of finality, like death, for it will not return. It takes you in your pride, your sins, your triviality. . . . Keith had slept with dozens of girls. So that wasn't it. Though it did not occur to him that marriage was still further from the point. An honorable estate, demanding constancy, self-sacrifice and forbearance; besides, it keeps the world going. What did he care whether the world went on or not?

She said: Toss for it. Heads, I'll marry you tomorrow. Keith found a silver dollar in his pocket. Sudden death? She nodded. It came heads.

She had to get it over with . . . Yet when she told Wint Shelby—she owed him that—she found herself crying helplessly. Because all that anyone got was second-best. The pieces of life wouldn't fit together. Wint was a better man beyond comparison. He was strong and steady; even in his unscrupulousness he was straight, did what he chose to do and stood by it. If he was a little hard and quietly possessive, he knew when he had lost. Perhaps they were too much alike. They had a great respect for each other, and neither could manage the other. They were hell-bent on making their own mistakes. And besides . . . The utmost probity, ability, or virginal innocence wouldn't have made Keith so—attractive. Marta did not respect him and had no grudge against him. Either attitude would have been irrelevant. She hadn't been in love with him, but she remembered him asleep with his head on her arm. Bread and salt is less than that.

Well, she had got it over. Eighteen years ago. But does anything ever end? If our perversities and follies are not of the substance of life, surely they color it permanently. And perhaps they originate from deeply buried, irresistible compulsions. The children of unhappy marriages so often come to matrimonial wreck, it must be by unacknowledged purpose. Marta suspected that she married Keith because she knew it wouldn't last. So she would escape both marriage and the reproach of virginity.

From this predestined failure Pauline had drawn

her firm conviction that Marta could fascinate any man. A *femme fatale!* Marta speculated sardonically if numerous public reputations were not reared upon a similar foundation. As Coolidge's masterly executive gifts were established by his keeping out of the way of the Boston police strike . . . Unfortunately, Pauline's delusion was peculiar to herself, and so did not benefit Marta. The men did not share it. She herself doubted if it would have been possible to discover a woman more disastrously incompetent in the traditional arts of femininity.

She had been unlucky in love, unsuccessful in marriage; she had not even Pauline's pretty coquetry, her skill in prolonged indecisions. . . . It was no odds now. *We'll to the woods no more, the laurels all are clipped . . .*

The steamer rolled increasingly, with a quartering motion that would have turned Lord Nelson green. Still peering over the edge of her berth, head downward like a bat, Marta pondered on freewill and predestination—would she and Pauline be here, at this hour and place, midnight and midchannel, if Pauline had been the one to marry Keith. No, the marriage itself would have constituted a divergence. But she voiced the question.

"I can't imagine," said Pauline. "We had an insane plan to go to the Peace River country! Maybe I'd be there in that frozen wilderness, a squaw with ten children. Awful!" It was pure fantasy. Thinking didn't recall Keith; only sometimes a phrase, a

tone, a resemblance, went to the quick. . . . No, thought Marta, not children—Keith knew better. . . . “You did me the greatest favor,” Pauline said. “What became of Keith, do you ever hear?”

“Not since the war,” said Marta. “He joined up; but he didn’t get killed.” “He wouldn’t,” said Pauline. “Rich Anderson did. Good heavens, I believe it was at that place on the Marne where the guide gave us a lecture.” . . . What a long way we go to find our graves, Marta thought. If you looked at a map, you couldn’t possibly guess. . . .

Pauline shuffled through her letters. “What have I done with that address Alice Trego gave me?” she said to herself. “Pol something.”

Marta surmised: “It must be in Cornwall.” Why? Pauline asked; and Marta quoted: By Tre, Pol and Pen, you may know the Cornishmen. Pauline sniffed, and Marta reminded herself once more not to impart undesired and tedious information. Positively nothing about Tristram and Iseult. . . . Whatever the name, Alice’s aged parents resided there, and Pauline had promised to visit them. Alice was a trained nurse, and had attended Pauline when Cathy was born. “She loved Cathy,” said Pauline. And she used to help straighten out George after his worst sprees . . . How did a Cornish girl happen to be nursing in Seattle, Marta asked. Pauline said, Alice’s father was for forty years a railway guard running from London to Liverpool, before retiring to a rural cottage; consequently Alice’s

aunt was married to the second steward on a liner, making her home in Brooklyn. Now Alice herself was married to a druggist in Everett, Washington, and had babies of her own. Lines extending to infinity. There would have been Phenicians, three thousand years ago, who had cousins in Cornwall. . . .

Would it matter, Marta asked, if she didn't feel equal to this excursion? "Ernest shattered my morale." "It's Polwhele," said Pauline. "I'll rush down tomorrow—it must be tomorrow now—and be back before . . ." Before Russ arrived in London, they both understood.

Pauline gathered up her scattered correspondence. "Dear Lady," she muttered. "Your postcard cheered me with the assurance that amid the distractions of foreign travel you still can spare a thought for the folks at home.' Shall I go on?" she enquired. "Or is this making you sick?" The ship groaned and quivered. Marta said: "Which? Does he finish with: It is now the wee sma' hours and I must close?" "Not close. Cease. And it's the witching hour," Pauline amended.

"Well, I'll cease if I don't get some sleep. And you'll find the name of Ernest engraved on the ivory tablets of my brain. Do you realize, woman, that this accursed boat docks at Harwich at six, and they'll call us at five?" Marta drew her berth curtain. The man who wrote that letter, she thought, is in love with Pauline. Like Tristram and Iseult. . . . On the other hand, if you wear the white flower of a blameless life, so does Ernest. *Get thee to a nunnery . . .*

CHAPTER XIX

MARTA said hello into the wrong end of the telephone as usual, and reversed it after a peculiar mental operation, an impulse to correct the error by standing on her head. "Hello," she repeated, "yes, it's me; come on up." Pauline's voice rejoined breathlessly: "Well, I had to be sure; I went to the other hotel first—" "I'm sorry," said Marta. "I've got a reservation for you here; ask at the desk." "That's good, but—" Pauline cut off. Marta stretched luxuriously, rose, turned on the bath, and leaned out of the open casement window, which gave upon a prospect of roofs that suggested security, comfort and peace. Delicate grey feathers of smoke floated straight upward into the soft clarity of the morning sky . . . A hotel room is an emotional hospital, sterilized of associations. No significance beyond their present use attached to the necessary objects of furniture: the blue damask bed-spread and curtains, padded chair and tidy dresser. . . . Pauline entered, with a startled air. "How come?" she asked.

Marta said: "They moved me to another room, while I was at lunch. I met the floor valet carrying down an

armful of my things, and almost slew him on the spot. I was perfectly furious, and packed instantly, your belongings, too—flocks and herds of luggage, bulging out of a taxi. But I left a message for you.” Pauline explained: “I went straight up to our room and knocked. A man opened the door, in a *nightshirt*. With drooping moustaches. Utterly revolting. Oh!” She sat down. “This hotel is much nicer.”

“Much,” said Marta. “Better food, and the waiters are French. The other was as dismal as a cold muffin. Did you like Cornwall?” “What?” said Pauline. “No, yes, it’s rather—sad. High round headlands rising out of the sea, and scarcely any trees. It reminds me of those dreams where you try to find someone and can’t.” Searching and searching, without direction. Sometimes she seemed to hear the echo of the children’s voices, just beyond. . . . She shook herself. “What have you been doing?” Nothing, Marta replied truthfully. London was the very place to do nothing. Only on Pauline’s account she wished London were not so deserted in August. Pauline must have people about her. The dead were too near her. *The virtuous and beloved dead need neither cassia buds nor myrrh*. Their power is that they are unchanging, and the heart goes after them, pleading to be allowed to do them one kindness, to be remembered by. But they have had the last word. . . . Pauline said: “Have you heard from Russ?”

Not yet, Marta replied. “He’ll wire at the last

moment. Shall we breakfast downstairs?" . . . In the grill, five waiters converged upon them and escorted them solicitously to a table. This cloud of witnesses dispersed, reassembled, and surged to meet the next guest. "Look at that one," said Pauline; "he was galloping down the room, waving a rack of toast, and the headwaiter tapped him on the shoulder. He leaped about and flew back." Still bearing aloft the excelsior toast. "The English and the French," Marta heard herself saying profoundly, "are different." Fortunately Pauline ignored this contribution to world thought. She was submerged in the Times. "Queen Mary visited the Zoo this morning," she read. "TNT is eleven and six. Here's a stock called United Molasses; will you have some?" "Molasses?" an unexpected waiter seemed eager to oblige. "Melon, coffee and toast," said Pauline distantly. "Without marmalade." The waiter was obviously baffled, how not to serve marmalade. He caught Marta's grin and light dawned on him. Americans . . . "Do we polish off the Tower or the Museum today?" Pauline asked.

They chose the Tower. Then they were to return for tea with people Marta knew: Donna Kessler and the Jermyns. She had made the engagement for want of anything better. She explained Gerald Jermyn to Pauline. One of those well-bred ineffective Englishmen such as used to be shipped to America, usually out West, the limbo of younger sons. Though it happened Marta had known him in New York, through Alma,

who was kind to strays. He had a hopeless "case" on Alma, and called on Marta to give himself the pleasure of speaking Alma's name. A small legacy recalled him to England; and Alma had suggested Marta should drop him a note. He had acquired a wife. "I hate wives," said Pauline gloomily. She wasn't interested in New York either. Or she resented it. . . . Donna could safely be left to explain herself. Perhaps not safely . . .

First, Marta said, they must walk across the Green Park. For a surprise. . . . The sheep grazing in the heart of the city were surprising enough. Pauline observed that dry-cleaning wouldn't hurt them. Wait, said Marta. Now . . . The unicorns. Over the gate.

Pauline made a fluttering gesture with her hands. Buckingham Palace, she murmured uncertainly. She was certain of the fact, but—

They couldn't, Marta realized, find a place for it in their minds. They were not awed nor impressed. They were at a loss. Coming upon it as if it were—oh, a department store. A going concern. It belonged in history, with George the Third. Or in fairy tales, with the unicorns. . . . The unicorns sneered enchantingly at the solid bulk of the Palace, the huge vacuous Jubilee Fountain, the loitering nursemaids and the red-coated sentry. The sentry's black bearskin busby, obscuring his face with its furry fringe, impelled Marta to a sympathetic sneeze. She was slightly horrified to perceive that at regular intervals his eyes moved from side to side, with clockwork precision. Obviously he saw

nothing. Pauline started, clutching Marta's arm: "He's alive." He crowhopped out of his comical box and performed the march of the wooden soldier. Plumed riders filed through the Horse Guards Gate, across the street, into the Palace Yard. Blinkered by the vizors of their silver helmets, they too looked down their noses, haughtily blind. A policeman halted the motors for them. Another guarded the guard. . . . Who was the last Roman Emperor? The last Doge of Venice? *Hush, said Lord Chesterfield, Selwyn and I have been dead for two years, but we don't want it known . . .*

The Jewel Room of the Tower reduced Marta's intelligence to an absolute blank. She was dazzled, but literally, as by a mirror flashed in her eyes. The mound of gold and gems did not excite envy, being non-negotiable, fit for no use, except to be heaped up in a stone-walled cell, behind an iron picket fence, for the astonishment of the lower classes. Fame is a vulgar affair at best. It's very like being caught in the subway crowd, Marta thought, as she was forced about in a circle. At once bored and fascinated, she counted the crowns and forgot the number. Half a dozen *crowns!* To stir the imagination, a crown should be unique. And these were so new, so unworn and unwearable. Not as if one beheld the veritable emblems of Great Eliza or William the Conqueror. Or Napoleon's cocked hat, at Fontainebleau, where Pauline had commented: What Napoleon needed was a good milliner. It was too big for the Little Corporal; he had overdone his strut. . . .

Marta's distraction increased at tea. They met in the hotel lounge. She had expected the occasion to be dull. It was, and yet preposterous. The things everyone said, which she anticipated, and to which there was no possible rejoinder. . . . She had once been informed, by an eccentric enthusiast, that the British were the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. She did not argue the point since for her there was none. Besides, they might as well be. . . . Pauline was brightly polite to Mrs. Jermyn, a thin woman with rabbit teeth, in a tweed suit which sagged at the back. It was carried unanimously that London did not resemble New York. Mrs. Jermyn then informed them that they admired the London police. Marta was powerless to prevent herself saying that she preferred the New York variety, as handsomer and more efficient. Mrs. Jermyn was equally unable to hear this irregular statement. Marta conceded the London parks. Pauline thereupon lost control and said she hoped to see Queen Mary going to the Zoo. Marta became acutely conscious of Gerald saying nothing, stroking his melancholy fair moustache. She gulped a fragment of cinnamon toast. Nobody could help being married. But it wasn't Marta's fault either if Mrs. Jermyn replied, yes, she often saw the King and Queen driving out. So democratic. And the darling little Princess. "Lilybet, she calls herself. And kisses her hand to people." As a corollary, Mrs. Jermyn affirmed that Americans had a higher regard for royalty than the English. By main force, Marta refrained from

pointing out that they might easily indulge any such sentiment, at bargain rates, as it. . . . If only they could keep off the war debts. No hope. Supposing she offered Mrs. Jermyn five dollars to call it square between themselves . . .

But the personal feeling was shoddy, inadmissible. Her mistake, forgetting that in New York one met all sorts of people as under a flag of truce, or of distress. New York was—what was it? . . . Donna created a heaven-sent diversion, arriving late. She had been sightseeing with fellow-passengers from the boat. She had worked part of her passage, as an entertainer, organizing games, playing and singing. Donna usually worked her way. "That was how I escaped from South Dakota—as accompanist to a Chautauqua ballad singer," she talked in an endless series of tangents. Marta had not known that Donna was born in South Dakota. "Wasn't," said Donna. "When I was six, mother went out to Sioux City to get a divorce. Father was a minister, and mother quit when the congregation objected to her wearing a red silk petticoat. So she married an Indian agent. The Indians thought she ought to wear the petticoat outside." Marta had a sudden hunch that Mrs. Jermyn was a daughter of the vicarage, to whom the conjunction of the clergy and divorce was a mis-statement in bad taste. Donna rattled on, uttering what must have been pure Choctaw to Mrs. Jermyn. Tumbleweeds and buffalo skulls. Curious, Marta hadn't thought of them for years. The prairie used to

be dotted with those skulls, bleached dazzling white by weather. Wild flowers grew up through the eyesockets. During her childhood, they disappeared. What became of them? . . . Donna paused to renew the vermeil of her lips, her chestnut bob tipped to one side. The lounge was filled with well-dressed people, engaged with tea-cups and small glasses . . . Great heaps of clean dry bones used to be gathered temporarily beside railway sidings, and freight cars filled with them. Marta had been told they were shipped away to be used in refining sugar. *Out of the strong came forth sweetness* . . . The Indians, Donna was saying, sometimes peered in the lighted windows of the agency at night. Marta doubted it; Donna possessed a constructive memory; she was dramatizing a child's fears. Marta recalled rare occasions, in bitter winter weather, when Indians ventured to the house to ask for food. They sat by the stove, gaunt and mute, devouring oatmeal porridge; presently they went away without thanks or farewell, except a guttural *How!* It was long before Marta understood that they were not devoid of manners. Among themselves, food was shared. Mostly, the Indians existed in her consciousness as vanishing silhouettes against the skyline, a draggled distant procession on lean piebald ponies with travoix trailing at their heels. The Indian ponies, dainty fine-limbed creatures, spirited in spite of their hard usage, were descended from the steeds of the conquistadors, the Arabian strain . . .

