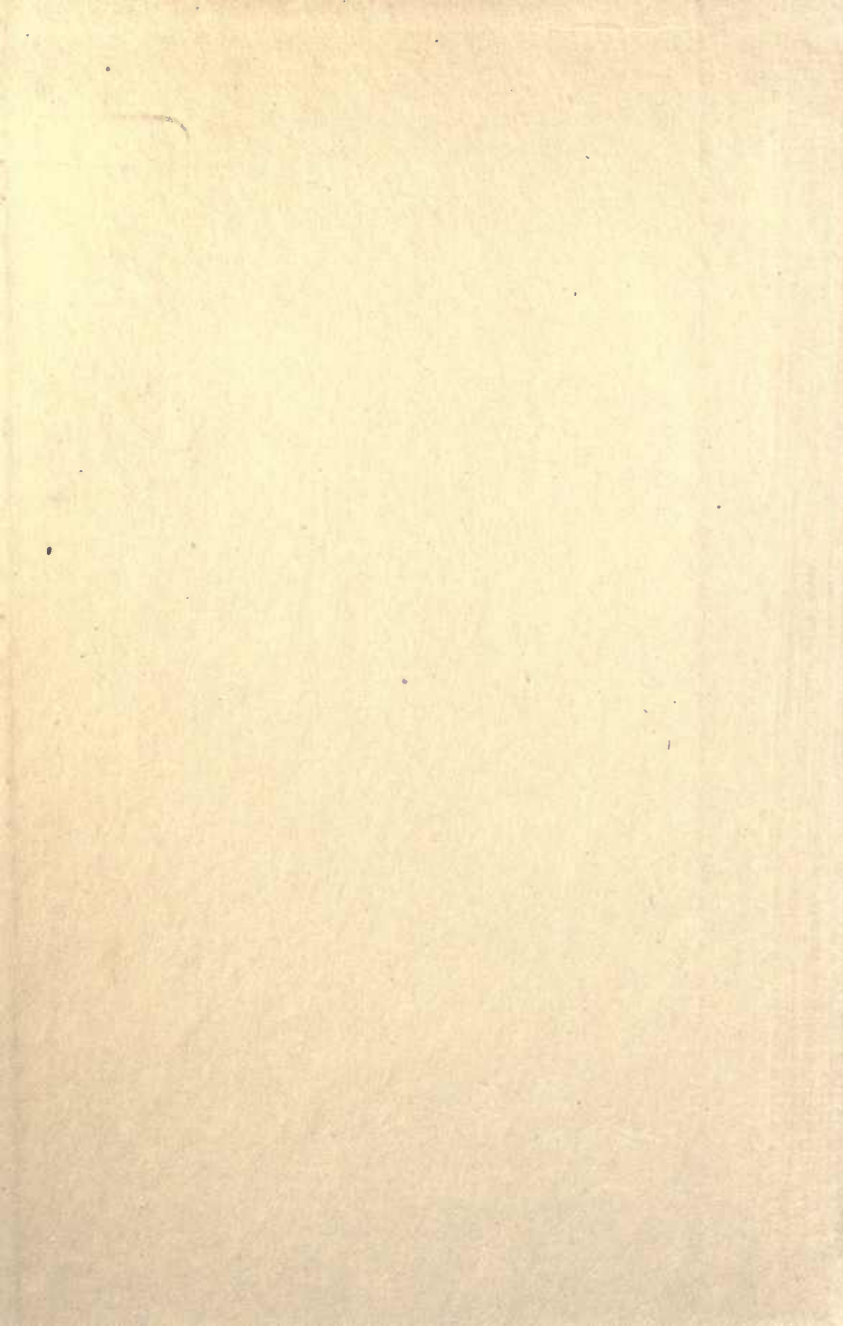


BEAUTY

RUPERT HUGHES



a.p. jd
75

40

BEAUTY



BEAUTY
MAGNIFICENT
WILLIAM
THE
IN A
THE
LOOK
THE
WE
WHAT

HARPER & BROTHERS
NEW YORK

agnes gund

BOOKS BY
RUPERT HUGHES

BEAUTY
MOMMA, AND OTHER UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE
WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?
THE CUP OF FURY
CLIPPED WINGS
EMPTY POCKETS
THE FAIRY DETECTIVE
IN A LITTLE TOWN
THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER
LONG EVER AGO
THE OLD NEST
THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN
WE CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING
WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

HARPER & BROTHERS
[ESTABLISHED 1817]



[See p. 47

SHE WANTED TO COW HIM STILL FURTHER, SHE WANTED TO TEACH HIM NEW DELIGHTS AND TO BREAK HIM AS HE BROKE BRONCHOS—SO THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT HARNESS AND DIRECTION FROM HER

BEAUTY

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

Author of

"WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO?"

"MOMMA" "THE CUP OF FURY" ETC.

With Illustrations by

W. T. BENDA



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

BEAUTY

ANNE M. HUGHES

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

BEAUTY

Copyright, 1921, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

BOOK I

	PAGE
THE EPILOGUE	I

BOOK II

THE PROLOGUE	65
------------------------	----

BOOK III

MISS NANCY FLEET	109
----------------------------	-----

BOOK IV

CLELIA	185
------------------	-----

BOOK V

THE ARTISTS AND THE LAW	279
-----------------------------------	-----

BOOK VI

THE AFTERGLOW	353
-------------------------	-----

ILLUSTRATIONS

SHE WANTED TO COW HIM STILL FURTHER, SHE WANTED TO TEACH HIM NEW DELIGHTS AND TO BREAK HIM AS HE BROKE BRONCHOS—SO THAT HE WOULD AC- CEPT HARNESS AND DIRECTION FROM HER . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MISS CLELIA BLAKENEY AS PUCK, SUDDENLY COME TO LIFE FROM SHAKESPEARE'S PAGES	<i>Facing p. 42</i>
MRS. COYKENDALL	" 146
SURELY THE DEAD GIRL HAD COME TO LIFE! SURELY SHE WAS STRUGGLING AGAINST HER CRYSTAL COFFIN	" 218

Book I
THE EPILOGUE

BEAUTY

CHAPTER I

THE maid who brought up the breakfast was already dressed for flight. Her cap and apron had been packed, and she looked like a poor relation, with none of the smartness a servant gains from the uniform of lace and linen. She stood with one knee uplifted to support the tray she braced against the door while she knocked with her free hand.

She knocked twice; got no answer; turned the knob softly; pushed in with an apologetic mien. And if anything demands apology, it is the outrage of a summons from slumber.

Berthe was saved from that crime, for the bed was empty. The covers were all awry, as if the nestling had flung them off impatiently. Berthe was glad of this, for she always hated to waken her young mistress; Miss Clelia slept so beautifully!—and so beautiful! Waking her was like tearing a flower out of the ground by the roots, a flower that cried out in protest as the mandrake used to. Indeed, young Miss Blakeney, Miss Clelia Blakeney, was apt to put up a drowsy fight, trying to stay drowned in the deeps of oblivion, as if she were a kind of daily suicide resisting rescue.

And this was strange, too, for when Clelia was once awake nobody could be awaker or aliver. And nobody could fiercelier hate to go to bed. Her rules of sleep seemed to be Mark Twain's very own; the ones he announced at his seventieth birthday dinner as the secret of his longevity: "Never go to bed while there is anybody to sit up with; and never get up till you have to."

Berthe had no idea when her mistress had got to bed the

night before. Berthe had been told not to wait up, but there had been a deal of commotion about the big house; just enough noise of music, dance, laughter, and chatter to keep the servants awake in their quarters once removed; yet not enough noise to satisfy their curiosity. There had been a very promising quarrel of some sort, and two slammed doors—just whose it was not agreed in the early-morning comparison of notes.

Berthe set the tray on the bedside table and went to knock at the bathroom door to warn ma'm'selle that the time was brief. The door was open, the bathroom empty.

Puzzled, Berthe surveyed the bedroom again. The dinner gown of the night before was tossed across the *chaise longue*. The traveling suit that Berthe had laid out precisely was where she had left it. Corsets, combination, stockings, ribbons, garters were here and there. The bathrobe was across the footboard of the bed. But the bedroom slippers were gone. And that was *drôle*, thought Berthe.

The window was wide open, and a sharpening gale was harrying the frothy pennants of the curtains. A few snowflakes went by outside, spotting the brown world to a fawn's skin. The big storm was already at hand.

It was the storm, or the swift fame of it, that was causing the stampede in this camp. They called it a "camp" because it was in the woods of the Adirondacks. But it was more like a palace—the palace of a viking king, a stronghold made of huge logs and ax-beveled timbers mitigated with rich hangings and heaped luxuriousness. And clustered about it was a brood of little houses, a dining house, a kitchen house, a music house, one for billiards, another for bachelors; one for servants, others for other people and purposes.

An Indian summer of unusual tarrying and undreamed-of balm had coaxed this little throng of Mrs. Roantree's guests to linger in the well-tamed wilderness long beyond the custom. Then suddenly the belated New York papers had announced the uprising of a blizzard in the northwest. It came conquering and irresistible with the roar and velocity of a barbaric horde of airships swooping a mile a minute

and rolling beneath it across townships, counties, and states, a vast billow of sleet and snow and ice.

The Roantree camp was far from the big hotels and from the nearest railroad station. The roads writhing about the mountains were not good for motor speed. There were but two through trains a day, and the afternoon express reached New York at an unholy hour.

When blizzards raged, the trains floundered and stuck; passengers starved and shivered and life became one long battle with the weather.

The Roantree party had delayed till the last moment, hoping that the storm would slip across the side line into Canada, but the weather reports put an end to hope.

The last day in camp had been as blithe and innocent of winter as the utter peace before a simoom. There was a very pathos of loveliness in the air. The evening sighed and the moon mused with the white face of all regret, regret that tenderness must end and cruel times begin.

The crowd took a phonograph out on the piazza and danced in the blue twilight or listened to the heart-breaking melodies of famous singers who earned fortunes by skirling their graceful anguishes about the world on rubber wheels.

The little populace hated to go back to town, especially since several promising intrigues of more or less innocence had flourished in the water-mirrored canoes or along the leafy aisles of the infinite forest.

The members of the Lower House, the large assembly of servants, had overheard and overlooked just enough indiscretion to keep them from perishing of boredom. They enhanced their own self-respect by expressing in advance a great horror of scandals that might develop, and yet suffered incessant disappointment when they failed to appear.

The servants were at a frightful disadvantage in this eternal duel between upstairs and downstairs over the concealment of the truth. The mountains and lakes were too large a parish for the servants to keep under inspection, and there was precious little comfort in imagining the worst, with no documents to lean on. Suspicion for suspicion's

sake gives little nourishment. They were restless to get back to town.

The guests, though, were of a contrary mood, since the carrying on of housed romance in town would be much less rapturous and far more difficult, for in spite of the venerable lies to the contrary, mischief is very near to nature's heart; mischief is almost nature's principal business.

The storm settled the matter and warned them all to get them gone to the city again.

And now Berthe stood perplexed in Miss Clelia's room, wondering where she could be. The whole big house and all the little houses were in a stir. Maids and men were hurrying wind-blown breakfast trays along the covered walk from the kitchen to the main house. If Clelia had been in any of its rooms she would have been sent scurrying.

Berthe dismissed with self-rebuke one or two suspicions that went through her sophisticated brain like dark snowflakes, servants' stories of wicked persons who had overslept in the wrong rooms and made hideous dashes in the light of day. The thought was outrageous in Miss Clelia's case, but, for lack of anywhere else to look, she stepped out on the porch that ran about the big house. It was only one story high, its numerous rooms all opening on a vast encircling piazza and in on a vast encircled living room.

There was no hint of Clelia out of doors. The air was turbulent with increasing wind. Two motor trucks loaded with trunks that had been packed the night before were already roaring down the mountain road to beat the storm to the station. A flotilla of limousines and touring cars lay at anchor outside the big garage, ready to carry off all of the guests and servants except two men, who were to stop awhile.

Clelia had expressed a wish to stop with them, but her aunt had grimly refused to stay and be snowed in; and so had all the other women, whose ideal of winter weather was the sort that Palm Beach furnished, or Miami.

Berthe hurried back into the bedroom, the wind hustling

her in and banging the door after her. To keep busy, she closed the windows and set to stripping the bed of its clothes, folding the blankets, and carrying the sheets to the big hamper in the hall.

She fretted over the chilling of the coffee and the eggs and the muffins. The horror of a spoiled breakfast wrought upon her till she ran at last along the doors, knocking at every one where there was a woman guest, and asking if Miss Blakeney were there.

Everybody answered, "No!" according to her early-morning mood. Berthe stood distraught. She was tempted to run to the bachelors' den and ask. Mr. Coykendall and Mr. Frewin and Mr. Larrick had been most notoriously devoted to Clelia, and her tantalizing flickers of favor had driven them almost to a three-cornered duel.

Berthe was saved from a desperate impudence by the appearance of the men themselves. They had dressed quickly, and two of them had breakfasted at a gulp, according to male habit.

Two of them stared at Berthe, but did not speak. They were Eastern gentlemen, Coykendall and Frewin, and it was their idea of courtesy that a woman in distress would ask their aid if she wanted it, and would prefer not to be disturbed until she did.

But Mr. Larrick, who was a Texas gentleman, had another idea. Seeing Berthe in a state of arrested suspense, he paused to say—and to say without a trace of the intonation adopted by the most kindly master to the most valued servant, but just as man to woman:

"Good mawn', Burt. What's the trouble?"

"Oh, Mr. Larrick, Mees Clélie I cannot find. The brakefast goes cold, and she must dress in a horry."

"You can't find Miss Cleely! Did you look—"

"Avrywhere."

"That's funny," said Larrick, with all solemnity. "Where d'you reckon she's at?"

"Did I know!"

"Have you asked her aunt?"

"Yes, sair. But I weel hosk again."

She knocked at Mrs. Roantree's door and, being bidden in, entered to explain.

Mrs. Roantree always got mad first and afterward relapsed to courtesy. She rebuked Berthe vigorously for asking such a foolish question, then apostrophized the absent Clelia for being such a nuisance, then grew alarmed and, flinging on a wrap, charged into Clelia's room to see for herself.

Other guests, hearing the commotion, hung out of their doors, heads in various stages of unreadiness for inspection, and asked: "What's up?" "What's wrong?" "What's the matter?"

One thing was sure—there was absolutely no trace of Clelia. Everything of hers was found except her slippers, her nightgown, and herself. And that was *drôle*, as Berthe kept repeating with less and less of the stoic calm she was paid for.

CHAPTER II

MRS. ROANTREE had come to respect spiritualism since it grew fashionable. She agreed with Sir Oliver and Sir Arthur and Sir William in accepting the materialization of the dead as a frequent and easy matter. She had had a number of undeniable communications with the other side herself.

But even she was not ready to believe in the dematerialization of the living. And now she stood in the center of her disheveled guests, declaiming:

“People don’t just vanish!”

She protested as angrily as if some one had insisted that they did. She kept retorting to persons who had not disagreed with her, and quarreling with beliefs that nobody had expressed; but she contradicted her own statements with fine impartiality.

“It’s perfectly outrageous of Clelia to do such a thing. Why couldn’t she have some consideration for the rest of us? I haven’t finished my breakfast yet, and it’s ruined. If there is anything I loathe, it is lukewarm coffee and cold poached eggs. The poor child must be somewhere. But where could she be? She couldn’t have gone gadding about with next to nothing on. Yet here are all her clothes. Haven’t you called her? Call her, why don’t you?”

She ran to the porch door and startled the men by her disarray and her clamor. “Oh, Clelia! Clelia! Child, where are you? Somebody run down to the lake and see if she’s fallen in and drowned. No, that wouldn’t do any good, because if she had, you couldn’t see her, could you? Or could you? And she certainly wouldn’t be going down for a swim on such a morning as this, with snow in the air. She couldn’t have gone mountain climbing, either, in her satin slippers. You might get the megaphone and call, or take a look over at the mountains, somebody. She might be

hiding somewhere, of course. But I do hope her sense of humor is better than that. She begged so hard to stay here. She may be hiding to keep me from dragging her back. One thing is certain. I'll not stay, whether I find her or not. Listen to that wind! We'll hardly make the train as it is. O Lord! what pests people are! It might be really something serious, you know. If anything happened to that angel—Oh dear, such a world!"

None of the other women would stay. They insisted that they would love to, if—they would not think of going if—but—and—of course—

Two of the men, Coykendall and Frewin, glared at each other suspiciously, and Larrick glared at both of them. But none of the men uttered his suspicions or his theories.

Larrick was the only one who acted on Mrs. Roantree's wild suggestions to run down and glance at the lake and look over the mountains. Even the servants pretended not to hear and busied themselves with breaking camp. The men guests were in too great a hurry to get away or too lazy of body or soul or too sensible to follow will-o'-the-wisps.

Larrick ran out into the whirlpool of the wind. He could almost have counted the number of snowflakes he had seen in his life before this storm. He could hardly believe his eyes now. Last night when he looked from his window his gaze could reach to the stars. Now, out of nowhere, out of nothing, white tufts of swan's-down were magically evolved. He caught big flakes on his hand and had just time to marvel at their astounding architecture, the tiny majesty of their patterned silver gossamer, when, almost instantly, they were gone back into the nothing they came from.

Clelia was like that. She had come into his vision suddenly, overwhelming him with a miracle of grace. And now she had winked out like a bubble, like a snowflake.

There were multitudes of other snowflakes, but where was Clelia? He ran, calling her name: "Miss Blakeney! Miss Blakeney!" And then, since terror gave him courage: "Miss Clelia! Miss Cleel-ya-a-a!"

But the wind swirled his very cry about his head as if it were whipped cigar smoke.

He cast his eyes over the slaty shudder of the broad lake where little gales scampered in covies leaving innumerable footprints of invisible fugitives from the big wind on the way. But there was no hint of Clelia in that anxious water.

Larrick darted wildly here and there, up and down the nearer mountain paths, but while his eyes were ready to surprise her like a caught dryad, he found no trace of her. He lunged deep into the green wilderness and lost his way.

By the time he reached the house again the automobiles had gone. He could see them scooting along the distant roads and dwindling from lumbering wains to frightened beetles. In spite of her threats Mrs. Roantree had not deserted her niece. But the two men Larrick was jealous of, Coykendall and Frewin, had gone. And Larrick would have been glad of that if he could have been glad of anything.

Only two men stayed—Burnley, the painter of snowy landscapes, and Randel, the sculptor, whose lungs had disgusted him by their dereliction. He laid the blame on marble dust, but his doctor advised him to spend the winter in the Adirondacks and Mrs. Roantree had given him a cabin to fit up as a studio.

Randel was Clelia's cousin, and his kinship gave him a franchise to anger.

"The others couldn't wait," he explained to Larrick, "or they wouldn't. They felt sure she would turn up. I tried to get her aunt to go; I said it would be a lesson to the brat. I offered to act as chaperon—as if anyone could chaperon that unbroken colt! Damned funny where the little beast's gone."

"Don't!" Larrick groaned as he winced. "She might be—" He could not say "dead." It seemed impossible for Clelia and that hideous word to have anything in common.

Now her little dog came whining out, a Pekingese of extraordinary stateliness for her size. She could condescend upward. She was a dowager empress less than a foot tall. She had taken a fancy to Larrick because he was always willing to rub her back—and knew where and when and how. Larrick spoke to her.

"Where is she? Go find her! Empress, go find Miss Blakeney!"

The Empress heard the name with delight and fanned the air with the silken plume of her tail. But she did not run. She was not a bloodhound. Her chief pride was that she had the irreducible minimum of nose; her nose was almost a dimple. She had slept all night on Clelia's silken dinner gown. Nothing was too good for her, and, so long as she had any part of Clelia's apparel to sentinel, she was content to bask in that beloved atmosphere.

She was not anxious yet. She was used to being left alone for hours and days, and until Clelia's clothes were taken away she would not worry.

Randel urged Larrick to have his breakfast.

"Cleel will turn up and give us all the laugh," he said. "She has never grown up out of her kid tricks, and she's hidden somewhere, thinking that her aunt would rather lose an eye than a train she had planned to take. Cleel will be sick when she learns that the old lady has stayed behind. And those two famous tempers will do the rest."