The reason why Americans and English could never understand one another was that they were separated, as from the Indians, by a gulf of time. In the American consciousness the whole of Europe, excepting France, was a hundred years removed. There it was fixed in their history, ended, done with. Impossible to conceive it in terms of the present, resume it as a mental habit. It had the impracticability of discarded fashions in garments, brought down from the attic, provocative of mirth, sentiment or wonder, but absolutely unwearable. They are too short, too long, too tight, too stiff; they trip and suffocate one with odd superfluities and constrictions. One cannot squeeze into them. Whether or not America has progressed is immaterial. It is another cycle, another dimension if one accepts the mathematical-metaphysical definition of time as a dimension of space. Though the lines extended to infinity they would never meet . . .

“Hello, Brownie, what are you doing here?” Her Paris hat, the brim dipping unevenly over one eye, forced her to twist her neck like a robin for an upward view. Identification became certain at the waistcoat. Freddy Riggs wore the last surviving fancy waistcoats; on him they seemed eminently correct. He had not changed in the least particular during the fifteen years of her acquaintance with him. As elegant as a young string bean, he had that durable blond slimness which defies age. . . . She thought: this caps it; why didn’t I guess it’s the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party; while she said

feebly: "Freddy! The last time I saw you—"

"At that big binge of Ryland Drucker's, wasn't it?" Freddy picked up the thread easily while he acknowledged introductions, conjured an additional chair, arrested a roving waiter, and ordered a round of cocktails. "Haven't seen Drucker since, have you?" Marta had not. Nor Freddy. One didn't, in New York. The curtain fell, indicating a lapse of years. Five, it must be. "Regular Babylonian blow-out," Freddy recalled. Marta glanced at her shoulder involuntarily. Why? The reason came with the action; she said to Pauline: "One of those enormous private madhouse affairs, where you step on celebrities, laid end to end. In a roof apartment, with entertainers. Boxing bouts, that night. I got blood spattered on my arms, sitting almost under the ropes." "Blood on your arms," Mrs. Jermyn repeated blankly. "Evening dress," Marta said, as if that accounted for it. "And one of the boxers got cut across the eyebrow; he kept shaking his head to clear his eyes." "How barbarous," Mrs. Jermyn said, between bewilderment and horror. "He wasn't really hurt," said Marta. Out of the ring, the combatants were of a singularly mild aspect. Having done their turn, they returned from a dressing-room in neat sack suits, hair sleeked down damply, and became spectators. She noticed that they did not cheer, nor yell with the crowd: Sock him! They'd been socked. . . . "No, it was a costume party," she corrected herself. Making it entirely clear and rational!

The rest would sound even more delirious. Freddy dragged her home with him when the party broke up; in his opinion, evening lasted until the next day. He wouldn't let her go, had her elbow locked in his. He also lived in a skyscraper studio apartment, with his aged parents, whom he had uprooted from their native soil of California . . . Herself in a home-made Directoire gown of white muslin and lace mittens, Freddy a fair-haired Mexican in a crimson sash, they arrived at his apartment in the cold bleakness of a wintry dawn. His aged parents were asleep in the next room—at least, Marta hoped they were asleep. She was perishing for sleep herself. After an hour or so, his mother emerged, evidently resigned to fantastic apparitions. She brewed coffee in an electric percolator; then she and Marta helped Freddy pack his suitcase—he would, of course, be going somewhere, was it to Washington?—and Freddy took Marta home in a taxi, on his way to the station. . . . She lived then in a model tenement on the East River; and she had to change her dress and go to her work in a stupor . . . She was not to see Freddy again for five years, until this moment, when he strolled into the lounge of a London hotel, to make another appointment for breakfast! He was abroad in connection with a moving picture exchange, and was flying to Berlin next day. He regretted having a business engagement for dinner and the evening. But whenever he got back, he would telephone her immediately. Marta accepted the provisional invitation and

the inevitable. "Life is just one breakfast after another," she said. "Then that's all right;" everything was all right with Freddy. As he rose to take leave, paying the check, with professional skill, for the tea as well as his own order, he gave Marta a long look of artless enquiry. His mouth was fresh-colored as a child's, and shaped to the naive expression of a child offering a kiss. . . . She thought, with fleeting irony, this will surely be the last breakfast. He's thirty-six. Five years makes a lot of difference, at eight in the morning. . . . There was precisely that difference in their ages. And that fraction of time fixed their relation. Each of us, she thought, has a separate character, personality, for each of our friends. We may never guess what it is. . . . Though she knew what she was to Freddy. A woman of the world! He had so placed her because they met after her break with Keith. Freddy was then twenty-one. Naturally he regarded a grass-widow of twenty-six as sophisticated, attractively dangerous. He aspired to her favors, expected to acquire from her some subtlety of wisdom. Her sheer incapacity to fill the assigned part had confirmed his belief. He saw her as superior and immune. He had once asked for a curl of her hair—a trophy for a collection?—and when she gave it to him, he was plainly at a loss for her motive. Because she had none, except indifferent amusement. . . .

He wrote down her address, her bank, in a notebook, and took leave . . . "Who is he?" Donna en-

quired frankly. Marta answered: "Freddy—oh, he's a nut. No harm in him," she added hastily. "He does promotion, publicity, for all sorts of things." She met him, briefly and unpredictably, wherever she went. In Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, New York; where he would be working up special editions of newspapers, or handling the advertising of fairs, aviation meets, even political campaigns. Stepping off a train, or into a hotel, surrounded by strangers, she would step into his arms without warning, into an impermanent intimacy, and out again. He was a part of the contemporary scene, and to that degree a part of her life. . . . "Is he married?" Donna pursued, with disarming honesty. "Not lately," Marta said. "He was, a couple of times; I never kept track of his wives."

Mrs. Jermyn said: "Why are there no happy marriages in America?" Marta replied recklessly: "No happy marriages? There are millions. Sunk in sodden domesticity. Pauline and I can hardly wait to get back to break up a few homes. It's the buffalo you mean, that are extinct, and we're glad of it. Mangy brutes, as dumb as—" She stopped, catching Gerald's patient reproachful glance. Donna saved her again, rising to go; the Jermyns rose also. Insincere courtesies were exchanged; everybody was charmed and delighted. . . . Shaking hands, Gerald said: "I wish Alma had come over." "As between me and Alma," Marta said, "you sum up the popular sentiment briefly and eloquently." Gerald said plaintively:

"You always laughed at the wrong time" . . .

But any time would be wrong, Marta thought. Because they were not synchronized. . . . Curved space was nothing compared to the confusion of times brought together by this commonplace group meeting accidentally. Subjective time was tied in bowknots among them. . . . Such incongruities were taken for granted in New York; they were of the essence of it, for New York is not merely a different but a wholly new dimension. It is the whole cycle of America thrust upward vertically, like the Rocky Mountains, by the pressure of converging forces. It is tomorrow . . . London is horizontal, spreading outward from a center, from the preserves of privilege, the great houses and pleasure grounds of the nobility. The space they had maintained for themselves remained open and magnificent, though the power and the glory had quietly departed. England has come to a pause in time. For a moment of history, the clock has stopped. The English are somnambulists. . . . Europe protests against America with bitterness and dismay because the visible spectacle of tomorrow is terrifying. The attraction of the future resides in the unknown, in the boundless expectation possible only to ignorance. Yesterday is dear to us because the effort is over.

They had been happy, the three of them, because by joining hands they closed a circle. *All of which I saw and part of which I was . . .*

Pauline speeded the parting guests and shrugged.

"That was fairly awful. . . . Wonder if there is any mail?" She stopped at the wicket. "Jimmy and David," she commented, pleased but too well aware of the contents to hurry about opening the letters. "What have you got?"

Marta held a telegram. She said in a small voice: "Russ can't come over till Thursday."

"But my boat sails on Saturday," Pauline said woefully. "There'll be only two days." Time defeats us always, Marta thought . . . Or do we come back and come back through it eternally?

CHAPTER XX

"BLUE is safe, anyhow," said Pauline, with a note of delicate derision. "A conservative shade, suitable for an elderly gentleman?" "Oh, quite, madam," the clerk assured her. Very well, she would take the set. Let's buy one for Russ, she and Marta proposed simultaneously. Green, Marta suggested, but would it go with—oddly, neither could remember whether Russ had worn a blue or a brown suit. It had an invisible stripe. "And a sprinkling of fox-fur," Marta said idiotically, visualizing Pauline removing the evidence from Russ's sleeve. Not to mention a dab of powder on his lapel, whichever of them he had acquired it from, Russ probably was not sure himself. How often he must have worn that smutch of white—it came back to her that he had looked down at it unsurprised and unembarrassed, not troubling to brush it off; there it was as usual! Maybe the souvenir was agreeable . . . The clerk was waiting. They bought the green tie. Leaving the shop, they turned into the park idly. They had "done" their sightseeing for the day. "Let's sit here awhile." With a flower-bed before

them and the Serpentine beyond, Marta was satisfied. She enjoyed the strangeness of the city, had no wish to dissipate it by drudging through it.

We're simply waiting for Russ to come over, Marta thought, indulging the harmless folly. Why not? When one comes to the point of having no more to expect, life is over. Perhaps mercifully there are always small pleasant things; spring returns perennially to a garden. Russ was following a deep right instinct about his farm. And one of the trivial advantages of middle age—there aren't many, Marta admitted ruefully, and very slight weighed against the treasure of youth—is that friendship is refined to its essential quality. You cease to require anything from your friends except that they shall exist. Just to see them sometimes, taking them for what they are, not for what they may do or become . . . It wasn't enough for Pauline yet. Marta knew herself defeated and could endure it, for she had at least spent herself; but Pauline had been caught. She, who could not tolerate a locked door: was the fear born of foreknowledge, or had the fear shut her in? . . .

The park attendant collected their pennies for the chairs. You can't sit down, though, Marta reflected, without paying. A bit of your life goes. It won't actually stop for you.

Pauline balanced the two little packages from the haberdashers; her brows lifted quizzically. She said, as if resuming a conversation, that David would be gratified by the Bond Street label. He had no other

criterion. Marta thought, Pauline ought to make herself expensive and exigent; he'd believe she must be worth whatever she demanded. Worth marrying, if that was her price. "Why don't you marry the man?" Marta quoted. "For instance, how?" Pauline retorted, and they both laughed.

"Oh, I've heard there are ways," said Marta. "There must be; it's been done. I fancy it's hard for a man to say no—before breakfast." Madame de Pompadour said that Louis the Fifteenth was not in love with her but with the private stair to her apartments, that he was accustomed to descend. . . . Various emotions contended in Pauline's expression: fastidious protest, outrageous mirth, and a trace of guilt. "Supposing," she said in a strangled voice, "supposing he wears a night-shirt!" Marta managed to reply: "Impossible; I'm sure his pajamas are p-perfectly elegant, the most c-correct . . ." They regained composure with an effort, to avert the attention of passersby. Pauline said: "While we are plumbing the depths of vulgarity—I daresay he might as well have had his money's worth, for the dinners and flowers."

No, thought Marta, it wouldn't do. Not for Pauline. She's too good for him. She wants to be fair; and it is himself he cheapens. He has a genuine attachment for her. Why else should he hang about for twenty years, except that she is the one woman he cares for honestly? When he fell in love with her he had just begun to make his fortune. Getting ahead, getting

in with the "prominent people," is easier for a single man; and no doubt he had contemplated marrying for money or connections. He was the kind who does; and Pauline possessed neither. But he hadn't; the fact was sufficiently significant.

Of course Pauline could marry him if she chose. Marta's inveterate curiosity teased her to find out what prevented them. "He's a souse, isn't he? I guess once is enough." Pauline replied indifferently: "He stopped drinking several years ago. Had to." Marta was on the point of remarking that in the fifties reformation is generally by necessity . . . *I shall never give impuissance thanks for any good it can do me . . .* Oh, but that's the reason! It wouldn't occur to Pauline; girls really don't think of that, and she still has a mind like a girl . . .

Pauline said, her face turned away: "I don't want any more children." No chance, thought Marta. "Cathy was such a darling," said Pauline. "For a year or so after she had scarlet fever she wasn't very strong and I had to take great care of her, but nothing could spoil her. Look!" Pauline took out a snapshot she carried constantly. During an anxious winter, she roused every night to assure herself that Cathy was covered warm. Sometimes she took Cathy into her own bed. She often woke now with the feeling of that light live weight on her arm, and the little heart beating under bones as fine as a bird's. A girl child is such a tender creature, as if made of finer elements than our mortal clay, in

another mould—the floss silk hair, the flower-like skin, the angelic straight lines of the small body . . . Marta said: “She was a dear child, with those starry eyes. But she’ll never be old. And you gave her a happy life.” What can one say?

“Yes, I did. In spite of George. But I can’t forgive him.” Marta said: “It must have been pretty bad. Still, there are far worse things for a child, than having a father who gets drunk occasionally.” “Not that,” Pauline replied. “It was what he said about Cathy. Why I threw the flowerpot at him. If he hadn’t got out of the room—” “What he said?” Marta was at a loss. Pauline continued: “Cathy was a few minutes late for supper. I’d let her go to spend the afternoon with a schoolmate. George was in one of his tempers. He said, if I didn’t look after that girl, some day she’d come home with—”

“But—but—Cathy was only ten, wasn’t she?” Marta asked, incredulous. “Yes, but even if she’d been older, if you’d ever seen Cathy . . .” “Oh, or any child—” Marta found no adequate expression. Evil exists. Something unspeakable, the obscene cruelty that leers furtively on street corners, prowls in dark places, and emerges hideously in war. . . . “I didn’t speak to George for a week,” said Pauline. “If he had died then, I’d have been glad. He knew it.”