Larrick grinned and pictured the sudden emergence of the ever-riant face of Clelia. He had seen the rival wills of the aunt and the niece fencing; and it seemed probable that the girl had stowed herself away somewhere in order to escape the return to town. She had talked to Larrick once or twice about the great times she could have meeting the blizzard halfway. He had never seen a blizzard and she wanted to show him one. He was glad that they would face it together. To be snowed in with her!

Clelia had a boyish love of conflict with nature, with storms, rains, tides, surf, obstreperous horses, unruly dogs, and restive men. He had loved to watch her intrepid and defiant moods.

Convinced at length that she was playing a game of hide and seek and would appear when she pleased, Larrick went to his breakfast. He had never been able to negotiate it in bed and had declined it in his room. It had been left in the dining casino by a servant who had gone to New York with the rest. Cold as it was, Larrick enjoyed it. He was thoroughly happy because Coykendall and Frewin, the most dangerous contestants for Miss Blakeney's favor, had deserted

with the crowd, leaving him alone at last with the girl he feared and adored.

He thought that they could not have loved her so well as they pretended or they would never have abandoned the field to him. And yet— He paused. Perhaps they felt that she was in no danger from him. Perhaps one or the other of them had some claim on her that gave him a feeling of security, a feeling of contempt for the Texan outsider who had blundered into their lodge.

That part of society which is called "Society" was like a secret society to Larrick. He could not make out the ritual or the rigmarole. He had a natural tact, a Southern graciousness, and a Southern pride that carried him along, but he suffered for lack of fluency in the court language. He found it far more informal than his Texas slang, but different utterly. Fashionable ladies said and did so many things that unfashionable ladies would never dare to say or do!

Larrick was not so happy when he finished his breakfast. He was worried as to Clelia's probable treatment of him when she came from hiding. She might tire of him alone in a storm-besieged house. He was ill equipped with parlor tricks or stunts for dull evenings.

But was she hiding? Suddenly terror pinched his heart anew.

Surely if the girl had only meant to conceal herself till her aunt got away she would have stolen forth by now. With a curious suddenness, he found himself remembering an old poem his mother had read to him once from a scrap book. "Come where the woodbine twineth," was the refrain of it.

In that story poem a young bride had crept into a great chest to hide from her young husband. As she hid herself, laughing, and drew the lid down a spring lock snapped and made the box her coffin. She had smothered there, unheard, unheeded, unfound for years. And then she was only a skeleton and a little dust in ragged silk.

Larrick was so wrought up by the remembrance of this old yarn that he began to ransack the whole place. Mrs.

Roantree was finishing her toilet in a slow rage at being kept. Larrick searched every other room in every house. Many of the closet doors were locked for the winter. He pounded on them and called through. In spite of the protests of Jeffers, the caretaker guide, he broke open several doors, jimmied them with pokers.

He looked under all the beds. He turned the storerooms out. He went through the neat rooms of the servants' quarters. He searched the cellars, the woodsheds, all the outbuildings, even the ice house and the distant stable where an old horse or two, some cows, and a pair of oxen drowsed.

He lifted the cover from a well and peered down, lowering an electric flashlight.

By this time the air was afleece with snow. There was a cry in the wind, a witch shriek, and a sense of grisly hands snatching and pummeling, a sense of things persecuted and persecuting.

Larrick went to the lake again, stumbled along the shore looking for footprints, shielding his eyes against the snowflakes that were flung blindingly into his face like confetti in a drunken carnival.

His panic excited the other men. Burnley and the guide, Jeffers, set forth to hunt. Randel ventured out, coughing. Mrs. Roantree appeared and began to grow hysterical, to dispatch everybody in all directions, to give orders, countermand them, and rage because they were not carried out. She tried to telephone to the nearest camps, but something was wrong with the wire. Perhaps the wind had overturned some of the poles. She could not get the Central.

Perhaps Clelia had gone ahead to the station and was on her way to New York by now. But this theory satisfied nobody.

The maid, Berthe, had refused to go to town. She threw off all pretensions to the self-control one expects of servants. She accepted the direct possibilities as facts and wept frantically. Mrs. Roantree called her a noisy idiot, but her own panic was evident. She hurried Jeffers away to inquire at some of the other camps, on the chance that Clelia

had gone visiting—perhaps in her sleep. “*La Sonnambula*” had been revived at the opera the season before, and Mrs. Roantree recalled the heroine errant in a nightgown.

Again and again Larrick went back to Clelia’s room and stared at her clothes where Berthe had laid them out in readiness for quick harnessing.

The little Empress kept climbing on the chair, determined to guard them, purring when Larrick talked to her, whimpering when she seemed to understand that her mistress was gone. Larrick felt that the dog’s certainty of her return was a good omen. Whenever he spoke to her she would wag her tail and reassure him with snores of optimism. Yet, what could the dog know?

Larrick wanted to show some of Clelia’s clothes to the guide’s hunting dog, so that he might learn the scent and trace her. But he dreaded to lift them.

Clelia’s clothes were like herself, dainty, silken, extravagant, gay, and lawless, peculiarly fascinating, a kind of fabricated laughter, delight woven into visible surfaces. Some of her clothes Larrick felt that he ought not to see. Yet they were sanctified by her. They had been next to her. She had warmed them and danced in them. He could not give them to a hound to sniff.

He went back to the storm in profound wonderment at the snow blindfolding the world, hushing the summer.

Winter, the puritan, was here with his white cruelty. There would be no more wickedness of love among the flowers; the birds would quench their songs or take them South. The trees would strip themselves stark, but beautiful women would wrap their graces in the shapeless pelts of wild beasts.

Larrick had come hither from a land where winter is little known and less loved. He had an especial dread of it. He distrusted it as one distrusts a foreigner. But, peculiarly, now it was abominable to him, since it chilled him from without when he was already congealed with fears from within, fears clustering about his heart in icicles.

By and by Jeffers came back from the nearer camps with the word that all of them were closed and there was no

sign of the girl about them. Then Mrs. Roantree gathered the men in council before the fireplace, now aroar with great blocks that had once been trees creeping skyward in green, but now leaping scarlet.

Randel, who was peevish with confinement and too weak to join the hunt, evolved a cynical theory that Clelia had run away and had left her clothes as a blind. Mrs. Roantree grunted at this, "Don't be a fool!"

Randel held his ground: "People are always leaving their clothes on beaches or in bathhouses so that their relatives or creditors will give them up for dead and not pursue them. They're usually embezzlers, though."

"Clelia couldn't have embezzled anything," Mrs. Roantree snapped.

Burnley amended: "Except the hearts and the brains of several men. She loved to juggle with those."

"But she couldn't have eloped without a wardrobe. Clelia loved clothes too well for that. What could she have done for clothes?"

Randel, who had read too many mystery stories, said: "She may have had another frock that you haven't missed. She might have bought a dress from one of the servants as a disguise. She might have gone to the station with one of the baggage trucks. She might have taken it into her head to run one of the trucks herself. She was always doing crazy things like that. She probably greeted the people at the station with a good laugh, and went on down to New York."

"But she wouldn't have left me marooned up here without a word," Mrs. Roantree protested. "Even Clelia wasn't quite heartless."

"She may have tried to telephone from the station and been unable to get the house. She'll send word back by your chauffeur, Kemp. You'll see."

This encouragement sustained the group till the return of Kemp, the only one of the chauffeurs who was to return. The cars the others had driven were to be stored in the garages near the station or shipped down to the city. Kemp had been ordered to come back for Mrs. Roantree.

He brought with him Miss Fleet, Miss Nancy Fleet.

This jolted Larrick's heart a little. He wanted to be loyal to his anxiety for Clelia, to think of her alone. But Miss Fleet by her very presence accused him of a disloyalty to herself. For Miss Fleet had been the first New York woman to impress him. He had found her so very New Yorky that she summed up the whole city for him; she had seemed exactly typical of it—as if any one person or group of persons could typify a city! The Athenians called Pallas Athene their patron goddess, and she represented about as minute a portion of the town's femininity as Nancy Fleet of New York's infinitely various womankind.

Still Larrick would never get over thinking of New Yorkesses in terms of Nancy Fleet, for she had dazzled him, startled him, shocked him, delighted him in just the ways he had expected New York women to affect him.

When, later, Clelia Blakeney had swum into his ken he had found her utterly unlike Miss Fleet, though she was just as thoroughly of New York New Yorkish. Then Larrick had done what we always do when we find exceptions upsetting our longing for rules—he had said "the exception proves the rule," and let the disproof prove it to his satisfaction.

Larrick had gone pretty far toward an infatuation for Miss Fleet before he was subjected to Clelia's fascinations. Miss Fleet had been too good a sport to protest against his manifest worship for Clelia, yet it disturbed him to have her on the ground just now. For just now his interest in Clelia was invested with a sense of awe, of holiness—of the solemnity that envelops the most frivolous of human beings and even pet animals when they are considered in the majestic connotations of death.

Of course Clelia might be alive, after all, and up to her characteristic mischief. Larrick's soul was tantalized between the dread that she had played a trick on them (in which case gloom would be ridiculous) and the dread that fate might have played a trick on Clelia (in which case levity would be odious).

And now Nancy Fleet had to turn up and mock him with those quizzing eyes of hers.

CHAPTER III

MISS FLEET was almost frozen with the travel through the storm in her light wraps. Snowflakes had been driven deep into her hair, and, as they melted, the water streamed over her face, bringing her coiffure down in shreds and strings. Her lips were blue with chill and her jaws so palsied that her teeth chattered like a telegraphic instrument.

Her features were hopelessly bewildered with the task of expressing so many emotions; she was furious with rage at not looking her best; she was amused at her own bad appearance, for she always laughed at herself before anyone else could; she was in acute distress from the cold that hurt her in every member; she was exhilarated by the combat with the storm.

While she stamped and wrung her numb hands before the fire the chauffeur, Kemp, explained the difficulty of the return, with the snow blinding him, blanketing the windshield, obliterating the roads, and muffling the landscape in white disguises. On one of the turns a lash of wind had almost carried the machine overboard down a cliff.

Kemp crushed Mrs. Roantree's hopes with the report that there had been no sign of Miss Clelia on the way or at the station, and his final word was that there was no chance of reaching the station again until the storm had passed over.

That would mean several days of imprisonment, and the sentence threw Mrs. Roantree into a dungeon of despondency.

And now Miss Fleet was warm enough to be articulate:

"All the way to the train I kept thinking how rotten it was of me to run off and leave you alone. So I came back. I hope you don't mind."

"Thank God for you!" said Mrs. Roantree. "The time

is past when I could endure being alone with so many men or be endured by them."

As soon as Miss Fleet was able to leave the fire she managed rather expertly and as if accidentally to edge Larrick into a corner. First she sent a ransacking gaze into him and then she began on him:

"The real reason I'm back is that I didn't intend to leave you alone up here to the mercies of little Clelia. She is unmerciful, and never so unmerciful as when she is in one of her most innocent moods. Did you ever happen to realize that innocence is the cruelest thing in the world? That's because it doesn't know, I suppose, how things hurt and how helpless we all are.

"When I was a baby fresh from the skies I was a perfect beast. I pulled flies' legs off and scratched my mother's face till it bled. I abused my pets horribly. I remember once, when I was yanking a pet pup around by his front leg in spite of his yelps, my father yanked me into the air by my front leg—my arm, I mean. I let out a yelp of pain, but my horror was greater. It was my very first horror. I couldn't believe that my own father would hurt me so. He let me down and said, 'Now you know how it feels to be hurt.'

"I've never wanted to hurt anybody since. Sometimes I think that one reason there is so much pain in the world is that there has never been anybody to yank God across the universe by the arm and say, 'Now you know how it feels to be hurt.' Christ knew. He wept. And he fainted on the cross and asked God why he had forsaken him. But God let him die, didn't he?"

Larrick made no answer. He was not especially pious, but he was afraid of such talk. He believed in using sacred names only for prayer and profanity. Miss Fleet was impudent to everybody, including Heaven, and she enjoyed the shocks she gave. She believed in shocks for shock's sake.

"But to come down to earth," she said. "You know I like you. Of course, I want to beat your head off about half the time, but that's out of pure affection for you. So I want to warn you not to get in too deep with Clelia. She's a

darling. She'll be a glorious woman. But she'll break lovers and husbands the way she breaks wild colts. You don't want to be only part of a stable with only one stall in her heart, do you? You'll never get her for your own. You couldn't hold her if you did.

"She likes you, but then everybody does. Besides, she likes everybody—and everything. And that's the heart-breakingest, cruelest sort of person there is. You won't thank me for it, and perhaps I'm only a hypocrite dressing up plain jealousy in a pink domino of altruism, but I'm going to stick around and save you from Clelia."

Larrick snickered a little, uncomfortably amused, and said: "I'm mighty much obliged. But I reckon we've got to find her, before you save me from her."

"Oh, we'll find her. I only hope she doesn't find herself in the headlines of the papers."

Poor Clelia reached the big type, but in a way that none of them imagined in their most fantastic guessings.

CHAPTER IV

IT was Miss Fleet's way to play the game above the table. She would play with all her might and use all the legitimate ruses, but she would not stack the deck nor slip cards up her sleeves.

And now, having given Larrick fair warning of her intentions, she went back to Mrs. Roantree and the two men.

Mrs. Roantree was so melancholy that she was ready to believe anything horrible. She flatly announced her intuition that Clelia had killed herself.

"Nonsense, my dear!" cried Miss Fleet. "Clelia might kill herself dancing, but no other way. She isn't the suicide sort. Elope? Yes! She might run away with almost anybody just for the excitement of the sprint. But death? What should she want with that when life is so full of such numbers of things?"

"Who could she have eloped with?" Mrs. Roantree snapped. She was secure enough to leave *whoms* to grammarians and social strugglers.

Miss Fleet evaded this question with a shrug, but Randel had a suggestion.

"There's Coykendall. He was rushing her mighty hard."

"But they had a quarrel last night," Burnley objected.

"That's as good a prelude to an elopement as any," said Miss Fleet. "And Clelia was never of the same mind two days running."

Mrs. Roantree answered, coldly, "There's one little difficulty—Coykendall still has a wife."

"But she's getting a divorce from him. She may have it by now."

"Even if she has, he can't remarry."

"He can't remarry in New York, but they could go to another state."

Mrs. Roantree would never permit anybody else to criticize her kith. "Clelia is decent, at least. She is incapable of such a thing. Besides, Coykendall didn't go away with her. He went with the crowd."

Randel had all the stubbornness of a sickly mind. "Well, she might have skipped out ahead. He could drop off at some station. But I don't insist on Coykendall. There may be somebody you never knew she knew. How about the young professional dancer over at the hotel? She rushed him pretty hard."

Mrs. Roantree sniffed, "You're delirious!"

Miss Fleet came to her support. "Clelia only danced with that cub because he danced better than anybody else up here. She loved him as she loved a good racing car—because he furnished her with—with transportation."

Mrs. Roantree added another argument: "And of course Clelia would never marry out of her class."

"Class!" Randel laughed harshly. "Girls never do, of course."

Larrick felt uneasy at this discussion of class. He was not quite sure what class meant but he was sure that he was not in theirs, whatever it was.

Burnley wasted a bit of sarcasm on the petulant Randel.

"She might have run off with one of the grooms or chauffeurs or one of the boatmen, perhaps."

Randel turned quite nasty: "It has happened, hasn't it? Rich girls of what are known as 'the best families' have been running away with their inferiors since the world began. You know one or two shining lights who have eloped with their fathers' chauffeurs, just as the men of the best families marry their housekeepers or their stenographers or chorus girls. When I was a boy, marriages with coachmen were very popular. In the old Roman days it was charioteers and gladiators who got the swell girls. Before long, I suppose, it will be liveried aviators running the family aerolimosines. You'll find that what has happened keeps on happening."

There was just enough hatefulness about the suggestion to make it abominably plausible. Larrick was revolted by

the merciless imagination of Randel. But he dared not protest, since the only protest he could think of would have to be expressed by his fist. His fist was his substitute for sarcasm, irony, innuendo, and other forms of light repartee. It tingled now to stamp the slander back into Randel's teeth, but Randel's weakness saved him. One cannot slug an invalid.

Burnley cleared the air by wholesome comment:

"You know Clelia better than to talk such rot. Clelia's not that sort at all."

"Oh, you know all that goes on in a girl's soul, I suppose," Randel sneered. "You know all the things she's capable of, all her secret thoughts and letters and the crazy things she calls romance. Eh?"

"I'm not God, but I know Clelia better than you do. You've got the girl all wrong. Whatever else she was, she was no sneak. If she had wanted to marry a chauffeur she'd have said so and she'd have torn the world apart to get him. She wasn't afraid of anything or anybody. She said what she thought as fast as she thought it, and she did what she wanted to when she wanted to."

Even Randel nodded to this. He acknowledged his defeat with a grumble and kept silent. Clelia's fearlessness was indeed her first quality. She was not afraid of bodily or mental risk. She had a contempt for physical and spiritual danger. She did not care where she went or with whom, confident always that she could take care of herself.

She was not even afraid of gossip. She got herself talked about by the respecters of appearances. But what's the fun of gossip if the slandered one laughs at it? She did not trouble to be discreet or to avoid the look of evil. She despised scandal, and was so high of pride that somehow she made nearly everybody feel that her pride guaranteed her good conduct.

Larrick admired her as he admired a beautiful, unbreakable broncho, whose very intractability compels affection. He had winced at much that was said, but had held his peace until Mrs. Roantree sighed, tenderly:

"That's true. Clelia would never have run away from

anything or anybody. She wouldn't have run away with anybody."

Then Larrick's patience broke, and he spoke up, startlingly: "I wish you-all would quit saying 'she was' and 'she wasn't,' 'she would' and 'she wouldn't.' Why can't you say 'she is' or 'she isn't'? Sounds to me like you-all had already given her up for gone. I don't like that past-tense business."

"Quite right, Mr. Larrick," said Mrs. Roantree, pleased for once to be rebuked. "This is not an inquest. Clelia is somewhere, and no doubt she has a perfectly good reason for being there. It's simple madness to imagine her running away with Coykendall. There's Norry Frewin, though. Clelia was always rather fond of him in spite of their everlasting quarrels. But he was afraid of his mother, and his mother didn't approve of Clelia. Mothers don't count, of course. I never had any influence over any of my children. Heaven knows they wouldn't let me have any say about their wives, though I couldn't have picked worse ones than they did. Norry might have persuaded Clelia to marry him, but— Is there any reason why Clelia shouldn't have married him openly if she wanted to? His mother's objections would only have made him a little more interesting to Clelia. There wasn't any other obstacle, was there?"

Burnley blurted out, "Well, of course, there was—" He caught himself.

Mrs. Roantree waited, then urged, "Go on, tell me!"

"It wouldn't be clubby, and I don't believe in gossip."

"What's better than gossip? Tell me, before I scream!"

Burnley shook his head stubbornly and would not be pumped.

"That's a dirty trick," said Nancy Fleet. "Here we are all locked up in the snow and I say that any fellow who knows any scandal ought to share it with the rest of us."

Burnley kept wagging his head from side to side.

CHAPTER V

MRS. ROANTREE subsided into a sulks of baffled curiosity. The men smoked and pondered. The flames aspired from the logs they consumed. In the gleaming embers below the logs was a kaleidoscope of hot colors, and Larrick, who had spent many a lonely hour with nothing else to read or heed but the shifting pictures in a fire, fell into an old habit of seeing landscapes there and watching the transaction of remembered incidents.

He fell to thinking of Norry Frewin and of his first meeting with the youth. It seemed to him that if Clelia had run away with anybody it would probably have been with Frewin, for Frewin was handsome, well born, magnetic, and impulsively uncertain enough to be interesting always.

If it had not been for Norry Frewin, Larrick would never have met Clelia. If it had not been for Larrick, Frewin would never have lived to present him to Clelia or to be discussed as her possible abductor. Larrick even now could not tell just how he felt toward Frewin. His gratitude, resentment, affection, envy, and contempt for the man were all keen and contradictory.

Both Larrick and Frewin were the victims of their own impulses, of impulses that shook them with lightning and seemed to come from as far away and to be as irresistible. Impulse had brought them together on a strange occasion.

Frewin had quarreled with his enormously wealthy father, and an impulse had led him to shake the golden dust of the New York home from his feet and fling to the opposite extreme of life, the very deserts of the Southwest. He had been drawn there by the heroic tales he had read of cowboy-land, the myth realm of the American youth—what the clouds and their thunderers were to the Scandinavians and the scenes of demigodly feats to the Greeks.