She will never marry David, thought Marta. She cannot trust him . . . Marta remembered Alma, with her deep clear melancholy, saying that a woman’s point

of view differs from a man's because women can be used. . . . Even the process of childbearing is a physical indignity which no sentimentalizing can alter. One might resign oneself to that; the flesh is an increasing humiliation to the spirit, until in the end it is cast off with relief as a worn-out rag. But one may learn the lesson too soon. At her age, Marta thought, women were supposed to be overcome by regret if they were childless. When she was depressed, reckoning her errors, she was glad that at least she had no children. Otherwise she did not think of it at all. The exhortations of priests, moralists, statesmen, aroused only her remote contempt. Fat comfortable men in robes of office . . . Their insistence that tired, overworked, unwilling women must "submit," bear more and more children, the fruit of apathy, fear, or even disgust, seemed to Marta a mental rape, a refinement of lust. She would answer to neither man nor God for her refusal. If it was women's business to have children, then it was *their* business; and a child is entitled to a birthright of health and hope . . . Yet if evil exists, there is also much kindness in the world. Pauline is better than I am, Marta thought. She is not hard.

"I got even with George," Pauline said. "How?" asked Marta blankly. "Never mind," said Pauline, and brushed her finger tips together. "That's one thing he didn't suspect." Marta was invaded by an irrational sensation, as if the whole universe had in that instant revealed that its essential meaning was comic. Maybe

it is! Why else do we laugh after irreparable disaster? And in the article of death, it is said that our most important affairs shrink to trifles, of no more consequence than the markers after a game is played . . . On his way to the block, Sir Thomas More was detained by a woman who complained that he had not answered a letter she wrote him. He excused himself with grim humor . . .

And yet one must have loved life passionately to quit it without fear or bitterness. More forfeited his head sooner than perform an action to which his will did not consent. At any cost men must have values. . . . *Pour their heart's blood to flourish one green leaf. Follow some Helen for her gift of grief . . .* But it is not the same thing to value what you pay for as to pay for what you value. David's was a second-hand soul. To be a snob is to be nothing, an echo, a shadow . . .

She did not come off very well herself. She had been wilful and light, choosing to pretend that what she did was not to count either way. And if she repented, it was for having committed the wrong sins! Were there an omnipotent power disposed to witness folly on the grand scale, it would need only to give back youth to middle age. They'd set the heather afire!

Pauline could not rest for long; they returned leisurely to the hotel. No letters . . . It was half an hour till tea; they went upstairs to prink. Marta reproached herself again for not having brought intro-

ductions, made certain of Pauline's entertainment. New York was so distracting, one longed only to fly from it to some blessed nowhere. But when she went there first she had felt forgotten and lost in the indifferent multitude, as Pauline now felt in London. To make up for it, Marta resolved that when Russ came over, she would vanish discreetly for the day. Go to Stratford perhaps with a busload of tourists; it might be fun . . . She was turning away from the mirror before she noticed the slip of paper on the dresser, a pencil memorandum: *Mrs. Brown. Call from Antwerp.*

It's Russ, she thought joyfully, to say he'll be here in the morning. She would ring the operator, and then fetch Pauline; the connection would take some time to put through. The operator said: Hold the wire please . . . Antwerp? Your party is waiting. . . . Are you there? . . .

"Hello. Brownie?" . . .

"Russ—is that you? You're coming over tonight?" She asked because she had no doubt of the answer.

"No, I can't make it till Sunday morning."

"Oh," she cried, "Sunday morning!"

"The report took longer than I expected; it's got to be typed yet." He seemed so near, she wanted to reach out, ask him to wait for Pauline. She made a little mournful sound. "What?" Russ enquired.

She said: "Pauline is sailing Saturday."

"I'm sorry. Tell her I'm sorry to miss her. Give her my love."

"Yes," said Marta, and repeated: "Not till Sunday." Too late.

Russ went on: "I've got to be in Antwerp again Tuesday; and then go to Paris, and Rome the week after." One can't ever manage things, Marta thought. "Can you hear me?" Russ said.

"Yes, yes, perfectly." As if he were downstairs.

"Listen," he said very clearly, "will you come back to Antwerp with me Monday night?"

"Sure I will," said Marta.

"And will you"—he had a nice voice, she thought, pitched true, in the middle register, and he stressed the request with the slight emphasis of deliberation—"come to Paris with me?"

"Oh, won't I?" said Marta in ringing tones.

"That's fine," she could hear him chuckle. "I'll call you when I get in Sunday morning. Say goodbye for me to Pauline."

"She's in her room; let me—" The telephone clicked; the operator cut through with an unintelligible formula; Russ suddenly became removed to a great distance, across the Channel.

She sat dejected for five minutes before summoning resolution to walk down the hall and tap on Pauline's door. "I'll be ready in a minute." Pauline was addressing postcards, wearing an air of martyrdom. "Shall I send David the Albert Memorial or the British Museum?" . . . Her attitude of indecision altered subtly to enquiry.

Marta said: "Russ called, long distance."

Pauline remained fixed, her brows drawn in a straight line. "He's not coming?" she said. Bad news is easy to guess.

"Not till—till next week," Marta said. Sunday was next week. It seemed less painful than to say, the day after Pauline must leave. "He sent you his love; he's sorry to miss you."

"How long will he be here?"

"Only one day. He has to be in Paris" . . .

"You could just as well go to Paris," said Pauline.

"He—he asked me to," said Marta. "It won't be as much fun without you."

"We did have a good time, didn't we?" said Pauline. "When we said goodbye at the dock I knew I'd never see him again."

During the remainder of the week Marta was depressed and apprehensive. She would miss Pauline for her own sake. And the charm would be broken. Pauline's intuitive wit had sustained it like a crystal ball upheld by the jet of a fountain. Marta wished to keep its fragile perfection intact. She would rather have absented herself than destroy it by any ineptitude. . . .

Going to Southampton on the boat train was a melancholy business. Fortunately the Schaefers would be embarking at Havre. Pauline hurried aboard, and seized a steward. "I can't stand this mob," she muttered between her teeth. They found the double state-room empty, and Pauline flung her hat in the upper

berth and herself in the lower. "If they put another woman in with me, I shall quietly shove her through the porthole. I hate strange females, spilling violet powder and cheery good-mornings, and showing you snapshots of Napoleon's tomb." She brooded. "I hate this ship. Do you suppose there is any chance of it sinking?"

"I'm afraid not," said Marta, and they smiled wanly. "Do you want me to give Russ any message?"

"No," said Pauline. "Do you think he'll write or send a wireless?"

"He doesn't to anybody," said Marta. "I don't know why not."

"I do," said Pauline. "He's right. Give him my love."

"He'll wire you when he lands in Seattle next spring," Marta added sincerely.

"You believe he really will come?" Pauline asked.

"Yes," said Marta, and grinned. "By way of China. Haven't you guessed—there's a dame in Shanghai."

"What of it?" said Pauline. "As long as she stays in Shanghai—I can't be worrying about other people's troubles all the time, can I?"

The bugles began to sound. "Don't come up on deck," said Marta. "I'll see you at Easter." . . . Nothing had ever estranged them . . .

She took the wrong turning in the corridor, pushed irritably through the mob at the gangway, and was maddened by the discovery that she would have to go

to a station across town for the return train. She knew she would miss it, and did. The taxi-driver derived gratification from her discomfiture, or she imagined he did, and barely repressed a profound impulse toward homicide. If there were any redeeming features of Southampton she did not wish to perceive them, and sat inertly in the station for an hour, till the next train.

London seemed utterly empty. The afternoon was half gone; she stayed in her room, washed her hair, and was sad. At dinner she drank a solitary pint of hock, hoping to induce sleep. . . . She had a dark conviction that she would bore Russ the next day . . . Even sleep, when it came, was leaden with sadness.

CHAPTER XXI

SHE woke perversely at five o'clock, to a pearl-grey dawn. Wide awake. She considered rising and going out to walk through the somnolent city, but then she would be hungry and want breakfast immediately and there mightn't be any; and she had better wait for Russ, though he might have his on the boat-train from Harwich, and she was unable to recall whether it got in at seven or eight, when he would call her room. Through the casement she watched the sky changing color, while she meditated on the infinite odds against the most transient pleasure, since it depends upon an exact conjuncture of inclination and a thousand trivial circumstances beyond control. Even planning is a handicap; she would not have waked at such an hour on any other morning. The best moments of life are fortuitous . . . Stop it, she adjured herself. You are positively boring that sparrow on the windowsill, though it doesn't know what ails it. . . . The sparrow gaped its beak, chirped, and flew away. . . . She took up *Crotchet Castle* and tried to read; it was not the right book; what kind of book could one read at five in the

morning? None. She darned a stocking neatly and thought, how should she talk to Russ without Pauline? Their relation included Pauline; at her departure, it ceased to exist. . . . Oh, go and soak your head. . . .

A practical idea; she dawdled through her bath, and observed before the mirror that she must have gained five pounds. Her shoulder blades were now respectably covered; this afforded her a reassurance she preferred not to analyze. There is no woman, she thought, who would not exchange brains for beauty, if she had any brains. Men find in power, wealth, a partly effective substitute; but only a substitute. In youth, one can enjoy romantic unhappiness, just as a millionaire can afford to be extravagant . . .

At least she had a new frock, sent on from Paris; it hadn't been finished when she left. Light green crepe with a cobweb pattern of grey, sleeveless, and completed by a jacket of the same material, and grey sandals and stockings; she laid them out ready to put on. Once she had asked Alma, resignedly, if she could wear green? It made her paler, that biscuit tone, and her eyes looked like a cat's. No human being, she complained, ever had such a complexion; it's neither blonde nor brune. Alma scrutinized her kindly. You look like one of those pats of cream cheese on a lettuce leaf. Quite nice. With that Marta had to be content. It was as near a compliment as she was likely to get.

Since they were few enough, she could remember

most of the compliments she had ever received; partly because they were apt to be back-handed. Women are pathetic; the plainest cherishes a belief that she possesses some unique perfection. A dimple in her knee, taper fingers, Katisha's left elbow. Or the commonest delusion, Marta admitted sardonically that it had been her own, though discarded several years since, that "there was something about her." *Thisbe, a grey eye or so, but not to the purpose . . .* She rested on the bed, she must have been dozing, for her mind seemed to have floated out of the window, when the ringing of the telephone ripped through the tenuous web of consciousness; so that she felt as if she were in two places at once, and that it was urgently necessary for her to be somewhere else immediately. "I'll be right down," she protested, and Russ was obliged to repeat: "In about twenty minutes." As soon as he had attended to his luggage. That gave her time to dress, but she could not collect her wits, pick up some essential thread.

Impossible to utter anything but good morning, when they met in the lounge; there were so many people about, and more in the breakfast room, multitudes occupying adjacent tables. Five in all, she counted them with bewilderment; and those at some distance, preoccupied with newspapers. They "seemed numerous" because they were so few, making one aware of each separately; they imposed a gelid discretion, one would be overheard. "Did you have a good crossing?" Russ appeared very fresh and fit. How old is

he, she wondered. Fortyish?—he must be older, if he'd been with the company long enough to retire. The only discernible difference in ten years was that he used to dance ardently. He was always rather quiet otherwise; she retained a permanent impression of him in the background, at Alma's. A noticeable quietness, smoldering was the word that suggested itself, whether because of his ability to actually sit still, or just the unexpectedness of his eyes, turquoise, with his olive complexion. Only the music took him out of himself. Dancing with Alma especially, keeping pace with her light lovely feet, when he reversed and swung her about against his arm, the action was pure fire and grace. Marta invariably watched for it. For a moment, it made her oblivious to her own sick fatigue. That was what one desired, not merely to do, but to be.

The waiter brought their coffee; Marta poured it while Russ replied to her question: "I guess there was a head-wind; I slept through, but the boat was late docking at Harwich. Where do you want to go today?" Windsor, she said tentatively; the reason occurred to her after she had spoken. Windsor Forest. He needed to be outdoors; she carefully did not mention that. She too resented advice for her own good. He looked perfectly well. If one night at sea set him up appreciably, a long vacation was all he needed. He had never visited Windsor and accepted the plan at once. He said: "I meant to order a car; but when I

called up our London office, the manager said he'd meet me at the station. So I said I'd not be over till Monday. They don't know I'm here." His expression of secret obstinacy amused Marta; he was playing hookey! She had learned the meaning of that look from Wint Shelby and Floyd Jernegan. One morning in the office she pointed out to Floyd Jernegan a spot of machine oil on the back of his coat-cuff. He glanced at it, said: The starter went wrong. Then he shut his mouth. No doubt as a boy he came home innocently with his hair wet from forbidden swimming. . . . I'll bet they do know Russ is here, she thought . . .

It was a back-handed compliment that she didn't count. No bother; he could put her in his pocket. He said: "I told Aleck Owen I was bringing you back with me, and taking you on to Paris."

For a moment she thought nothing at all. Russ was staring at her, and she had just set down her coffee-cup. He told Owen, that means the whole office. And be damned to them. You couldn't beat that. It was the grand manner. If I had any reputation, it would be safe now. "What did Owen say?"

"He thought it was a splendid idea; he was glad you could go."

"And does Ernest know?" Marta enquired.

"Oh, yes, he was delighted."

"In my lucid intervals," said Marta, "I cannot believe there is any such person as Ernest. There can't be. He is highly improbable. I shall miss Ernest; I

only wish I could miss him altogether. I don't suppose it has occurred to him—"

"It hadn't when I left," said Russ.

"No, of course, it wouldn't," said Marta, and finished her toast pensively. The enchanted mosquito net must remain forever an unattained vision. Russ thought, but anyhow, you . . .

He had about an hour's work to do before he was free. "The report?" Marta asked. He said, with relief, that the report was already mailed to Goodwin. "This is an estimate for the English factory. They say they can't meet our figures. They'll have to; we could do it cheaper in Antwerp." It was policy to place orders with the home factory. "The real trouble is that Colville, the chief engineer here, is bucking me. They don't like Americans." Marta hazarded, that she understood Russ was technical director for the Continent, not England. "Well, it's saving face for the English office, but it comes to the same thing. I'm consultant; when Goodwin isn't here, I represent him. That's why I had to come over. If Colville had sense enough to put the job through, he'd have got the credit." Court politics, Marta thought; the generals of Louis Fourteenth preferred to throw away a victory rather than see a rival win.

In the elevator, they called the same floor, the top; Marta read the number on Russ's key. She exclaimed: "You've got the room next to Pauline's." And Pauline was gone. "Wait a minute," Marta said at her

own door. "I was to give you this." Russ opened the little package rather shyly; he was pleased. "Why, you didn't need to." "Absolutely," she assured him. "Words could not express how mournfully we watched your feet vanish in that freightshed at the Antwerp dock." "My feet?" "Under a string of trucks. After you got past them you went through an archway and turned to the left in the street, and that's all there was, there wasn't any more. So we went below, to restrain ourselves from going ashore again."