It had not taken long to convince Frewin that the desert was not for him. The pine shacks and tawdry gambling saloons along the muddy and dusty wallows called streets, and the uncouth, unkempt cattlefolk who amused themselves dismally there, were not likely to fascinate a fastidious soul that had found the Tenderloin of New York stupid and its sophisticate populace dull.

But his pride long survived his money and he had tried to stick it out; had tried to get money by gambling and finally even by labor. His language and his very intonations, however, branded him as a foreigner, and the traits that proved him well bred in the East proved him not bred at all in the West. In consequence he suffered cruel humiliations, privations, degradations till his proud spirit was all in a dismay and he was afraid to call his soul his own.

In an hour of morbid dejection and of desperate hunger he wandered into a decrepit saloon that was a disgrace even to the starveling village where the best was of the worst.

It happened that Larrick happened to slide off his horse outside that same saloon. Otherwise, the other things that happened would never have been.

Larrick had known nothing of the velvet of life, which was all Frewin had known until recently. But even to Larrick that town and that gin joint were disheartening. He was in a grouch against life in general and cattle punching in particular. He was ready for a fight with anybody or anything—cayuse, steer, sheriff, or God. When he shambled inside the floppy door and glowered at the dreary bar with its woeful meanness he was about to fling out again, but he noticed the peculiar behavior of the young man he afterward came to know so well as Frewin.

The first thing that caught his attention was Frewin's embarrassment. The young fellow was manifestly hesitating to approach the bar. Larrick could not guess that the shabby and disconsolate youth was trying to muster the courage to ask the keeper to lend him a drink and a clutch of the odious free lunch. Frewin had been so used to opening accounts anywhere in New York that a request for credit seemed to be a natural approach.

His self-respect balked at the present necessity, however, and he paused. Larrick, for lack of any other curiosity about anybody in the world, watched him, wondering what worried him.

Hunched over the bar was a boozy braggart, that old-fashioned thing known as a "bad man," this poor town's one best bad man, and drunk enough to be really bad. Spot Caper was drunk enough to have slung the obsolete accoutrement of a gun and holster at his groin, and he was telling the surfeited barkeeper of a man he was going to get and get good and plenty.

Frewin did not have a gun and would never have used it if he had. Larrick owned a gun, but carried it only for rattlesnakes and cattle thieves when he was riding range. Frewin had not been trained to the use of a revolver as a proof of sincerity or as italics to remarks. He was utterly unready for what followed.

As he approached the barkeeper and bent across the sippy counter to beg a very private ear his elbow struck the bad man's glass of whisky and sent it rolling. It scattered all its precious liquid fire and ended in a crash at the barkeeper's feet. Frewin was dumfounded at the leonine belch of rage that Spot Caper emitted. Frewin mumbled in his drawing-room tone—that Eastern tone which sounds so offensively snobbish to Western snobs:

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" He was about to offer handsomely to buy another round of drinks when his tongue was locked by the horrible fact that he had never a dime to buy one with.

Spot roared: "Sorry! You're sorry, are you? Well, what the hell does sorry get me? You—"

The worst of it was that Spot was also dimeless and had already been dunned by the barkeeper for his past account and forced to pay for the late spilled liquor. The barkeeper also was angry at the breakage and waiting for Frewin to make good.

The prodigal took the curses and the contumely of Spot till his gorge rose and he protested, feebly:

"I've apologized, and that's all I can do."

Apparently it was. For he did not move when, with a startling whisk, Spot flashed his gun from its case and jammed its muzzle into Frewin's very teeth. He was too scared to move. He did not budge or speak even when Spot damned and double damned him for everything loathsome and told him just what parts of him he would shoot off if he didn't shell out and shell out quick.

It was Larrick that moved. Under some odd compulsion that he never could explain he took two or three strides forward, as long and as quick as a catamount's, and, arriving by Frewin, who was nothing at all to him, shouldered Frewin aside, and took his place in front of the gun of Spot Caper, whom also he had never seen before.

When the surprised and infuriated Spot barked at him to get the hell out of there or take what came, the amazed and amazing Larrick leaned forward, rested his forehead on the muzzle of Caper's pistol, and commanded:

"Go on and shoot!"

"Pull your freight or by God I will!" Caper yelled.

But Larrick answered, "Agh!" a long, disgusted, "Agh!" like a gathering of spittle in his throat, and, pressing his brow harder against the black mouth of the weapon, invited the death so lightly leashed that it was almost as dangerous for Caper to lift his finger from the trigger as to press it.

Larrick waited a moment in that ridiculous sublimity of offering himself in the stead of a stranger and then, as if to take away the last suspicion of nobility, he embellished the vicarious sacrifice with the dirtiest language in his memory.

One may not print nowadays all the words one hears all about him, but among the publishable remarks of Larrick's Frewin remembered something to this effect:

"You cain't shoot, and you know it, you yalla-livered skunk. You cain't even leave go of the trigga. You cain't dew nothin' at tall! But I'll tell you what I'm goin' to dew. I'm goin' to kick—"

During the elaborate menu of activities that Larrick outlined Spot Caper went quite to pieces. His trigger finger collapsed. His elbow relaxed. His jaw dropped. His

head rolled. His tongue oozed out. His knees caved. He broke gradually everywhere, and went to the floor as abject as if he belonged in the spittoon he fell across.

He was slobbering and sobbing in shameful grief and remorse at his inability to do the impossible and murder an unknown man who dared him to.

Then Larrick, a little overstrained by his own storm, was frenzied enough to turn on the craven at his feet and kick him across the room, rolling and sprawling and creeping on all-fours, till a final bull's-eye in the full target sent Caper under the half door and out into the street, where a passing schoolmarm almost stepped on him.

Spot had dropped his useless pistol in transit. Larrick picked it up, slapped it on the bar, and said to the awestruck proprietor:

"Give that back to old What's-his-name when he comes round sober and tell him to swap it for a pep'mint stick or somethin' he can use."

Frewin sidled meekly to the hero's side and mumbled:

"You're the bravest man I ever heard of or read about; and that's the bravest thing that was ever done."

"Brave hell!" Larrick yawped, blushing. "I'm a Gawdam fewl and you're anotha."

But Frewin would not be denied his tribute. With a formality he could not help, though it shamed him, he faltered:

"How can I ever repay you?"

"Buy me a drink and forgit it."

"But I—I can't."

"Broke?"

Frewin's head dropped.

"Then I'll buy you one. I been busted many's the time. Hey, boss, set that bottle marked B'urbon ova heah, with tew glasses."

The raw whisky tasted like a red-hot poker all the way down Frewin's gullet, but it anæsthetized his pride to enable him to accept further alms of the same sort from his ribald savior.

When their legs began to corkscrew they gyrated to a

table and sat down for further drinks. Frewin grew talkative, told his real name, and his station, and all about the old man in New York and his poor mother waitin' for'm 't'ome.

Larrick's whisky gave him solemnity and he sermonized.

"Jevva hear tell of the Proggal Son? 'Memmbber the par'ble abote the Proggal Son in New Tes'ment? Fella that lef' fine ranch and ate husks offen the hawks? Well, you're just anotha dam' proggal and you're goin' back and fall on your old dad's sneck same way."

"Imposs'le!" Frewin wailed. "Too late! Oh, it stew late!"

"Tew late nothin'!" Larrick stormed. "You have place like that waitin' for you; palace on Fi'th Thavenoo and dress soots, sill kats, and places to go and shows and all, and you leave it and come down to wors' part of Texas. And here's me would give my right teye to get even's mush as a glimps of N' Yawk and never been nawth of Dallas in all my bawn days. And you say, 'Tew late to go back!' Tew nothin'! You're goin' back on firs' train to your pore li'l motha who's wai'n' for you!"

Frewin blubbered gloriously at this, but shook his addled pate and burred: "Imposs'le! Oh, simposs'le!"

Larrick smote the table till the glasses leaped, and mounted to his highest ferocity as he shouted:

"You're goin' home on firs' strain like a gemlenam or I'm goin' to kick you all way to N' Yawk like I kicked old Whassname into the street."

Frewin yielded to this frightful promise and consented to start as soon as he was sober enough. Larrick agreed that it would be well to wait for this moment and they fell back in their chairs and slept for several hours.

Sleep followed by cold water and coffee and some well-needed food restored the two young men to their senses sufficiently to debate the problem of raising the amount of the fare to New York.

Larrick found a friend who lent him the amount on his own recognizance, and the next day he put Frewin aboard the train to Paradise. He had contributed enough besides the

fare for a shave and a haircut and a bath at the barber shop, some clean linen, and a little pocket money.

Before the train pulled out, the New Yorker and the Texan were Damon and Pythias. But strange things had to occur before they met again.

By the time Frewin had reached home and the all-forgiving welcome there, and had sent back a letter of gratitude and the borrowed money with usury, Larrick had vanished into the wilderness, taking a new job and worrying little about his delay in repaying the man who had staked him to the fund for the restoration of Frewin to respectability. The letter was returned to Frewin undelivered and it left him with an indissoluble obligation on his head. An obligation tormented him like the itch and he suffered agonies till his chance came.

And now, a year later, the once penniless Larrick was a rich guest in an Adirondack camp, wondering if Frewin had stolen from him the rich maiden he loved, and wondering if his hatred of Frewin were great enough to exceed his love for the man. It is very hard to hate those that have taken a great deal of one's gifts. Such persons are like investments. It is not easy to hate investments.

Larrick said to himself, "If Frewin has carried off my Clelia I'll kill him!" But he knew that he could not harm the man he had already saved at the risk of his own life.

Yet the thought of anybody having Clelia except himself was a frantic thought and he could only wonder what he would do if he found them together—the girl he revered and desired and the man he had been more than a brother or a father to.

He could only wonder what he would do, for he could never tell in advance. All he could be sure of was that it would be something unreasonable, instant, rash, and as insane as his substitution of himself for Frewin at the muzzle of Spot Caper's gun.

It is a maddening thing to be the victim of impulse beyond prophecy, and Larrick, cursing his own helplessness with his own soul, plunged once more into the blizzard to get away from the cyclone in his own soul.

CHAPTER VI

THE storm was in full cry now. The air seemed to have gone mad, to be venomous with implacable rancor. The trees and rocks, the high hills and the cheerful waters, had not challenged or insulted the storm or defied it. They were as meek as Armenians in a Turkish massacre, increasing, rather than appeasing, hatred by submissiveness.

Larrick was astounded at the personal maniacal wrath that sought to flay the very flesh from the earth.

The snow had changed to splintered ice, a hurricane of thorns, blistering cold, blinding, freezing the eyeballs.

When Larrick bent his back to the gale the air went forward with such onrush that he seemed to gulp for breath in a vacuum.

He who had come forth to hunt somebody had soon almost forgotten who it was he sought, for now he was lost utterly. When he lifted his eyelids to the pain he could see nothing but vortices of white particles in chaos. He was enveloped in a smoke of powdered ice and he could not guess which way to turn.

He ran blundering with the complete cowardice of a child in a nightmare. He slammed into trees and bruised his forehead on their columns of ice. He threshed through bushes that were but stalactites crackling as he fell among them.

He remembered with aggravated fear that lost men wander in circles till they drop. He tried to go straight, but the world was all circles, spirals, whorls, intortions, the scrawls of a madman's penmanship.

The ground shot upward through the tumbled sky. The horizon was just beyond his eyelashes. He was knee-deep and elbow-deep in the horizons. The universe had fallen to ruin in a thunder of white plaster and there was no

longer any down or up or north or south, east, west, forward, or backward.

He was as devoid of reason as the demoniac tempest when, at last, he was blown against something like a wall. It was a wall, a wall of pine boards with the bark on them. He was rejoiced to tears at finding again something that was gloriously flat and vertical and rectangular, something built with hands, that masterpiece of architecture, a woodshed.

It was human. It had design, purpose; men had built it as the symbol of the first conquest over the subzeronian hell—the gorgeous discovery of fire! The thought reminded him that perhaps there was still warmth on the desponding earth, and hope was rekindled in the blown ashes of his thoughts.

He had something to fight for now, and his wits rallied like the remnants of a defeated army. In the lee of the shed there was a little mercy for the eyes. He could open them and peer through the tossing billows and he could make out vaguely and fitfully other blurs of shadow that must be the other houses of the camp.

He thought hard and pieced together in his mind the layout of the buildings, found himself at last, and oriented himself in the recaptured scene.

Filling his lungs with air, like a pearl diver, he plunged into the snow flood and swam to the next building, buffeting and buffeted, but sustained by that bravest thing in the world, the heart of man when he fights nature.

He won to his goal. It was the dance house! He would not submit to the mockery of dying outside a forsaken dance hall. And he dived into the torrent again, toward the billiard house, and made it. He was tiring fast, but he drove on again toward the cook house.

He missed it in the white darkness, but ran plump into the Big House and slid along its wall to find the door.

The wind bellowed and shrieked, but abruptly he heard an added cry, and, pushing forward, thrust his hands against a mass of snow-drenched fur.

A human form turned and clumsy mittened hands ran to his. He peered through the white swirl and hardly

recognized who it was before their noses met in an Eskimo salute.

It was Nancy Fleet. She had bundled herself up and come out after him. The blizzard had flung her back and flattened her against the wall, but she had continued to scream his name this way and that in the hope that he might hear it. She had acted as a Samaritan Lorelei.

Larrick could not hear what she said till they were out of the bluster, but his heart knew hers for its brave, eager devotion, and she was suddenly endeared to him in a perilous way.

He was so weakened by this contact with human tenderness after the bitter wrestle with the hate of nature that he could hardly win to the door. Nancy took a vast comfort and pride in setting her arms about him and aiding him. She had to mock her own emotion, as usual, and, as they fell through into the great room where the high flames choired like seraphim, she shouted, "Enter the Watteau sheperdess with the lost ram."

Larrick was too weak to close the door, and it took all of Burnley's might with Nancy Fleet's weight to shut it in the face of the snow wind that shot in like a flood breaking through a crevasse.

Larrick, panting and gasping prayers of thanksgiving for his safety, tried to be gallant to Miss Fleet, but she would not be helped. She helped him to pull off the icy cuirass that had been an overcoat. Then they stamped the little cargoes of snow from their shoes and ran to the fire to thaw themselves out.

Only now did Larrick realize how cold he had been. He was a long while getting back to a living temperature, and he swung his arms, beat his chilled breast, and stamped his wooden feet till he was exhausted before he was warm.

At length he was stretched out in a big chair and toasting comfortably while Miss Fleet played Hebe with the whisky and Mrs. Roantree recounted the theories that had been advanced in his absence.

"The only thing we haven't discussed as a possibility is murder," she said.

Larrick sat up and turned to her with a gasp.

She was despairful enough to explain: "People do get murdered all the time. People disappear, and years afterward their bones are found or somebody makes a deathbed confession."

"But who could have murdered Miss Clelia?" Larrick demanded. "And why?"

"If I knew I shouldn't be guessing, should I?" Mrs. Roantree sobbed. "Somebody might have entered the poor child's room and dragged her out, or called her out into the woods and bludgeoned her. There are insane men loose in the forests, half-crazy hermits, queer tramps. The Adirondacks was a favorite place for draft evaders in the Civil War, and in the last war, too. The Indians used to be all through here—and outlaws. Who can tell what terrible creatures might not have made away with her?"

"But why? you say. Well, why does anybody commit murder? Yet murders are committed, fearful murders. Jack-the-Ripper atrocities, everything imaginable and unimaginable gets done. My God! I wish that storm would stop shrieking so! It sounds like Clelia crying for help. She may be out there calling while we sit here and do nothing."

But there was nothing to do. A glance at the murderous storm was enough to quell any thoughts of wrestling with it for its prey. To attempt it would be only to sacrifice one certain victim for an uncertain.

They sat inert, and forbore even to wonder aloud. Even Miss Fleet was beaten and somber. She mumbled to Larrick: "Please forget what I said to you about Clelia. She was—she is—she is!—a precious angel, and I can't stand the thought of anything hurting her."

CHAPTER VII

JEFFERS brought them what food he could. He had fastened a rope from the Big House to the cook house and carried his rough fare through the tempest as a ship's cook might fight his way from the galley along a life line over a wave-swept deck to the captain on the bridge.

He brought loaves of bread, and Nancy Fleet knelt by the fireplace and toasted her fingers and her arms faster than the slices she held out on a fork. Jeffers brought in some eggs he found in the refrigerator and they fried them; and coffee, which they boiled as best they could in the old-fashioned way when fireplaces were kitchens.

It grew dark early and they all pretended to be sleepy to get away from one another's eyes. The men found quarters in the rooms of the departed women guests. Nobody wanted to sleep where Clelia had been and they left that shrine to its loneliness.

The little Empress had to be plucked away from the clothes she snuggled in, and she kept going back to the shut door and scratching at it, or sitting close and looking back to appeal for admittance. She barked and whined and refused to be held and comforted.

Mrs. Roantree cursed her for a little pest, but cuddled her and wept over her and took her into her own bed for the night.

Larrick tried to immerse himself in sleep for blessed oblivion's sake, but the tumult outside was repeated in the uproar of his own thoughts. He stole back to the fire, but the pictures in the embers were infernal. He sought a book in search of that chloroform for unrest which is one of the greatest benefits of the alphabet, the story-teller's medicine.

He happened upon the solid portion of the camp's library and plucked from the shelves the second volume of the *Diary of Samuel Pepys*. The pronunciation of the name

stumped him, as it does everybody else, and he was in no mood to enjoy the masterly self-portraiture of it or the fascinating snapshots of the woeful gayeties of the Second Charles.

But he happened on one entry that mentioned the attempt at suicide of a girl and the reasons she gave—"because she did not like herself, nor had not liked herself nor anything she did a great while."

Larrick closed the book and meditated the tremendous eloquence of that piteous apology.

He wondered if Clelia could have felt so about herself. Larrick had felt little else of himself a great while. But Clelia, with all her beauty, her versatility in enjoyment, her treasures of praise, could she ever have known such dejection? And yet who could fathom the shadows in another's soul? Who could follow the patterns of another's thoughts?

Larrick had often noticed how the crisis that stimulates one man to his best endeavor paralyzes another; the difficulties that make life interesting for one make it hopeless or hateful to another; the defeat that instructs and inspires one crushes another; the discovered shame that makes one repent and reform makes an outlaw of another. This man laughs at a spoken or a published insult; that man cowers before an implied reproof and perishes for a compliment withheld. This man in a fury shoots another; that man shoots himself.

Larrick pushed the volume back into its own ranks and pulled out one on a lower shelf. Luck brought him *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, by Francis Parkman, great historian, great writer.

Here Larrick found congenial food for his eyes. He knew the Indians and he loved the stories of their wiles and the wilier ways of the whites. He loved the outdoors of the book and the mountain lore. At length he fell upon the superb pages where Parkman contrasted the feast and the famine of a New York tribe:

In the calm days of summer, the Ojibwa fisherman pushes out his birch canoe upon the great inland ocean of the north, and, as he gazes down into the pellucid depths, he seems like one balanced

between earth and sky. The watchful fish hawk circles above his head; and below, further than his line will reach, he sees the trout glide shadowy and silent over the glimmering pebbles. . . . Again he explores the watery labyrinths where the stream sweeps among pine-tufted islands, or runs, black and deep, beneath the shadows of moss-bearded firs; or he drags his canoe upon the sandy beach and, while his camp fire crackles on the grass plat, reclines beneath the trees, and smokes and laughs away the sultry hours, in a lazy luxury of enjoyment.

But when winter descends upon the north, sealing up the fountains, fettering the streams, and turning the green-robed forests to shivering nakedness, then, bearing their frail dwellings on their backs, the Ojibwa family wander forth into the wilderness, cheered only on their dreary track by the whistling of the north wind and the hungry howl of the wolves. By the banks of some frozen stream women and children, men and dogs, lie crouched together around the fire. They spread their benumbed fingers over the embers, while the wind shrieks through the fir trees like the gale through the rigging of a frigate, and the narrow concave of the wigwam sparkles with the frostwork of their congealed breath. In vain they beat the magic drum and call upon their guardian manitoes—the wary moose keeps aloof, the bear lies close in his hollow tree, and famine stares them in the face. And now the hunter can fight no more against the nipping cold and blinding sleet. Stiff and stark, with haggard cheek and shriveled lip, he lies among the snowdrifts, till, with tooth and claw, the famished wildcat strives in vain to pierce the frigid marble of his limbs.