He hesitated, as if on the verge of saying something; and then remarked that he would call her when he had finished his chore. . . . Waiting in her room again, Marta indulged her suppressed risibilities. What he had put over was at once too simple and too complex for direct statement. Nothing to do with her reputation. The strictest proprieties would hardly be infringed by two middle-aged people crossing on the same boat, taking the same train to Paris. He had used the occasion to intimate that if he didn't choose to introduce her, it was not because he was engaged in a surreptitious escapade. *All I want is cee-vility, and damn little of that.* . . . Armor plate manufacturers ought to investigate Ernest. He was completely impervious. What is the nature of a bore, she speculated. I suppose they don't wish to be bores. They must bore themselves, too. Egotism—but we're all egotists. It is the condition of individuality. Her own

ego was tough enough to withstand comprehensive dissatisfaction with almost every detail of her person and character. It protested at being so inadequately represented by her appearance, accomplishments and abilities. It rejected the verdict of the mirror. That is not Me. *I'm looking for the face I had before the world was made. . . .*

The trains to Windsor ran every half hour or so; they secured a first-class compartment to themselves. It was so spacious and bright, with large windows and ample settees covered with tapestry stuff, it made her feel prim and shy as a child at a party. Russ too had the air of a small boy in a clean collar, minding his manners. Not exactly a good boy, but subdued by the odds.

The humble suburban gardens, tidy hedges and toy stations were soothing to watch running by. One could almost fancy oneself contented with that gentle monotony as a way of life. At the last, the heart turns toward peace. But only at the last . . .

She roused to attention; Russ was saying that the Owens had intimated a hospitable readiness to give her a dinner. "I told them I thought you'd be too busy," he said. A wonderful excuse, she reflected; busy with what? She suspected he had it on his conscience, refusing without affording her a choice. It was of no consequence to her, though she did not despise the courteous intention. Russ had to escape. One got to that point.

She said: "I'd prefer to do just whatever suits you. It's so restful tagging along. No responsibility. You're not to worry about me at all."

"They give dinners in turn," he said morosely. "And talk over everything next day. When Ernest's sister-in-law was there, nobody did any work for a week. They even had a story that she and I had run off to Brussels."

"Why to Brussels?"

"I don't know," said Russ. "It was her idea; she was driving."

"What?" Sheer curiosity was Marta's besetting sin. "Do you mean to say—"

"I didn't mean to say so." Why had he said it? He wasn't sure himself.

"And then what didn't you do?" Marta pursued.

"We came back again."

"I'm glad of that," said Marta. "I was afraid you might be there yet. Well, there's no reason why one shouldn't drive to Brussels and back."

"It wouldn't have mattered," Russ said reluctantly, "only she told everyone we really had run off to Brussels. She told Ernest and Caroline."

"Not Ernest! Did he turn her out of his house?"

"He explained to me that she didn't mean it that way. She was always unconventional."

"Let me get this straight," said Marta, animated by the pure zeal of cross examination. "A blue-print would be useful. Do I understand that she intimated

you went to Brussels and—and registered at a hotel? You needn't answer if it would tend to anything whatever."

"We didn't register," said Russ, hunching his shoulders.

"No, no," said Marta soothingly. "It's so conventional. The main facts are (a), that you didn't go to Brussels; (b), that you came back again. And (c), that it's none of my business." Now you'll never find out, she thought; it's his nature to curl up like a porcupine when he's prodded with questions.

She was mistaken, for once. Russ muttered: "You don't have to register, in Brussels."

Marta gazed at him uncertainly, during a perceptible pause. She said at length: "I hope—well, you know the story of the man who was asked if his wife was entertaining this winter; and he said, not very."

"I wasn't," said Russ, as if the admission were dragged from him. "I guess she was disappointed."

Marta thought, now if I could only say, I see what you mean; but I can't any more than he can say it if that's what he means. The tradition of gallantry has turned against men with a vengeance . . . She said: "Probably Ernest explained it to her." The conversation had nowhere to go from there. To fill in, Marta enquired: "Is she pretty?" "She must have been a stunner a few years ago," said Russ. "But the way she laps it up. . . . And in Paris she tried to take on the whole International Power staff. She got Gil

Hutchins thrown out of a hotel." Marta asked, by circumlocution, what overt act constituted grounds for ejection from a hotel in Paris? None whatever, it appeared. To the contrary. . . . Hutchins had escorted the lady home from a party. After seeing her out of the elevator, on her own floor, he tried to break away. Her somewhat hysterical protests brought the manager. Hutchins' French was inadequate; and he was escorted to the street door. "Gil was mad as hell. She did her best to square him next day, told the manager she was the one who raised the row, she was drunk, not Gil; but the story had gone all over town."

"It ought to be a lesson to him," said Marta virtuously. "There's a moral in everything, if you can find it. The only couple who ever got thrown out of a hotel in New York happened to be married."

"New York must have changed a lot since I left," said Russ. "Why, no, it's—it's more so," Marta corrected herself. "The tall buildings aren't just scattered around—there's nothing else but. You don't notice while it's happening, but when you look back, you see the difference." Terrible and marvelous. As a child, reading of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, she had regretted that she should never behold them. Now she was satisfied. New York could have accommodated imperial Rome in the back-yard. She had seen the tops of the tallest buildings hidden in the clouds. Even though it should crumble and vanish, it would become the most splendid of all legends.

But most terrible. . . . No abiding place . . .

"The old crowd is sort of scattered," she said. It came to her with faint surprise that she'd gone on thinking of Russ as still one of them, though he'd been away six years. "Nonie must have told you all the news." Buddy Millard and Doris were married before he left, weren't they? Yes, they moved to Croton five years ago. So did Alma after Chase died—her husband, Chase Kirwin. The Connors were in Florida; Marta had heard that Dinty Connor was rumrunning. And Bruce Dwyer had been transferred to Detroit. "There's hardly anyone left but Nonie and me." "I never had any use for Bruce Dwyer," said Russ. "He was the only one I didn't like." "Oh, he's a lightweight," Marta hedged. "Agreeable enough." Russ maintained doggedly, that he couldn't stand the way Bruce used to shoot his cuffs! The crowd was an odd menagerie, Marta agreed; only Alma could have brought them together. "Do you suppose Alma will marry again?" Russ enquired. Marta said: "I shouldn't think so, on account of Cicely." Alma's only child had a weak heart, born so. A gentle, resigned little creature, wistfully pretty. "Besides, losing Chase hit Alma hard." Marta felt Russ's silent reservation, indicated by sheer immobility. She knew, but—Or perhaps she didn't; Russ might know Alma best, some side of her nature hidden from another woman. For we all know different things about our friends, she thought confusedly, and what we don't know might

alter the reading of what we do know. What did she know about Russ? The total of facts was slight and immaterial; nevertheless, she had an intangible certainty about him. Perplexingly, it was when he retreated into his shell that she had the deepest sense of intimacy; she was shy of speaking to him then, it seemed unfair . . .

“This must be Windsor,” they recognized simultaneously.

CHAPTER XXII

"THERE ought to be a drawbridge," said Marta, "with Marmion clanking across, dressed up in the kitchen stove. Or Ivanhoe." They had come out on the terrace overlooking the water-meadows. Windsor is a toy castle, she thought. Big enough, but it's not—not grown-up. Russ said: "There was a picture of Windsor in a book at home, on the marble-topped table in the parlor." Their impression was subjective, Marta recognized; it took them back to ten years old. All the same you can't feel anyone living here. The people who actually *lived* here have been gone so long, even their ghosts are dispersed. . . . They weren't conscientious tourists; they went down the hill, to hire a carriage. Motor cars were not allowed in the Forest.

Their Jehu had a devastating cockney accent, and his ears were wadded with cottonwool. "This ain't no carriage," Marta commented sotto voce, "it's a buggy." She removed her hat, which obscured the landscape. They ambled gently along an earth road; the trees were admirably grouped, and a herd of deer grazed daintily in the middle distance. "I never went buggy-

riding, did you?" Russ said: "Not often," ignoring an unbidden recollection. "At home, I had to be in every night by eight."

Marta exclaimed: "So that's how you got that way?"

"How—what way?"

"Sulking in your corner. When things go wrong, you just sit there, telling yourself you knew they would."

He acknowledged: "How do you know? What's more, the wronger they go the better it suits me. I can't snap out of it, have to wait for it to wear off." . . . No you don't he said to himself, and became stiller. You had your showdown . . . He set his shoulders; Marta was saying: "Oh, I used to watch you. Burning up and eating your own smoke." . . . She'd done it again, touched him. The way a woman does when she really gives you a kiss, slipping her arms under your coat, warm and smooth as silk around your heart. . . . But she's holding her hat on her knee . . .

"When the Prince of Wyles is at the Castle," the driver pointed with his frayed whip, "this is 'is fyorite ride. 'Im and the Duke of York. Abaht where the deer are, they generally tyke different directions; the Prince keeps to the right and the Duke to the left." Russ raised his voice civilly: "Thank you." In a lower tone, addressing the driver's back, he added: "I'm glad they can break away when they're fed up with each other, the Prince and the Duke." . . . Conversation was diffi-

cult to fit in between the unexpected contributions of their cicerone. This had also been Queen Victoria's favorite drive. Frogmore was about twelve miles over yonder. Each time he turned and held them with his glittering eye, the intense intelligent scrutiny of the deaf. His threadbare ulster was buttoned tight across his narrow chest; the raw color on his thin cheekbones might have been weather or drink. Or consumption. Poor soul . . .

The utter inconsequence of an equestrian statue of George the Fourth a mile from anywhere invited them to a respite from the habits of his successors. They descended from their carriage and sat on a convenient tussock of turf. Marta resumed an interrupted remark: "But Goodwin won't be willing to let you retire. Especially if you put over that contract in Rome." Russ said: "I can bring him around." Marta looked enquiring. Russ explained: "On my way back from China, I stopped over in Tokyo to make arrangements for breaking shipments in bond. The Japanese official I had to deal with seemed to take a fancy to me. He must have been nearly seventy; he was retiring at the end of the month, and he fixed up my business in short order. He'd been offering his resignation for ten years. The government wouldn't accept it. One night at dinner the old boy unbelted, told me how he'd worked it finally. He began making mistakes. Not so bad they couldn't be corrected. Then he'd apologize—say his memory was failing. And pretty soon he'd make

another mistake. Till they'd had enough. He didn't dare tell his little joke except to a foreigner. Well, I'll begin making mistakes."

Marta suggested doubtfully, it would go against the grain. When you're used to doing your best. . . .

"I make mistakes now. But I cover them up." Russ hesitated, his characteristic pause before a confidence, which made it more personal.

He said: "Last winter Goodwin sent me to reorganize the service in Rome. Getting ready for this bid we're working on now. I went over the city with surveyors. Though half the time I didn't know where I was. Rome is—oh, you'd never get to the end of it. I'd like to spend a year there. It goes down. . . . Anyhow, I took maps, and made a couple of tracings, dotted in one for population, another for our connections, and approximated them. To get district centers. After I'd checked it over three times, we had a conference of the board and the local engineers. They said it was great. And the general manager said: 'I'm glad you've decided to move the administration office.' I nearly went through the floor. Lucky I was too stunned to speak right away. The administration office! I'd clean forgotten it when I centered the whole plan. After I came to, I said: of course, that depends on whether the site is available. They said, oh, yes, they could get the site. They'd wanted to make the move, but hadn't got further than talking about it. . . . That was my big hit. If you want to know, it's why Goodwin made me

technical director for Europe. So now you know more than he does.”

“My gosh!” said Marta. “Pure genius! If you detect me regarding you with awe, you’ll know that’s what it is. By the way, could you stop this rain?” A drop splashed on her nose.

“If I detect you doing anything of the kind, I’ll know you’re giving me the raspberry,” said Russ, as they strolled back to their carriage. He regarded her with well-grounded suspicion during the remainder of the afternoon. . . . He shuts up like a clam, she thought, because he’s naturally candid. It’s his only defence. He knows that if he answers at all he is likely to tell the truth. He has literally nothing to say to Ernest; he can’t very well say what he thinks of him, and he’d sooner be shot than let Ernest in on his thoughts about anything less, his private mind. Even his disconnected literal statements are keys to some personal experience; and he stops himself just in time, as he did at the conference. In his position he has to practically gag himself; his least remark might be twisted into office politics. He has nobody to tell his little jokes to, like the old Japanese. . . . How dangerous it is to go near any human being. Tigers are safe by comparison. When Sisera fell asleep in the tent of Jael, she drove a nail into his head. And everybody said it was very clever of her. . . . Yet we have to open to somebody. We don’t tell quite all, there’s always something we hold back. We’d deny it to the Recording Angel, on the

Judgment Day. Maybe only a trifle, most likely a stupidity that cheapened a good intention. But there's usually one big thing, a tragedy or a cowardice or a betrayal. And a few very funny episodes, scandalous, that come back suddenly at the most inappropriate moment, and you have to lie in a hurry when you're asked what you are smiling at. Like Keith's silver watch . . . I wonder what would be the one thing Russ would never tell . . .

"Well, my work is totally ridiculous," she said. "Any way you look at it." So it was. A weekly comic strip. "I can't even draw." She made the characters with circles and triangles. The foolish dialogue had won for it a measure of success. She could invent it only by not thinking at all in the process. It had begun as a joke, in letters to Alma, who showed them to a friend—the editor of a "woman's page," who suggested the possibility of using them for "fillers." They had caught on. This preposterous stuff got her a living, even got her photograph "in the papers," for the bedazzlement of Ernest. What had it to do with the years of hard work that had gone before? Nothing but that she extracted her comedy from the stuff of common experience . . . Certainly she had been the sport of chance. Other people must be more capable of shaping a career according to a predetermined plan. Only she didn't yet know what it was she had wanted to do. Some grave, exact and exacting occupation, with a scholarly or mathematical technique. Or else to be

wholly scatterbrained and idle. Probably if she had had money, she would have played about frivolously. Between these extremes of disinterested concentration and utter irresponsibility, she would have found no satisfaction. The middle way no doubt was best; the fault was in herself. She couldn't walk straight along a pavement. Under the yoke of necessity, she had done her work as well as possible; she had no other merit.

"You either get the breaks or you don't," she quoted, as they drove back through the moist teeming greenness, more than ever at the mercy of the driver. "I'll bet if you thumb-screwed the truth out of any successful man, he'd own up that he had arrived by a fluke. But that doesn't do more than even the odds; he had to be able to use the chance when it came. There are years and years when nothing will go through, no matter how you break your neck and your heart, trying." . . . He knew it only too well. In the big companies, the important positions, or rather the well-paid ones, were filled by favor. It was hard enough to get the work done so somebody's son or nephew might blandly pocket the prestige and profit. Inheriting his place has a fundamental effect on a man; he goes through the motions, but he doesn't know what it's all about. You have to work around him; he is simply in the way . . . "When you land your Roman contract," said Marta, "it won't be by accident."

"Do you think I can?" Russ asked. It wasn't, he

explained, a question of engineering, in the final issue. It concerned the other branch of management, a matter of negotiation and financing. His business in Milan had been with bankers. Goodwin was working on it himself. . . .

Marta saw he was asking her quite simply for a word of assurance, to be believed in. "Of course you can," she said with conviction.

"I've never been very good at persuading people," Russ said.

"But don't you know you can get people to do any thing you choose?" she exclaimed. "I mean *you* can."

"How?" he enquired.

"I can't analyze it. You—you just sit there," she broke into laughter. "And they want to please you. You always could have, but I suppose you didn't know." It's true, she thought. I'm trying to please him. But we all need to be told. It's little enough to do for someone you like. We don't say the nice things we think about our friends. We make compliments to strangers. . .

Russ said: "Aleck Owen was afraid to take it on. I said, if he didn't want to help, I'd handle it alone. He said of course he wanted to help, he was all for it. So now he can't go against me."

Neat, Marta thought; Russ trumped the trick. The technical staff was there to execute projects and policies decided by the general management, both being answerable to Goodwin. And Owen had handed over his

special authority to Russ, *carte blanche*. "You should ask me how!" she said . . . The driver said he thought it was clearing up.

They had a belated lunch in the chilly and deserted dining-room of the very English hotel in the royal town. Bad luck that it should have rained. Genuinely English hotels hold in solution the essence of innumerable wet days. Marta forced herself to keep up a desultory flow of frivolity; if she allowed the pall of gloom to settle, no human strength could lift it. "There must be a law," she surmised, "against washing salad in England. And the English are a law-abiding race." Russ said: "You remind me a good deal of Harriet Gwynn." Marta investigated an accessory slice of beetroot unhelpfully. "Who is Harriet Gwynn?"

"My wife," said Russ.

I don't know the answer to that, Marta thought. She could only stammer: "Excuse it please. The fact is, I'm in ignorance of your dark past. Except that you've been married and maybe divorced." "I believe so," said Russ. "Harriet wrote me that the divorce had gone through, while I was in China." Then they are still on speaking terms, Marta thought. Better not enquire how I remind him. . . . "I'm not," divorced, she meant. "I was afraid I'd get married again in a thoughtless moment, and I have a hunch that if you can't make it stick the first time, you might as well quit." "I think you're right," Russ agreed. "No matter who I was married to, I'd fall for someone else." "What you

need," Marta advised, "is a card index system." . . . Maybe he wants to talk about his wife. But I made a *gaffe* once. . . . How do I remind him? . . . She was completely at a loss.

It was time to catch the return train. Russ must have been up at six, Marta thought, while she said mendaciously that she would rest an hour before dinner, in case he wished to. They walked to the station. . . . The toy engine of their train aroused Russ's professional interest; it resembled a tea-kettle in a tea-cart. Marta said: "Did you ever go over the Rogers Pass, in the Rockies, before they tunneled it? The mountain division was only ten or fifteen miles long. They put on four and sometimes six Mogul locomotives for the big transcontinental passenger trains. At night, hitting that three per cent. grade, two engines in front and two behind, pouring out streams of smoke and fire, it was like going to hell on a first-class ticket. Perched up in a sort of crow's nest in the observation car. There was a man from Pittsburgh asked me to elope with him. Made you feel like that." She regretted her refusal. "I didn't, so I've never seen Pittsburgh." She was making conversation out of whatever came to mind.

"When was that?" Russ enquired.

"Dun't esk." A long time. But he's seen your passport. "Twenty years ago."

Russ said: "I was in Pittsburgh twenty years ago."

"Why, of course, that's where you met Nonie."

"The year I was married," said Russ. . . . He does

want to talk about her, Marta thought. Their train drew up to the platform. Russ opened the door. "It was Nonie introduced me to Harriet."

"You certainly mixed those babies up," said Marta wildly. And stopped as a very correct English couple got into the same compartment. They fell back on banalities, at uncertain intervals. Their train was a local, all way-stations. "We must be on the wrong train," said Marta finally. "I'm sure we're running around London in circles. About midnight we'll arrive at the end of the line—Magnum Parva or Stoke Poges or Little Pudlington." To her complete discomfiture, the English lady opposite said courteously: "This is the London train. Waterloo station." Marta replied feebly: "Thank you," and subsided. . . . A dismal station; but the street lamps were lit in the city.

Russ paused at the porter's desk in the hotel to make reservations for tomorrow's boat. He showed Marta, doubtfully, the slip he had filled out. "Is that right? Nonie used to call me down for spelling her name wrong. I can't spell." *Martha Browne*. "Perfectly correct," said Marta gravely. He did pretty well to spell *both* my names wrong, she thought. I wouldn't tell him for worlds—the duck. Besides, she had been named Martha. Her full name was a dreadful secret. Martha May!

She spent the rest hour powdering her nose repeatedly and wondering if the day had been a failure. She had missed Pauline . . . Russ was wearing the green tie

when they went to dinner. The French restaurant they pitched upon was absolutely empty except for themselves; Sunday night in August, out of season. She had lost all her cues, and talked extravagant nonsense. She didn't dare stop. Russ was so quiet, she couldn't tell what he made of it; was it the color or the wide open directness of his eyes that lent them such inscrutable innocence? . . . No heel-taps. Better leave too soon than overstay. "This is such a homelike corner; doesn't it remind you of the back room of the old New York saloon? Family entrance. It was always cool in summer, and so correct. Ladies were not allowed to smoke." She extinguished her final cigarette and lifted her arms to put on her hat. The attitude drew her thin frock close. . . . Breasts like a maid, he thought. In Alma's car. . . . She said you always could have. . . . But that wasn't what she was talking about. . . . And damn it, you always wanted to . . .

He said: "Will you write me when you get back to New York?" "Of course I will. Twice. You'll intend to answer, but you'll put it off. I daresay it's more sensible to forget people when they're away." . . . He thought: If I could work it through Colville, have him send for Ernest. . . . He said: "I don't forget. It's because I'm sure I'll see them again."

Why, that must be so, she thought, rather dazed. He did send word, this year and last year and the year before, to Alma and to me. Asking us to come over. . . . "I always have a feeling that I won't see my

friends again," she said unguardedly. "On the dock at Antwerp. . . ." The waiter was presenting the bill, and she was grateful for the interruption. In the street, Russ said: "I went back to the dock at Antwerp."

"You came back?"

"Yes. Those drunks were still quarreling at the gangplank. You weren't on deck."

We had gone below, Marta thought sadly. Because it was so dreary without Russ. He didn't want us to leave. And if we'd seen him, we'd have gone ashore again. That's the way things are. . . . A cab cruised up to the curb. The hotel was only a dozen blocks distant; Russ said: "Shall we drive around for a few minutes? They say Westminster Bridge is fine at night." "I'd love to see it." A few more minutes . . . She folded her hands prettily. The night was soft and cool, too sweet to spoil; when Russ offered her a cigarette she shook her head, turning slightly toward him with the gesture. . . . She was not aware how it happened, only that he was holding her close, kissing her. As they had once kissed. . . . She flung her hat to the floor of the cab and slid out of her silk coat to clasp her bare arms about his neck. He said, with a deep sigh, as if he couldn't help himself: "Oh, you must, you must!" With his hand over her heart. She was changing into a cloud. A feather against amber . . .

The cabman said: "Westminster Bridge, sir."

The universe stopped. . . . There was a cabman. He

repeated inexorably: "This is Westminster Bridge."

Marta said: "To hell with it."

Russ chuckled, while she recovered her hat and coat and purse. The cabman said: "Thank you, sir." The long dim-lit level of the bridge stretched over an unfathomable gulf. Two or three people moved on it at a distance. Marta had to hold to Russ's arm; they leaned upon the parapet, and saw faint streaks of gold and silver glimmering far below in the liquid darkness. Across the Thames an immense electric sign made a broad golden blur. Russ said: "You'll be glad to know that Hilgate's Toothpaste is the best." "Where?" said Marta. "That sign," Russ explained. She said: "I thought it was all the stars," and they kissed again. They were both laughing. Like a drunken sailor and his girl, Marta thought; no, a sailor and his drunken girl; Russ drank nothing. "Why did I pay off the cab?" Russ said aloud. He hadn't known what he was doing either. She was glad of it. He signalled another taxi and gave the address of the hotel. They sat apart; Marta concentrated with an intense effort—her hat, her hair. . . . She must walk through the lounge and ask for her key. . . . She had it. The lift boy paid no attention to them; they were silent and perhaps appeared sleepy. They waited until the lift had sunk out of sight again. Russ looked at Marta; the hall was quite empty and she opened her door . . . They had always liked each other. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

THE waiters were indubitably French. Marta was down a few minutes early, and postponed her order. "Ah, madame will wait for monsieur?" the headwaiter surmised sympathetically. I've breakfasted with Pauline every day for two weeks, Marta thought; and just once, yesterday, with Russ; trust the *garçon* to comprehend. She was still capable of blushing; when Russ joined her she could see that it amused him. Also that he must have slept well. They made a fair pretense of reading the paper. Russ apologized for not being able to fix a time for lunch; he would have to telephone her. She suggested that he should let it go; and he admitted that he was in for a heavy day. . . . So then she must have shopped or walked in the park; and they met for a hurried dinner at the hotel. Her luggage seemed extremely conspicuous as it was brought down; the boat train was full; and there were people Russ knew on the boat. They hadn't really spoken to one another since he said good-night, until he helped her find her stateroom; his was on the deck above. When he put his arms around her she knew

it had been a very heavy day. She sat beside him on the berth, with his cheek against hers. "Did you get them to accept your estimate?" "They had to," he said. But it was like lifting a dead weight to deal with the English.

"Isn't that a new suit?" It was; he turned around, submitting it to her approval; was she in favor of pleats at the waistband? He also required her to certify the set of the collar. Well, perhaps the collar was a trifle loose, she said, patting and pulling it judicially. She thought, he's acting quite naturally as if I were his wife in the sight of God! Harriet could have held him; he's the married kind. He'd have cheated a bit, of course. Perhaps that's part of being married. The "modern" idea of being "perfectly frank" is fatuous. You cheat because you want to cheat; there's no point in it otherwise. . . "I told them to cut it closer," Russ said, with gloomy satisfaction. He had ordered four suits on his last visit to London. One of the men from the office would bring the rest next week. What opulence, she commented. Four suits, and trusty messengers to fetch and carry. "You don't know the worst," he smiled sheepishly. "One of 'em is a morning coat and striped trousers. And—" "Don't keep me in suspense," she begged. "I've got a silk hat," he said.

She clasped her hands. "Could I see you in it?" "Not if I see you first," he retorted. "It's the bankers' special. A banker has absolute confidence in a silk

hat." "He thinks it's full of rabbits," Marta conjectured. "You haven't changed, Brownie," he said. "I'm afraid not," she said rather sadly. "That's the awful part of it." Everything else changed . . . Russ passed his hand across his eyes. "Is the light too strong?" she asked.

"I forgot my glasses again," he said. "And working all day with figures. . . . Sometimes for a minute there's a sort of curtain shuts down. I don't need them when I'm out of doors."

But that's bad, she thought, with a catch at her midriff, where fear is. I mustn't say so. He knows it well enough. . . . He took her orders trustfully. She pulled the berth curtains to make a shadow, wetted a handkerchief with rosewater and laid it across his eyes, pressing her fingertips along the arch. "Does that hurt?" "Not much," he said. "That's the supra-orbital nerve," she said, "in case anyone should ask you; or even if they don't, it is anyhow." She had probably got the terminology wrong; but there was no mistake about the trouble, a serious congestion. Yet what vitality he had, quick and warm. *From too much love of living* . . . "My arms ache at nights," he said. Since it was not for herself, she asked: "Do you positively promise to give yourself a vacation next Easter? When you've hung round Nurscia's altars the golden shields of Rome?" "Yes, I will," he promised. "I'll go out to the farm. If you'll come and visit." . . . *And he saw on Palatinus the white porch of his home* . . . "You

should worry," she said. "I expect we'll all move in. Alma and me and the rest. Like Ernest."

Russ said: "I tried to persuade Colville he needed Ernest in London this week. He didn't get the idea." After a significant interval he added: "I think Ernest is going to the factory next month."

I hope he does, Marta thought vindictively.

"This is making you sleepy?" she said. "Mhmm," he assented. She sent him away. Like a good boy. . . .

They found each other on deck in the morning; the river was bright in the sun; and several people spoke to Russ, with an accent of curiosity, as they went ashore. Marta thought, I ought to be painted up to the part. The extra suitcases had a flagrant air; if only she had a portable dog or a parrot in a cage, it would be perfect . . . Albert met them with the car, and Berthé hurried to the door when she heard Russ's key in the lock. A buxom Flemish housewife, with coils of russet hair and generous curves; Marta thought, all the Dutch painters have immortalized her in her kitchen, in a golden glaze, surrounded by ruddy copper pans and mounds of fruit. Her beaming welcome included Marta. Russ spoke to her in French, and her face clouded; she made a motion over her shoulder. The three of them were enveloped in a conspiratorial hush. Ernest was at breakfast. . . .

It's a chemical reaction, Marta thought. . . . Russ changed, not merely into another person but another substance, dense, intractable, impenetrable. She her-

self was turning into a wooden doll . . . Yes, it was a fine morning; no, the Channel was smooth . . . The large bright room became a vacuum, a railway station or public hall. . . . They would stand there forever, Ernest holding his napkin, his eyeglasses gleaming aridly . . .

He did, finally, depart. "Tell Albert to bring the car back," said Russ. "I'll be at the office in an hour." They strained their ears for the sound of the descending elevator. "I thought he'd go if I let him use the car," said Russ. Berthé cleared Ernest's place with exemplary speed; not until then would Russ take his own chair at his own table. "He makes one feel so incurably respectable," said Marta dejectedly. Even parrots and lapdogs would have been unavailing. "I'll have coffee, because it's bad for me. I guess the end of a misspent life *is* respectability. And the executors burn all the evidence; and the biographers insist that the late lamented was fundamentally a good Christian, though by oversight not a church member." . . . Russ enquired of Berthé, was Ernest dining in? Most certainly. Then they would dine out. Tomorrow night, Berthé said, Ernest would be absent, attending a farewell dinner for somebody. Russ translated the information for Marta. So they could dine at home tomorrow. Berthé looked warmly pleased. . . . Anyone but Ernest would take the hint, though anyone but Ernest wouldn't need it.

I might as well improve my mind, Marta thought;

and decided upon the Plantin Museum, which Henri had omitted from his cultural itinerary. A lucky choice, it was finer and richer than any palace, with a beauty fit for use and wear, beauty in grain. The workshop was next the parlor; and the sony dames in silks that would stand alone had an air of being ready to step down from their gilt frames, roll up their sleeves, and flour their plump arms to the elbow in the bread-trough. Good for the bourgeoisie; you couldn't beat them at their best. . . . She stayed a long while, sitting in the cloistered porch, before returning to the apartment, where Russ was to pick her up for dinner. Perhaps Berthé would give her a cup of tea.