Larrick paused. He had not read much, and never such living words. With a ghastly reality he saw the lost Clelia in the place of the frozen Indian and read again that marvelous sentence, changing a word unconsciously:

“With tooth and claw the famished wildcat strives in vain to pierce the frigid marble of her limbs.”

This was unendurably actual, and Larrick gave Clelia up for lost and hated the north with redoubled hate now that he had surrendered to its spite the fairest thing he had found among its beauties.

One thing was certain: the perfect sculpture of her marble should not be left to the obscene brutality that spring and summer would wreak upon it. He must find her and bring her in.

CHAPTER VIII

HE went to the window to look into the storm. The glass was so cold that it chilled him to stand close. But he noted that the virulence of the gale had diminished. The wild din of it had ceased and there was left a kind of petulant melancholy like the aftermath of a woman's hysterics.

The sleet had gone and there was only a trouble of flitting snow, tapping at the window as with finger tips and floating by, yet always there.

The wind had a wretched soul of its own. Larrick found it hard to believe that the wind was not some forlorn spirit locked out of the house and suffering with the bitterness of the night.

There was womanishness in its wail and in its gusts of skulking passion. In sudden recurrences of wrath it seized the trees and shook them till the snow flew from them in showers. It swept a spray of snow from the ridges of snow. It caught up double armloads of snow and ran to the lake with them. It scooped out furrows, scalloped the edges of smothered walls, took a perverse delight in burying the road and baring the terraces.

The lake had long since vanished. It must have been coated with a thick armor of ice to uphold the burden of snow that turned it into a white and wind-wrung prairie.

The stars, no longer hidden, were crystals of snow in a cold-blue field of heaven. The moon was a round sheet of ice, very cold, very far, very lonely, very still.

In the heavens all was frozen indifference—the earth was pallid and condemned.

Larrick had ridden herd in dust storms that blinded and choked, but never in the snow. He had been told of mounds of poor frozen cattle, piled up in hillocks, of cowboys freezing

to the saddle or curling up in the bellies of their frozen bronchos and dying there under a white shroud.

It terrified him with a peculiar terror to think of a death in the cold. He hoped with a violence of hope that Clelia had, after all, been spared such a death. She should go out like a flame or droop like a flower over the edge of a silver vase.

It was under just such a clear blue moon-ruled sky that he had seen her first, only then it was summer and the earth was carpeted beneath her delicate feet with grass, green grass in a flood of blue moonlight.

Only a night ago he had seen her dancing on the veranda with Coykendall in the moonlight as the phonograph churned out jazz music. He had suffered at seeing her dance so flippantly, so fluently with another man. How glad he would be to see her there again, even in another man's arms!

He had not been the only one jealous of Coykendall. Frewin had been frankly ugly. There had been a quarrel. What if Coykendall had somehow coaxed Clelia out into the blue midnight and frightened her so that she had run away from him.

He might have pursued her and killed her in a spasm of black wrath, leaving her hidden body to be made marble by the storm.

Or she might have escaped him and lost herself somewhere, wandered too far, slid down a ravine and broken her bones. What if she had stepped into one of the steel traps set for annoying animals? She might have slipped into one of these leaping streams and drowned in a trout pool.

She might still be alive. Some little of that abounding vitality of hers might remain and he might save her yet.

He could not endure to stand and gaze. He must keep moving. Stealing about quietly, he found heavy wraps and boots and slipped out into the hushed air.

A numbing chill invaded his frame. His skin was not trained to the cold. The infinite little windows of the pores had not learned to open and shut for all weathers. But he drove forward toward the looming mountains.

His feet broke through the crust and sank deep and

must be hoisted out with effort. It was as if he trampled glass that crackled and cut and let him down into white clay.

He made little progress, floundering, falling, disgusting himself with his awkwardness.

He saw that he would have to have snowshoes. He did not know where the guide kept them. He did not know how to put them on.

He turned about and retreated to the house, doddering like a man on broken stilts.

He flung into his bed and shivered, wondering how he could endure the waiting. But sleep mercifully set his clock forward by many hours.

The next morning he woke early before the others.

He dressed quickly and sought the fireplace and made himself much coffee. Then he asked the guide for snowshoes.

Jeffers was surly about Larrick's plan to go out again. The uselessness of it offended him. He refused to be an accessory. Larrick hardly persuaded him to produce a pair of snowshoes and fasten them on to his ankles with thongs. Jeffers was not even amused as Larrick suffered the usual initiations into the strange footgear. He walked as on tennis racquets. He stepped on his own broad soles and could not tell which foot to lift. He fell in every imaginable humiliating way.

But at last he learned to shuffle along somehow, and he struck forth into the white desert, across the clearing into the woods, eager to be away before anyone else could volunteer to come along. He was most afraid of Miss Fleet's company. She was too confusing. She thought of so many things and phases of things. He wanted to think of one—Clelia's fate.

The going was maddeningly perverse. The blizzard had assailed him, but now the quiet world lay mute and mocked him with its contempt. It made no response to his struggles except when he blundered against some fir trees with snow heaped along the boughs and beaten into the needles. Then wagonloads of snow were emptied upon him, filling his hood and getting down his neck.

Old white logs tripped and spilled him and he bruised and cut his face on the broken plate glass of the snow.

He panted with the effort and streamed with sweat that turned cold upon him when he sank down, idly studying the florid autographs of the wind or the tiny footprints of mice and squirrels, the trident tracks of hungry birds and the trails left by rabbits that hopped and rested.

In one of his pauses he bethought him of a picture of Clelia that he had torn out of a newspaper a few days after he had met her for the first time. He had carried it in his wallet ever since, and he wondered if he still had it.

He took off a glove and groped inside his coats for his pocketbook. He found what he sought, a ragged bit of a Sunday supplement, picturing various personages who had taken part in a lawn fête for charity. Yes, there she was, "Miss Clelia Blakeney as Puck."

The paper was creased and blurred with long wear, but the sight of her picture evoked her as she had first stolen into his ken.

At the edge of a millionaire's empty lawn there had been a stone wall that kept a thicket of trees from marching into the little plain. A searchlight from the roof had gone exploring the edge of that wood. Suddenly it had discovered the figure of Puck come to life from Shakespeare's pages—a lissome girl in the clothes of a lad of that period, with a touch of fantasy about the garb.

A clatter of palm applause from the audience in the dark had greeted her, and Frewin, who had brought Larrick to his first lawn affair, had mumbled to him:

"That's Clelia! That's the Clelia Blakeney I've told you about so much!"

Larrick had warned himself at once that he must not fall in love with her at first sight, as he was preparing to do, before Frewin gave her a name; for Frewin was his friend and had already picked her out for himself long before.

Larrick was ashamed to feel that this knowledge had not at once quenched his interest, but had indeed made the girl just a little more compelling.

He had watched her as she leaped from the wall to the



MISS CLELIA BLAKENEY AS PUCK, SUDDENLY COME TO LIFE FROM SHAKESPEARE'S PAGES



grass and came dancing eerily, darkling, swooping on little scalloped fluttering wings, poising on one toe so lightly that she seemed not to weigh down the clover beneath her, swirling and pirouetting, then halting to recite a bit of verse, and finally, with uplifted hands, summoning from the woods a pack of fairies and elves, children who swarmed over the wall and filled the lawn with a scurry of robes and a glamour of bare legs and arms and feet.

Larrick could see Clelia at her invocation and could hear her voice, that crisp, pointed New York voice of elegant carelessness and nervous ease, almost the first New York girl's voice he had ever heard.

Then there had been a crowd of swells to share the vision with him. Now in this Adirondack revocation she danced for him alone. He reveled in her grace like another Herod, and he was offering her the half of his kingdom when a flurry of snow ran across the clearing like a curtain and shut her from his imagination. He could study the picture, but he could not make her dance again.

Still, the spell was left and he was assured that she could not have been marked out for such a fate as freezing to death. She would dance out of life as she danced in, for she was always dancing. There could not be cruelty enough, even in this cruel world, to congeal such beauty.

He went back to the house with a heart full of confidence that she had simply fled upon some errand that her own wisdom had made necessary to her all-important happiness.

CHAPTER IX

LARRICK'S recovery from despair encouraged the others and they settled down to the killing of time until their sentence should expire. They played cards and accepted Mrs. Roantree's temper with good grace. She made and unmade rules as suited her hand and roundly abused the others and herself with characteristic vigor.

That night, as they played, they heard the wind rising anew, and the noise of it was disheartening. They were remanded to prison for a new term.

The gale came back like a sea, only it came now from the opposite quarter. It kept a great bluster, but it seemed to have no other purpose than the reversal of the mischief of the other storm.

It raised sails of snow on the lake and sent across convoys of ghostly vessels with broad white spinnakers swooping.

By morning it had swept the lake almost clean, revealing a vast tract of flawed glass.

Larrick was cast down by the renewal of the evil temper of the weather and by the frustration of his escape to the city, where he hoped at least to find Clelia and learn what she had done, and why.

In his discouragement his optimism began to freeze again. His imagination began to play once more with its dreadful visions of Clelia as the nun martyr of the winter's maledictions. He grew restive to resume the hunt.

He had not searched the island in the long lake nor the other shore. He could cross the water easily now and save miles of stumbling travel.

He bundled up again and went out in the deathly cold. He had not gone far when he heard Miss Fleet hailing him.

"Wait for me!" she cried.

He turned and saw her plunging toward him through the

uncertain drifts, now towering on a pinnacle of ice, now thigh-deep in the snow. She was tremendously wrapped up, but her cheeks were like poppies and her eyes keen as steel.

He told her of his plan of exploration and she said:

"I know you don't want me and so I'm coming along. There's always something interesting in being where you're not wanted."

"You're mighty welcome," he lied.

She widened her eyes in acknowledgment of the perjury and swung along with him. At the edge of the lake he hesitated. He had never set foot before on frozen water and he could hardly believe that it would hold him up, though he could see that it was thicker than the floor of any bridge he had ever crossed. Miss Fleet saw that he was afraid and, laughing, launched herself out and coasted on her feet as she had done since childhood.

Larrick tried to copy her, and slipped, sprawled, spun, and fell with a crash. She picked him up and did not laugh. She had an idea that it would be more fun to skate. She told him to wait for her and turned back to the house. Glad of being alone again, Larrick ventured along the water's edge with gingerly steps, blinking at the sharp light that beat up from the polished surface.