Berthé opened the door and her arms, placing the entire menage at Marta's disposal. Marta followed her to the kitchen and indicated her simple desires by pointing; they arrived at a profound understanding through alternate repetitions of "Non, non," "Ah, oui," and "merci," punctuated with laughter. Presently Berthé left her in the living-room, with a smile that enfolded her, tucked her up, gave her leave to roam about at leisure, take a bath or a nap, pocket the silver spoons. . . . Berthé dotes on Russ, thought Marta, even to the extent of adopting any stray female he chooses to bring in. She feels he ought to have whole harems, as his just due, if he wants them. Complete devotion, for fifteen dollars a month. . . . Women are simpletons, I'm afraid, but nice simpletons. They spend themselves on small things, and are taken for granted,

so they get neither cash nor credit. Women of Berthé's kind; not me. I'm probably of no significance whatever, an accident of social evolution. What can you be by yourself, if all you want is to stay outside the scheme? . . . Why did They send me back again? I knew all the answers. And I won't give in. I can die as often as They can send me back; that's one on them. Because death is their trump card, as long as we fear it. As soon as we know better, it's ours. Because I know it, I'll have to live to be old this time; I'll hate it but I can stand it. I'll hate it like hell, though. I didn't know that I knew quite soon enough. But if They send me back once more, I shall . . .

That was queer. Her mind did that sort of thing sometimes. She had been thinking about women and men. Men did not want to be women, or said they didn't. And though women were supposed to, she had never wished to be a man. Why not? Because as a woman she found men interesting? Maybe men had the same reason; they'd have no place to go in the evening, as the man said when he refused to marry his mistress. . . . It's nothing but words. I'm fond of Pauline and Russ, not women and men. Russ could get a young and pretty girl for five dollars, if it came to that. He has, often enough, I daresay. I liked Wint Shelby, but not . . . I'm afraid we have souls. And what they do to us is plenty . . .

Russ arrived and they escaped before Ernest came in. But they couldn't go back later; Ernest would be

there. Antwerp was lost. She knew it the next evening beyond doubt. Russ called for her at her hotel. She hoped she looked passable, in a black lace dinner dress; her arms were rounded, and she had gained color as well as weight. . . . If only they had delayed half an hour. . . . There was a coat closet in the hall of the apartment, with several hats on the pegs; as she took off her light wrap, she asked Russ: "Which side is yours?" "Both sides," Russ growled. "The apartment is mine." Ernest emerged from the spare bedroom, angular and formal in a white tie and claw-hammer. He advanced relentlessly, shook hands, did the honors.

They sat congealed for another interminable period. Years. While she faded, grew blurred and blanched, felt her hair feathered with white over the left temple, where the pain was acute when she had her sick headaches. A woman of forty, in a black evening dress, suitable to her age—oh, what was the use, she'd be forty-two next November. And one must sit still, pretend not to care. Nothing was left but dignity, the coldest comfort under heaven. Frost settled on Russ's head, grizzled his heavy brows; she hadn't noticed before, he was grey. He sank into himself immovably. His expression was not a mask, it was his daily self, the man in authority, whose subordinates approached him with circumspection. Someone she had never met. . . . By themselves, they saw each other as they had been ten, fifteen years ago, when they were

still young, or young enough; when there was time ahead instead of past. *Their blood runs round the roots of time like rain . . .* One couldn't even remember it with Ernest in the room. Talking about the Federal Reserve Board. She suppressed a singular upsurge of animosity against that institution, a conviction that it was unsound in theory and pernicious in its practices. It must be, if Ernest held it in reverence; it ought to be abolished. Before it ruined the country . . .

"Do you mind if I get rather drunk?" Marta asked Russ, when at length Ernest had torn himself away. "My God," said Russ, "did you know he was there, when we came in?" "Sure," said Marta, surprised. "Instantly. I'd know it through a six-inch plank. I thought you said that on purpose, for his benefit." She did get rather drunk. She might as well. And they discussed the stock market. They might as well. Because sooner or later Ernest would return.

The stock market, Marta said muzzily, must crash soon. She had said so for two years, and it didn't; so she wasn't going to change her opinion for another equally erroneous. Russ thought it wouldn't? But how, Marta asked with owlish solemnity, could it keep up? Russ believed in the New Economic Era. The ratio of production was increasing by multiplication instead of addition. There was no limit. When manufacturing was literally handicraft, the luxury of the few meant narrowing the necessities of the many. Now

everybody could have enough; and war was obsolete, ineffective as a means of acquisition. . . .

Maybe everything is different, Marta said dubiously. But it feels the same. Like a boom out West. They used to have a boom every few years. It always broke . . . And in New York, she said, you don't get more for your money. Less, if anything; you pay more for the same thing. Miserable cramped apartments on Park Avenue, with low ceilings and inside rooms, at ten thousand a year. Millionaires driving out to their Long Island estates through miles of mean suburbs and rubbish dumps. . . . "It ought to be the way you say," she conceded. "If people had any brains. When I was a kid I thought it would be splendid to grow up and have brains. You see, I thought grown people had brains. Last week I invented a theory, that the more you learn, the more chances you run of being wrong. If you don't know anything at all, you have one chance out of the possible number of answers of guessing right. If you deduce from incomplete data, inevitably the answer is wrong . . . I trust I am boring you as much as I am myself?" she concluded anxiously, searching for a cigarette. Russ went to ask Berthé if more could be obtained in the neighborhood at that hour of the night. Their dialogue drifted out to Marta; it was very odd, she could understand French at exactly this stage, as if by a slow motion process, her mind retaining the sentences in suspension until she could examine them. Berthé

was saying it was eleven o'clock. Time to go . . .

The white waterfall of net was a veil of tears as she resumed her cloak before the wardrobe mirror. "If you didn't have to continue living here," she said, "it would be interesting to see whether Ernest would move out tomorrow if—" No. She sounded like Ernest's sister-in-law . . . Ernest's approval or disapproval would be equally cheapening. Sink down into yourself, talk about the weather or the tariff, move objectively through a brittle world . . .

Russ had opened the drawer of a cabinet. "Would you care for this?" She didn't see what it was until he had slipped on her wrist a bracelet of pale gold inset with polished white jade and rose-quartz, plain and delicate. "But it's perfect," she said, and wondered how he had come by it. He thought of that too. She might be offended if she knew. Or she might laugh. He had seen it in a Chinese shopwindow, one evening when he was lit, and bought it. Next morning he couldn't recall whether he had meant to give it to Louise or send it to Harriet or Nonie. So he kept it. He liked it himself; so he wished to give it to Brownie now, not satirically. He had an inexplicable fancy about Brownie, as if he didn't know exactly who she was. There were always obstacles. But the next time he would recognize her by the token . . . If he did two days' work in one tomorrow, they could get away to Paris the next day. . . .

A mosquito bit her that night; and she slapped it

with a drowsy ferocity that made her head ring.

On the train, they were merely going away, they hadn't got anywhere yet. . . . The grain-fields were half reaped. Previously, Marta had been struck by the absence of any trace of war, over the debatable ground. Russ said: "Look at the trees." She was at a loss. "They're all the same height," he said. "Mown off by the artillery fire; second growth."

"Did you want to go to the war?" she asked.

He said: "Not this war."

"Why, did you know a better one?"

"The Spanish-American was the war I wanted to go to," he said.

"You weren't old enough," she assumed casually. "Wasn't I?" "You couldn't have been." "What do you think?" "I can't guess," she acknowledged. "That's a break for me," he said. "I nearly gave myself away." She thought, if he was, say, eighteen in ninety-eight, he'd be forty-eight. . . . Yesterday she could have believed it. Not now; he was himself again, young—young enough—and sulky and truant. But there were those peaceful wheatfields. And all the quiet people who astonish one by light allusions to unimaginable disasters they have survived . . . Whatever his age, he didn't like it either. No more than she.

He said abruptly: "I couldn't wire from the office for hotel reservations. What would you—"

She almost said, your usual arrangement. She said instead hurriedly: "Whatever you think best. The

custom of the country. . . .” “Oh, I’ve visited around,” he said. “But I guess it would be more comfortable—only I didn’t know if you might want to see your friend Jane.” She said: “I could tell her I’m at the same hotel as before. The French telephone service will baffle her. And I’ll go there afterward . . . Do I have to show my passport?” “No, but you’ll have to sign your name.” He was trying to get a rise out of her, watching her color mount. “I can spell,” she said. “It’s quite a nice name.”

Paris was a wholly strange city; she had no sense of revisiting it. Through the back of her head she was conscious of Russ looking over her shoulder while she wrote. She falsified her age brazenly, to cheek him . . . A copy of the hotel registrations went to the police bureau. It would be there, buried in the files, forever, part of the census of an imaginary city. . . . Upstairs, the staccato yelps of the taxi-horns, muted by the side-street, re-created the real Paris. But it was outside. The large, shabbily clean room was characterless, not French, not anything, merely an enclosed space. Like the blank intervals on a map, unexplored; here no writ ran. . . . *Late, late in the evening Kilmeny came home; and nobody knew where Kilmeny had been . . .* Russ opened his suitcase, and the room acquired another quality. Now it belonged to them. Temporarily. So much space and so much time, clearly separated from everything that went before or might come after. The

hour when all cats are grey . . . "How neatly you pack," she said.

"Berthé packs for me. When I get back, it looks like a bad accident. And I throw my clothes on the floor. . . . May I take off my coat?"

They began to laugh. His face was smooth against hers, though he hadn't shaved since morning. He hardly needed to shave; perhaps that was why he retained such a deceptively boyish expression. He said: "I haven't been very—entertaining."

She said: "I like being here with you . . . Anyway." "You're a dear," he said. They had a great kindness for each other. Only the simplest words would do. He wanted to sleep in her arms, literally, not a euphemism.

CHAPTER XXIV

“ONE moment, please—good heavens—” Marta broke off to answer a muffled enquiry from Russ, “nothing; I was speaking to the waiter.” Russ called back: “Look in the inside left pocket.” “I’ve got change,” she replied. She shut off her mind. . . . “Thanks, *merci*, that will do.” The waiter arranged the breakfast tray and departed. She wished there was a bolt on the door; locks were a mere formality . . . Russ came out wearing a dark grey figured cotton kimono, tied with a black sash; the pattern of the fabric was in some indescribable fashion masculine. When men wore lace ruffles and ribbons, no doubt the stuff took on the quality of its intended use as soon as the web was cut. His wet hair was brushed up into a solemn comic crest, rather Japanese, too. He always looked extremely clean.

“Those waiters,” said Marta, “make me so nervous. I had no idea French farces were absolutely realistic, with everyone popping in and out of doors and diving under beds. The waiter knocks and you yell wait a minute, and he oozes through the keyhole immediately.

Pauline broke all records for the standing broad jump the first morning. Then the waiter lingered chattily to improve his English on us; he cherished an ambition to go to New York. We revenged ourselves by teaching him that in America the correct come-back to 'how do you do' is 'not so hot.' He went out saying it over—not so hot, not so hot. I hope he tried it on the next New England school teacher he caught rising like Venus from the bath. . . . You look like Genji."

Hardly, said Russ, this was the cheapest kind. "But Genji imparted a superior elegance to whatever he deigned to wear," said Marta, eating a ripe black fig, which made the bitter French coffee taste agreeably tonic. She was ragging him; she was a good sport. Shuffled up the cards and laughed. He ought to be satisfied. He didn't want to be foresworn again . . . Then what did he want? What more? . . . After everything, he still wasn't sure. . . .

"Yours is the real thing," he commented. Plain white, with no ornament but an embroidered medallion. Not the flashy export stuff. "It's the equivalent of a petticoat, I believe," Marta said. "To be worn underneath." "A chemise," Russ said. "They wear three; and the white one has to be tied with a pink string, a narrow sash; pink for luck." Marta had noticed that he knew all he needed to know about women's clothes, in several languages. He had had a great many women. She didn't mind being one of them. Not now. As there must be a last time, she might be rather grateful

to those others. Perhaps out of all one lost or spoiled one gained just enough instruction for that last time. *Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part; Nay, I have done, you get no more of me. . . .* "I shall buy me a pink string today," she said. "For luck."

Russ said: "Sometimes you remind me of my wife so much you make me shudder."

She was taken aback. "I'm sorry—what did I do?" "No," he said, "I didn't mean it that way. She was—interesting." Marta had it at last.

"You're in love with her yet."

"A little," he said.

Now Brownie would be huffed . . . But she wasn't. You couldn't ever tell what Brownie would do. And that was how she reminded him of Harriet.

"She was the one!" Marta said.

"That made trouble between me and Nonie," Russ said. "Nonie expected me to hate Harriet, never think of her or speak of her again." Marta asked: "What was it about her, Harriet, that gave her such a hold on you?" "I don't know," he said. "She was like a bad child I'd taken into the family; she belonged. And she *was* a bad child." . . . Heedless and headlong. A wish was a plan to her; she turned night into day; she couldn't get on with his mother—who could?—but all those trifles, however multiplied, were immaterial. They parted, inevitably, because they were going different ways. . . . "Were you happy together?" Marta asked. "Yes. But that's not enough . . ." Isn't it?

Marta thought. It came between you and Nonie. And yet Nonie was wrong. You oughtn't ever to hate anyone you've been so close to. It will destroy you; it destroys the world. . . . "We were afraid we might quarrel seriously, turn on each other; that's why we agreed to a divorce," Russ said. "And I fell in love with Nonie. I guess I haven't got it in me to be faithful to one woman for long."

"How long?" Marta asked quizzically. "A week?"

"Oh, you—I could stand you for at least six weeks. You're about six different women. You don't have to go to bed with a man to keep him interested. But you'd be all right even if you hadn't any brains." He said something else. . . . A wave of scarlet flowed up over her neck and face. "Did I shock you—a woman of experience like you?" he quoted. She realized that he enjoyed making her blush, give herself away. As if to even the score . . . She was astonished. When he had only had to ask, on his own terms . . . She shook her head, and went to the dresser for a cigarette, and said obliquely: "Pauline hit me off: I'm not quite bright."

Russ came over with a match. He asked: "Have you ever seen Westminster Bridge at midnight?" His charming smile was reflected in the mirror.

"No, but I've heard it's wonderful." She put down the lighted cigarette carefully. "It was you," she said. "The same as the other time, coming back from Brooklyn. What did you suppose?"

He said: "I thought you were trying to see if you could get me going. Well—you could."

She made a sign of dissent. "Why, I let you—" He asked: "Would you have?" She answered: "You put the comether on me once. So I was afraid to go near you. Because—oh, you were separated from your wife; and in love with Nonie. And you weren't living with Nonie either. You needn't tell me; Nonie is a virgin. I thought you were looking for a—a substitute."

"No," said Russ slowly, "I wouldn't do that."

"Not—not on purpose," she explained. "And not me especially. I didn't think badly of you. You've got an affectionate disposition. I guess it wasn't any too easy for you; and that would have made it worse. With everybody, your friends, Alma and the rest . . ."

He knew now what more he had wanted. He hadn't liked to think she could do that to him and not care. Affectionate was a good word! Probably she was right . . . Though whether it was better or worse to pick up a girl occasionally, as he used, he didn't know. He had done it, and that was that. . . . Or to seduce a virgin under promise of marriage. . . . No credit to him if Nonie wouldn't. . . . They would then certainly have been married, as soon as it was possible—and he'd rather not figure that out either . . .

"When you're in a small set, it's taken for granted you belong to somebody," he said. Marta examined the implication disinterestedly. He *had* belonged to

somebody. The problem of conduct involved would baffle the College of Jesuits to untangle. They'd have cheated like a shot if they had imagined they could get away with it; and most likely they'd have risked it anyhow if either had suspected the other's inclination. Furthermore, she guessed accurately the alternative he took . . .

Evidently I never had any morals, she told herself. Or only in reverse, an outlaw ethic. . . . She blinked as Russ said: "Was there anything between Dinty Connor and Alma?" "Nothing," said Marta promptly, glad to be able to speak the truth. . . . Flattering even to make the running against Alma. We want everything, she thought. So that's why Russ had no use for Bruce Dwyer. He won't ask about Bruce . . . He didn't.

Russ was going to the office for an hour or two; then he'd be through; it was Saturday. "I beg your pardon," he said suddenly, "do you mind—" Not at all; she stammered slightly, aware that her embarrassment sprang from the opposite cause. She had been thinking, he's uncommonly well-built, not middle-aged. None of us would mind, if we could afford it. You can tell fairly well by the set of his head, she thought, the same as in those old Roman portrait busts . . . Russ was holding his chin up, with the intense seriousness of a man concentrating on the back of his neck, adjusting his tie. She crossed over and smoothed the fold of the collar. His shirt was of white handloom silk. "More than Oriental splendor. With mono-

grams!" "I wouldn't have thought it of myself, back in Rockford, Illinois," he said, half apologetic. "But why not? You brought them from China?" "Well, this lot just came; I asked a friend there to have them send me a new supply . . ." He must write to Louise. Next week. . . . "They always put on monograms," he added, as if exculpating himself. "It's cute," said Marta, and bent her head to kiss the neat white silk letters. "It's over your heart." He felt it there, a shudder that was both pleasure and pain. The charm of all women, which he had never been able to resist, was in that kiss, unexpected, light and laughing. He kept still, for if he returned it then he would somehow be unfaithful to three women at once.

Marta chose for lunch Jane's favorite restaurant. She thought altruistically that Russ would not object to seeing a pretty girl. He saw two; Jane was with Sally Stephenson. Jane was sorry they could not join forces, and asked Marta to dinner Sunday. Jane and Sally conferred over sheets of typescript, making pencil notes. Sally had the sea-grey eyes and rippled hair of a young Juno. Their clothes were of an absolute chic. Afterward, in the Bois, Russ commented: "They said they had to talk business."

"They make big salaries," said Marta. "And earn them." "Both stunning beauties, dressed to the nines," said Russ. "That's their business," Marta pointed out. "They don't need a man to support them," Russ summed up. Marta explained that Jane had married at

seventeen, and her husband did not support her. Sally, too, was divorced. "I daresay they'll marry again, but Jane has turned down a millionaire and Sally refused both a title and money." Marta had sometimes wondered why Jane took the trouble to keep up a friendship with her, who was neither smart nor beautiful. But it was because Jane, too, was a working woman. They had that in common. "That's a new thing, it has happened in our time," Russ said reflectively. In happening, it had broken his own marriage. Marta said: "Getting married isn't a man's chief objective. I didn't realize soon enough that it wasn't mine. But for most women, probably it always will be."

Russ put in parenthetically that he had declined another invitation for himself and Marta. Golf at the country club, of course. Marta said she would go along if he wished to play. He did not. "They'd expect us to stay for dinner; do you want to spend the evening in a good home?" He chuckled at Marta's involuntary recoil. . . . The Bois was too near the city, but they found a shady spot and Marta spread her scarf to protect her white frock. She did not immediately follow his drift when Russ said: "Till I went to Chicago, I'd never had a drink. The local manager, Tip Kearney, used to take me out with him and another fellow, Heinie Weissmuller. Tip generally ordered sherry and vermouth for me, because I wasn't used to anything stronger. And I'd sit and listen to him and Heinie. They knew the ropes. Chicago was a tough town.

I didn't meet any girls there, except . . . I was sorry for those girls. Once they were in they couldn't get back." "I don't see why not, if they tried," Marta reflected. "The rest of us worked for our living." "You wouldn't have gone under in the first place," Russ said. "You've got too much brains."

"I don't believe that made the difference," Marta said. "Nor morality either. The most brilliant woman I ever knew—before I grew up, I mean—was one of those. We found out afterward. An old-timer, Bowie Hamilton—he wasn't an old man, but born in the West, exactly the type Remington drew—a neighbor of ours, brought her out from town and she passed as his wife. Stayed through the summer. She was well educated, a good musician; she had been a lady. She played the melodeon in the Mormon church, partly to oblige and partly for devilment; afterward she'd parody the sermon for us. She was a wit and a mimic, and I suppose she was the piano player in the 'houses' where she'd been. That would make up for her being middle-aged; she was thirty-eight, she told me. I was eleven or twelve. In the fall she went with Bowie on one of his freighting trips to town—and he came back alone. As soon as she got to town she started on a wild spree, drinking, and vanished on the next train. A couple of years later we heard she had died in a mining camp dive in the Coeur d'Alenes. Of course she wasn't married to Bowie; the summer was a whim of hers. My mother was very fond of her,

and said: 'I guess none of us know why we do the things we do.' My mother never did anything wrong in her life; that's why I remembered her saying that. There couldn't have been any others like Mrs. Hamilton. That made it the more confusing. An extraordinary woman. Looked rather like the pictures of Dolly Madison." . . . In a straight black dress, high-waisted, with elbow sleeves; and her powdery grey hair cut short and curled. Marta remembered with exactitude the arrival of Mrs. Hamilton, sitting up on the high seat of the freight wagon beside Bowie, who had reined in six horses with his left hand. A very fair, tall woman, sun-burned from the long day's drive. Marta met them on the road, by accident. Mrs. Hamilton had a collie pup in the wagon, a fierce fat puppy; she gave it to Marta, who carried it home in her pinafore. Mrs. Hamilton made Bowie's shack mysteriously delightful, with nothing to produce an effect beyond a striped Hudson Bay blanket on the bunk and a glass pitcher holding white wild roses set on a strip of brown velvet laid across a pine table. The first artistic composition Marta had ever seen. She used to present herself in the open door as silently as an Indian; Mrs. Hamilton invariably invited her to enter in the same tone she would have used to an adult, offered her a cookie, and let her alone. It was a heavenly refuge; the fair stately woman diffused about her an atmosphere of harmonious indifference. Was it her irony that had undone her? She was a bad woman. How

could one reconcile such categories? Marta acquired that summer an intellectual contempt for sublunary judgments. It had a permanent effect upon her mental processes. Oddly, her only equivalent experience was a lesson in arithmetic, when she learned that the decimal system is not the only possible one, that any number will do as well as ten for a base, and mathematicians say some of the others would be more convenient. We use ten probably because we have ten fingers. . . . Much later Marta was to grasp the larger truth that logic must proceed from premises; it is a method of comparative measurement within a limited field; and subject, not superior, to life. . . . She had no sentimentality for "lost ladies," but she wouldn't trust a man who spoke of them grossly. Russ was grateful to them for the pleasure and release they had afforded him. She liked him for it.

"What a crazy world we've lived in," she said. "And they tell us now it was puritanical in our time. It was tough and wild. But it can't be described; nobody could understand who didn't live through it, because every imaginable contradiction was true."

"Chicago was tougher than anything you can find in Europe now," said Russ. "I was there five years. Then I was transferred to Pittsburgh." There was a black interval, when he didn't care where he was, didn't care to meet anybody on account of Tip. . . . "After awhile I got acquainted with a suburban set, subscription dances and that sort of thing; respectable girls. I never thought

of wanting those girls . . . There were two kinds of women . . . Then I met Nonie and Harriet." A new kind. Girls one could talk to, desire, marry. But not hold. "You see, it was just because Harriet had her own interests, she couldn't go with me when my job took me away. I'm not blaming her, but it was bound to end the way it did."

"If you'd married a girl like Caroline from your home town, you'd still be married to her; would that suit you any better?"

He became an embodiment of obstinate negation. "Most the boys I knew did. And stayed there. They'd go with a girl for a year or two, and then it would be taken for granted. Sometimes they had to get married." A good deal of adolescent experiment went on surreptitiously. Perhaps he was saved by the lack of pocket money for such simple social treats as the town afforded. And by his mother's strict supervision. At fifteen, he had been initiated by a girl two years older than himself, his second cousin; driving home from a picnic. An unemotional submission on his part. And he was scared all the time that his mother might give him a licking—for staying out late! "I always intended to get away," he said, with retrospective gloom.

From his mother, Marta thought. From virtue itself, which was stamped with the image of his mother. The age was shaped by an unparalleled moral dualism. All great races build up rigid conventions of abstinence, and break them continually. Unless restrained, their

power will flow away like water. Unless it breaks bounds, it becomes sterile, incestuous. . . . Not only the vicious and coarse-grained and appetent went the pace, but the passionate spirits, the generous and adventurous. . . . It wasn't much fun for the good women, the guardians of virtue, either. Or why did they tell their daughters to cut and run? . . . She said: "If it hadn't been the women it would have been something else. Don't hold it against us."

He said unexpectedly: "Do you think I treated Nonie badly?"

"How?" Marta was perplexed. "Not marrying her," said Russ. "But you had to wait for your divorce, and then Nonie had changed her mind?" "I don't know," said Russ. "I stopped writing. So I don't know. I was very much in love with Nonie for a year or so. After that it was mostly habit." And yet he was fond of Nonie; he would always be fond of her. . . . When he thought of Harriet he saw her averted profile, with an edge of light on it—she would be sitting on the piano bench, by the window, pretending she hadn't heard him come home, if they were on the outs—and then the abrupt graceful motion of surrender when she turned to him and made a kissing mouth. When he thought of Nonie he saw the dense dusk of her hair, the quick intelligence of her hands, and the sweet reasonableness of her expression as he approached the limits she had set. . . . Knowing that he'd probably go out and pick up a girl, if not that night another night, because he

couldn't stand the strain. A year was a hell of a long time. He had stuck it that long . . .

It isn't any use telling him, Marta thought. Apparently a man can't ask a woman for his congé. I suppose we ought to accept the fact that that's their nature. Perhaps Nonie had worn through it, too . . . Anyhow, he doesn't need to be told, or he wouldn't ask.

"There would have been someone else," said Russ. "And it didn't seem worth while."

"I don't know either," said Marta. A jilting is a blow to pride; but how wounding to love to be married unwillingly. "When everything has got so mixed there seems to be no right thing to do." Nonie had taken him from Harriet. But she was too fine to pursue him with reproaches . . . Marta could not say whether one person could spoil another's life, or mend it. She would not disclaim responsibility for her own. No one else could have made quite such a bad business of it as she had done for herself. "I suppose Ernest says that Caroline made him what he is today. I hope she's satisfied. Did you ever actually know a man whose wife made him what he was?"

Did he? He knew Tip Kearney . . .

CHAPTER XXV

HE had not thought of it from that angle. And he had thought of it a good deal. It would come back to him as sharply as if it had happened yesterday. Even now, after twenty years. . . . That Sunday morning when his landlady called him to the telephone, an important message, she reiterated. He went down to the front hall, muzzy with a first-class katzenjammer. The canary in a cage in the dining-room began to trill, and it almost split his head. The school teacher from the second floor was going out to church and looked insulted; he hadn't put on his collar. (He couldn't even forget her.) The connection was bad. At first he couldn't make out anything except that it was Heinie Weissmuller speaking. The hospital—can you come right away? He asked, what hospital? Are you in the hospital? What's the matter? Not me, Heinie said, and the telephone buzzed and blurred again. Central, don't cut me off, damn it. Come to my hotel. Tip's had an accident—I can't tell you over the 'phone. Can you come right away? . . . When he stooped to lace his boots the room rocked. He hadn't got in till three

the night before. . . . Their last Saturday night, Tip Kearney and Heinie and himself. For over a month Tip had been, as he said, sober and sorry for it, working around the clock to put through a combine of two companies. He had put it through. Tip was made. Now, Tip said, we'll paint the town red. *Give the girls another drink, 'fore we sign away* . . . Only he wasn't drunk. Didn't seem to have any effect on him. They made the round of Twenty-Second Street. What a lot of different kinds of drinks there used to be; if you named them over, they brought back a thousand other things, times and places and people, that had gone with them, reflected in a bar-mirror, between glittering pyramids of glasses: rock-and-rye, Tom Collins, martini, Manhattan, highball, whisky sour, silver fizz, Clover Club . . . Heinie was mixing his. At Freiberg's they picked up a couple of girls. One was a chestnut blonde, with natural red lips and red-brown eyes, in a tight black dress and red-heeled slippers. She ordered a *pousse-café*, and sat with her elbows on the table, turning the glass in her fingers like a tiny rainbow. Heinie kept drinking to Tip's luck, till he got maudlin and began to cry. With Tip so cool and Heinie slopping over like a stein of warm beer, Russ wished he was somewhere else. The girl was a pippin, and she was making her play for Tip. They always did. It made Russ feel queer, that once, maybe just because Tip was ten years older than himself and they always did. . . . The other girl was plump and senti-

mental; she edged up to Heinie and said, come along with me, I'll fix you up with a bromide, some coffee. Tip said, leave it lay, sister; he's sunk; you don't want him on your hands. The plump girl told him to mind his own business. Tip said, Heinie's my business; will this square it? He laid a bill on the table. The plump girl bounced up in her chair; but the red-lipped one said: Kill it, kid. He's right. This party is a frost. Then she looked at Tip over the rainbow: How about me? Tip said, Baby, you're worth a million dollars. And I'm broke. She raised her eyebrows, and Tip leaned over and kissed her, and said: There, you see. . . . Whatever he meant, she did see. Russ wasn't sure he understood; he thought he did, now . . . Well, she said, another day, another dollar; and she began to pull on her long gloves. Tip folded a bill small and tucked it in at her wrist. Save it for me tonight anyhow. She nodded. Tip put the girls in a cab, and at the last minute she palmed a card into his hand. . . . Standing there in front of the café, Tip tore it up. Now you've got it, he said, what are you going to do with it? I never thought of that. I'll end up as a prominent citizen in a silk hat. Look at John D. Rockefeller! My God, tonight I felt as if I was having a swell funeral. . . . Russ knew better than he could have explained what Tip meant. Tearing the card was like spilling a libation before you tasted the wine yourself. An offering to the gods. Just as Goodwin deprecated his success. Half a dozen superstitions,

but all to the same effect; you had to pay something. She was the prettiest girl they had ever picked up. Foolish to try to cash in on success. What would it get you—another drink, another girl—nothing more than you'd had already. No good except to put under your pillow and dream on. Tip had talked like that, driving home. . . . But it's something, Russ thought, when you've had your last drink, your last girl, anyhow. Something to dream on. . . . They dropped Heinie first, and then Tip let Russ out at his own door. . . . And the next thing the telephone call woke him. . . . Heinie was waiting. He looked sick; and he had been holding his head under the tap to sober up. Russ had to make an effort to ask about Tip. Heinie said, just like that: His wife shot him.

Russ didn't know Tip had a wife. And they'd been batting around together four or five years. Sure he had, Heinie said, and stumbled into a chair and hiccuped. In Cleveland. She went back to her folks when Tip came to Chicago. He went after her a couple of times, and then he got fed up. Tip's always been a highroller; I guess he couldn't settle to matrimony. She wouldn't divorce him either; fact is, she wouldn't sleep with him but it made her wild to think of him running with other women. She came on from Cleveland about a property transfer. Tip wasn't expecting her. The doorman let her into Tip's flat; I'll bet he took her for a floozy and she caught on. I guess she had only to look around anyhow. She was there all eve-

ning, waiting and working herself up . . . It was Tip's revolver; she found it. And he swears he shot himself by accident, so that hell-cat will come clear. She's been throwing hysterics ever since, and begging the doctor to save him. . . . Doctor Sheean, he's a friend of Tip's, he called me. To fix up a story. Tip said to keep you out of it. . . . They wouldn't let him see Tip that day; but he went to the hospital again next day. Tip said: Hello, old scout, who left the door open? The words sounded like Tip, but his voice was thin and when he moved his head on the pillow his face showed that the effort hurt. He said: I didn't know it was loaded. . . . When the nurse sent Russ away, Tip whispered: So long. Give my love to the girls. . . .

The worst was, Tip lasted three months. And his wife nursed him! Russ had gone to Pittsburgh, but Heinie wrote to him. Heinie used awful language. And he sent a clipping a year or so later, when Tip's widow married again. . . . It was Tip's successful merger promoted Russ; Pittsburgh was an important rise.

And maybe what happened to Tip led to Russ getting married. He couldn't go out as they used to. . . . You took a respectable girl to a dance and took her home again and said thank you. . . . Nonie and Harriet brought him out of himself. Tip would have liked them. Russ meant to be straight with Harriet. He was, until they had come to the breaking point anyhow, after he had been away in St. Louis for weeks,

and when he returned Harriet was off on a concert tour. Even then, he had no intention of sidestepping when he began going to see Nonie . . . And it seemed as if the one woman he had wronged was Nonie. The one he had never had . . . There, as Brownie said, was a thought to hold . . .

His last drink, his last girl. . . . He hadn't had a drink for three years. . . . The sun sifted through onto Marta's face and gilded her ash-brown hair and the tips of her lashes. If he had known ten years ago . . . He was forty-seven. . . .

He said: "The wives of the men here in our Paris office have a study club. For international affairs. The League of Nations and that sort of thing—keeping up with their husbands."

"Mph. A penny in the slot produces the opinion for the day," said Marta. "Oh, Mr. Girard, what did you think of Lord Cecil's speech on the Polish corridor?"

Russ chuckled. "Will you come over next summer?" "Sure—if you invite me next summer. What is this fatal charm you have for women?" "Write and tell me about New York; I'll be lost when I get back. They'll have gone so far ahead of me." "Who?" asked Marta, in amazement. "They've got the international mind, too. You'll be covered with glory. Foreign prestige. All you need to do is walk in and move the administration building." "You'll never let me hear the last of that." "No, but honestly," she insisted,

"Americans have become awfully solemn and goofy. Worried about world leadership. They have the mandate for Yap. Your trouble will be that they'll offer you a big job, too big to refuse. You'll put off retiring till next year and next year."

"No, I won't," said Russ. "I haven't five years to live. At the outside." He must have got his own death, he thought, about the same time as Tip, or a little before. Deferred payment. He hoped when it fell due it would be a quick finish. The alternative was the one thing he couldn't quite face. Shouldn't have told Brownie, but it might not seem so lonely if someone else knew.

She said nothing for awhile. A passionate resistance welled up in her. "The doctors are often mistaken. Besides, none of us is certain even of tomorrow." She wanted him to have his farm. For herself, she thought, it would be almost a relief to have a limit set. Five years would be enough. He ought to have that. "I know you've got to put through this job in Rome," she said. "But afterward, won't you take care of yourself—please!" No small favor to ask, that someone should go on living to please you. The humor of it struck them.

The Chateau Madrid was the wrong place for dinner. There were too many ermine and chinchilla cloaks, and strings of pearls, too much light, and the orchestra was too loud. The dancers were stiff and bored, except one couple; Marta watched them. "I

suppose that's what we want. To be always young, and light-footed, and in love. But one takes being young so seriously." Russ said: "I'd do the same things over again if I had the chance, but I'd like to do them differently." . . . At forty, Marta thought, we regret only that we are forty, and repent only the lack of grace in past actions. If we wish for our lost innocence, it is that we might lose it again. We should like to have loved once only and been faithful; as we should like to love many times. To experience everything, even fidelity . . . She said: "I wouldn't have missed it anyhow, though part of it has been awful. To be born in America was great luck; I don't even wish I'd been rich. We've lived on an upward curve."

They left early. When they shut their own door, it made a quietness in which the hours did not run so fast. By themselves, they were not sad nor even serious. "If you stay in Rome a couple of weeks," Marta said, "Caroline will be home before you; and her house won't be ready, and she'll move in with Ernest. You'll find the whole family in the apartment."

"There isn't room for the three children," Russ argued, taken in for the moment.

"You said there was an extra room upstairs," Marta reminded him. "Ernest and Caroline, of course, will occupy yours."

"You believe they'd really—" Russ glowered at Marta. "You have the most devilish imagination."

"Nobody could imagine Ernest," she pointed out.

"If he did not exist, it would be unnecessary to invent him. Voltaire said so. Ernest used to visit Voltaire at Ferney, in droves, with letters of introduction. He will visit you on your farm."

Russ growled that on his farm, at least, he would have the people he chose. . . . Quite likely he will marry Harriet again, Marta thought. No, his obstinacy would prevent; besides, there was no need. Human relations are subtle and profound and irrevocable. Russ had never felt unmarried from Harriet. Perhaps because he had supported her, assumed a definite obligation which could be clearly met. He had promised to love Nonie, and what could one do about that when it was over? We must have rules even though they never fit the individual case, have no reference to it. They provide a way out.

"I don't think it's ever been done," she commented on his declaration. "Sounds worth trying." . . . *And I'll take care of your widows, Joe, as many as I shall find.* . . . Russ caught the look in her eye. "Now what?" he demanded. "I wasn't saying anything," she answered. "No, you weren't saying it," he retorted. They understood one another well enough. Their relation had no name because it had no conditions. Whatever was between them was like those legends of rings exchanged or a coin broken, to be sent as a summons only in some unforeseen circumstance of finality. . . . She told herself she was romantic, inventing justifications. No harm, anyhow. Not with Russ. That was

what he wished he could add to the past—wear his rue with a difference. They would not hurt each other.

Time permitted itself to be ignored until noon the next day, Sunday. Then it began to run through their fingers. His train left at five. When they had packed, they felt dispossessed, so they took hours for lunch, in a restaurant arbor. A bright, hot day; wouldn't be worse in Italy, she asked? She was thinking, it couldn't be good for him. Hot enough, he expected. She ought to see Italy in spring. . . . "I wouldn't set foot in it," she declared. "With those blackshirts infesting it—I couldn't breathe." She flared up when Russ offered the conventional defence. Surprised at her own indignation, she heard herself expanding her objections. She did genuinely hate regimentation and suppression; she hated it too much to be coherent. "We've had ours," she exclaimed, "we oughtn't to go back on ourselves." Americans, she meant. They had been free. It wasn't a joke; their freedom had been bought with a great price, and was worth it. She was grateful to all those valiant minds who had wrought and endured for her. Now those who had profited by it were going to destroy it, so no one else should ever have it. They didn't know what they were doing—but they ought to know! "The Italians are ashamed because they broke in the war; they're trying to carry it off with bluff and bullying. That pop-eyed ham actor. . . . Every Babbitt in America fancies himself in the same part. . . . And our bankers

selling us out for the commission. Ten per cent. on thirty pieces of silver. It's too cheap; the bill comes in later." She stopped. Of all inappropriate occasions for such an outburst. . . . A Fourth of July firecracker.

She saw that Russ did not even disagree with her; he regarded only concrete facts. He said mildly that it was easier to do business in Italy than formerly, when one had to hand out petty bribes at every turn.

"You haven't a copy of your Roman report in your pocket?" Marta enquired. "I'll bet I could spot the item—what do you call it now?"

Russ grinned, "Preliminary expense."

"And how much?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"The higher the fewer," Marta said. "Oh, what of it—I hope you get the job." They've always done it, she thought; the Fuggers backing Philip of Spain and Samuel Bernard ruining himself for a nod from that pompous dullard Louis XIV. "I should start out saving the world!" She couldn't save it before five o'clock. . . . She knew why she was angry.

At the Gare de Lyons they had half an hour to spare, and waited in a dreary café across the street. The traffic, converging to an endless stream that flowed upward along the ramp, filled her with despair. It would not stop. They had to take another cab and join the procession. She would keep the cab to go back to her hotel. With his hand on the door, Russ kissed her goodbye. They did not say the word. There were

two words they had not said. The cab jerked into the line again; a dismal concrete platform raced by; she could not see Russ.

The traffic kept going on in her head. Around the curve of the ramp. Though they were out of it, further and further away, traversing a network of mean streets. There was an open space, a grey building with a garden. She called to the chauffeur suddenly. Yes, the Cluny Musée. She got out and paid the fare.

Sitting on the steps of the side entrance, with her chin on her hands, she discovered why she had stopped here. In the long grass of the garden, fragments of medieval sculpture reposed tranquilly. Their granite features were blunted, all but effaced. It gave them a ghostly aspect, an infinite calm. It is the material substance that is ghostly, she thought. It wears thin, dissolves with time. Something more powerful and enduring wears it out . . . The soul, having stooped to embrace mortality, is caught in the net of time. It strives to break through by the keen devices of the intellect, by the intensity of passion, the persuasion of tenderness, even the violence of anger; and falls back on silence at the last. But at parting it cries out, wait, one moment more and I could have told you . . . oh, wait! What we desire is communication. . . . Perhaps, some other where, we achieve it, by a persistence to which even granite must yield.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT Marta's table, on the boat, there were three other women and a man; the latter correspondingly depressed, in proportion to the square of the numbers. Marta could not retain from one meal to another the names of these fortuitous companions. The man himself she feared she would never be able to obliterate from her mind, not as a name or a face, but by reason of his occupation. He collected testimonials for a patent mattress. His mission abroad was to persuade a heavy-weight champion then honeymooning in Europe to join this chorus of commendation. He had been unsuccessful, and obviously was pondering wherein he had erred. Of the women, two were suburban matrons, the third inevitably academic, all in quest of culture. They exchanged views on Westminster Abbey, and the perversity of the French, who are in the habit of drinking wine daily without moral and physical disintegration. This was the fourth day out. Leaping overboard in mid-ocean was perhaps too drastic a remedy. Marta muttered "Damnation," and pressed her napkin

to her lips. The nearest matron appeared pained. "There is *flour* in the spinach," Marta felt obliged to explain. The English, she reflected, exhibit superhuman ingenuity in making food revolting. She excused herself and wandered below.

She had stayed in Paris a week after Russ left. Jane amiably included her in various gaieties. Several other acquaintances discovered themselves. A note from Freddy Riggs she left unanswered, for no particular reason; it would be all right with Freddy. There was no occasion to sit upon the ground and make some pretty match with shedding tears. The sea is melancholy. She had spent most of the four days in her cabin. It was an odd single cabin, furnished to suggest "the maid's room," probably not designed for passenger accommodation but allotted to her by a purser who recognized desperation at sight. . . . The sea is melancholy because its motion is incessant, wave after wave in endless succession, like the stream of traffic at the Gare de Lyons. . . . Marta worked for an hour steadily, wrote a letter to Pauline, and picked up a book.

It couldn't last, she thought. Nothing lasts. Or is there something? There must be, or what should the three of us, so tired and spent, have had to offer. . . . At intervals the ship's orchestra was audible, playing on the promenade deck. . . . To be always young, and light-footed, and in love. But we were none of those

things, yet we valued each other. We were glad of each other. . . . She read:

*But what have the gods to do with such complainers?
They love the beautiful, the hard and the proud—
Only these can waken them from the night.*

Yet when the gods no longer care, we still do. So we have that of our own, beyond their gift, of which they cannot deprive us. Which they envy us . . . From the deep level of consciousness another thought strove to take form, hovered like a cloud. She put out the light, which distracted her. She would switch it on again presently and read awhile longer.

In the half-light which remained two memories intervened. . . . She had sat down on the floor by the bed-head to bid Russ good-night, saying: Go to sleep. She did not need to see to become aware that he smiled: You've got a funny idea of what will put a man to sleep. But she had done no more than kiss him gently; therefore she must always remember him saying that. . . . Later, in the night, she had heard him sigh and turn over, without waking. His arms ached. . . . He said he did not forget his friends. He was sure he would see them again. . . .

What had she been about to think through? . . . The waves broke with a rhythmic susurrus against the steel sides of the ship; she heard footsteps, cabin doors opening and shutting. A tag of music floated downward. She wasn't asleep, for she heard a steward

closing the port at the end of the corridor, and she knew where she was.

But Russ was there, too; he held her close and kissed her twice. His mouth was warm, and his heart beat strongly against hers, the spirit acknowledging sweetly its debt to the body for having served its joy. . . . For the last time . . .

"Oh," she cried, "he didn't want to die." The words echoed in her inward ear, as though she had spoken aloud, while she knew she had not.

She must have dreamed it. Why did she say that? No, no, no. . . . But she knew. . . . In the stillness, her inward voice said again sorrowfully: Honey, you're in luck. You'll miss a lot of trouble . . . Strange she should be the one to tell him. . . . But he knows that. He's telling me . . . Oh, brave! He knows it, and he didn't want to die. We had a good life. We would do it all over again, and hope to do better.

END.