And suddenly, as he worked his way round one jutting ledge of rock, and bent to pass beneath the far outflung branch of a great cedar, he found Clelia.

She was right beneath him. He had almost trodden upon her, where she lay like her own reflection, fixed and embedded in her own looking-glass, an imprisoned image seized and held fast by the mirror that loved it.

Her perfect body was swathed in a silk nightgown, its delicate wrinkles clustering about her every outline, creamily rippling with an eager tenderness over each rounded contour.

Her hands were gabled as in prayer at her young breast. Her eyes were closed. Her hair, dispread and unbound, was afloat like a mist in the ice, as if blown back on a wind, disclosing on her white, white forehead a deep gash, and one or two drops of blood frozen there into rubies.

Larrick cast himself down to gather and lift her in his arms, but a wall of adamant rebuffed him. In a surge of wild love he bent to waken her with a kiss, and kissed ice.

When he flung up his head in torment his lips were already frozen to the mirror, and they bled as he tore them away. He knelt there, beating on the crystal door, crying her name:
"Clelia! Clelia!"

CHAPTER X

NANCY FLEET had followed Larrick because she liked to be with him and had rejoiced in the prospect of scaling snowy peaks at his side.

She was so certain that Clelia would not be found that she had dismissed her from her thoughts.

She had laughed at Larrick's timidity before so silly a peril as ice, because Norry Frewin had told her that Larrick was the bravest man on earth. But like every other bravest man, Larrick had his specialties in heroism, and there were realms where he was more timid than a little girl. A frozen lake was one of the dangers that he knew not of.

Nancy Fleet had rejoiced to see the hero from farthest Texas shudder at a risk that children took with shrieks of laughter. Reveling in his innocence of ice, she welcomed the chance of revealing to him the godlike privilege of skates. She wanted to fledge his feet with wings of steel and make another Mercury of him. Besides, she wanted to cow him still further, she wanted both to teach him new delights and to break him as he broke bronchos—so that he would accept harness and direction from her and regard her with respect as a dear teacher.

Commanding him not to budge till she returned, she had darted off for the house, for she remembered a brief outing of a previous winter and managed to turn up two pairs of rusty skates. When she came back the blades glistened and clanked at her hip like weapons—as indeed they were.

Larrick was not where she had left him, but his footprints were large and deep in the crust and she ran to overtake him. She ran right gracefully, bending beneath the pine branches and calling to him once more, her comrade cry of, "Wait for me!"

She made him out where he crouched on the ice, and

hailed him with all cheer, but as she came up to him she saw that the eyes he turned to her were aghast, his face leaden and sick, his lips a blur of red.

She thought that he must have fallen again—broken bones, perhaps. She stumbled forward with anxious questions, the old eternal phrase, "What's the matter?" Dumbly he pointed with a quaking hand.

She approached to look across his shoulder and saw in the ice, not her own expected reflection, nor his, nor yet the returned aspect of the sky, but Clelia—Clelia dreadfully in repose, fallen terribly asleep in her prayers.

So lifelike she was that Nancy watched for her bosom to breathe. Her own breath waited till she smothered, then she began to pant, to gasp. She dropped slowly to her knees at the side of Larrick and stared at the water whist to ice, and the girl bewitched in its crystal magic.

So beautiful Clelia was, so long and slender and stately, so more than humanly pure, that Nancy's first tears were for the very perfection of her grace, the unimaginable peace of her slumber.

There was such absence of the dross of life about her that she was mere beauty; she seemed not anything that had been born and had grown, had laughed and cried and run about the world, but, rather, something created anew, complete in the rapture of a genius. She was a work of art, and mystic tears were summoned by the sheer felicity of her design—such tears as steal out upon the eyelids when music flings up like a rush of sudden doves, or when a line of divine poetry is encountered; when a mighty architecture looms in enormous emotion, or a landscape is found idyllically dispread before the wanderer and speaks to him with a gigantic tenderness.

So Nancy's first reply to Clelia's mute appeal was a few tears of reverence. Then came the gush of pity for the girl who had ceased to partake of the life she had graced, and had come so untimely to be fastened in the translucent granite of this fairy tomb.

Nancy fell forward, her brow on her arm. The first of her words that Larrick understood were these:

"Forgive me, Clelia, forgive me! You poor, sweet, sweet child!"

Larrick's heart seemed to break again, to split open in a new place, and spill its blood into his body. That such a girl as Clelia should be dead and done for was maddening. That such a girl as Nancy should be racked with such mourning and such remorse was all but unbearable. The successive realizations of the cruelties of the world and of this deed beat upon him ruthlessly. But he was the sort of man that never yields till he is crushed.

Instinct braced him as it braces strong souls to endure and endure and endure, till sometimes it seems that strength is given for spite to certain slaves so that punishment may be prolonged upon them and new torments tried out. By such persons in their agony a renewing physician seems to stand as one stood by in the ancient inquisitions that Christians practiced on one another to revive the victim of torture when he fainted, lest he cheat the torturer of a final luxury.

Larrick knelt on the ice and accepted grief after grief that shook him as if a monster stood over him and smote him with the head of an ax again and again—not with the blade, for that would have ended his pain, but with the thudding head of it.

He would not break, because he could not break, or grovel, or cry "Enough!" But there was no love left in him for the world or the management of the world.

A man who was a soldier at the battle of Omdurman told me (years later, when he had become a preacher) that after the fallen Mahdists had killed several men who bent to help them where they lay intermingled with the British wounded, the order was given to destroy the fanatics, and he was so revolted by the hideous business that he stood up and shook his fist at God, calling him dirty names and daring him to come down and fight fair.

So Larrick felt now a mad impulse to leap on a good top-horse and charge the heavens. As High-Chin Bob, in Charles Badger Clark's poem, belly-roped a red-eyed lion and dragged him over the mountains in a never-ending chase, so Larrick would have been glad to dare the sky and drag that Bad

Man along the stars. But this was only one of those wild frenzies of a soul in a throe of grief, and its futility was but another humiliation.

In his helplessness he turned for company to the fellow victim at his side. He put his hands down about Nancy Fleet and lifted her, gathered her in his arms, and huddled her close. There was the possibility of a little further bitterness in the remembrance that she had been in his arms before, and in such a different spirit that they seemed to be hardly the same people.

Now he felt that in that earlier audacity of his, when she had seemed to be merely a knowing accessory in a flirtation whose charm was its peril, he had laid impious hands upon a saint. Seeing how capable she was of tenderness for Clelia, and how quick she was with shame for a few little jealousies, he recognized in her a goodliness he had never suspected.

Now they were as brother and sister united in the bereavement of a little sister. He had been the lover of both Clelia and Nancy, and now fate had driven romance from their hearts and made them blood kindred.

Larrick's eyes went back to Clelia, and he saw her transformed, too, by the anointment of death. Everything she had been and done was viewed in retrospect, forgiven because it was past, understood because it was finished, sanctified because it was already antiquity.

He winced to remember how flippantly she had been discussed, her dare-deviltry, her frivolity, her impish recklessness, her flirtations, her volatilities. These were all now the records of an angel, and what blame inhered in them fell upon those who remarked them, not upon the one who committed them.

There was a benediction upon her and a malediction upon her critics, a dreadful accusation against those who had even lovingly found fault with her.

She was now the alabaster effigy of Sancta Clelia, and her withdrawal from the world robbed it of a precious visitor, leaving the earth more ugly and empty than ever.

He lifted his eyes from her to the hills and to the sky

and found in them no help, no solace, no reliance. The hills smoked with blown snow like sullen craters; the sky was closed with clouds of murky turbulence. The flowers were buried, and the trees were stark, and the planet was a bleak moon.

To his desert-trained eyes white suggested alkali, and the world seemed caked and damned to an alkaline wilderness.

The only warmth in it and the only life in it were in the throbbing body of the partner of his grief. He could and he must find use for his strength in upholding her.

The only help he could give Clelia was to release her from the ice and render her the poor tribute of burial. The word, like all the rest of its tribe, nauseated him in connection with Clelia and what she had been.

He looked at her again with pity and straightened sharply, for he noted anew that gash in her placid brow and those gems of her blood. Now he was kindled with the feeling that he must also revenge her.

He ceased to hate God for permitting this infamy and began to hate the unknown human whom he accused of the crime. He could not punish the Deity, but it was a man's privilege and his duty to exact atonement for human ferocity. He promised the guilty one all the hell he could inflict in recompense for this deed.

CHAPTER XI

GRIEF wears out, weeping runs down automatically. By and by Nancy ceased to sob and rested motionless save for a few last twitches of anguish. But once she had come out of the temple of woe she lost the right to be in Larrick's arms.

They were no longer brother and sister, but man and woman. She put away his arms almost blushing. He accepted his dismissal.

He rose and hoisted her by the elbows till she stood by his side. They were mutually embarrassed again, and Clelia was their common embarrassment.

"What shall we do now?" Nancy faltered. "What can we do?"

"We've got to get her out of the ice first."

"But how?"

Ice was as hard and cold and stubborn and brittle as the rest of the hateful world, and it must either be broken or melted.

The two witnesses were so exhausted by the storm of emotions they had lived through that their wits were benumbed. They felt the need of council.

They turned to go back to the house for aid and advice.

They paused. It seemed not right to leave Clelia alone there in her scant covering in that chill bed. Yet she was all too safe. They could have gone away for many months in the assurance that until the spring came, the tardy spring that must work upon these mountain lakes, Clelia would suffer no change soever.

The summer of passion that had made her and ripened her would soon destroy her loveliness, but the winter that had slain her would guard her well.

So they moved off and went slowly to the house, hobbling

and shuffling and plunging over and through the snow. Nancy fell again and again, and he picked her up. At length he set his arm about her and kept it there. She began to weep again and to grope forward blindly. As they approached the house like two lovers they were seen from the windows and wondered at; waited for.

Mrs. Roantree, staring at them, was startled, then indignant, then amiable as usual. She could not see that Nancy was weeping. She fretted:

"What on earth possesses those two idiots? Haven't they any sense of decency at all?"

Burnley suggested: "Perhaps they are engaged and don't care who knows it. I thought Larrick was crazy about Clelia—but her absence must have cured him."

Mrs. Roantree had not taken Larrick seriously as a suitor for Clelia. She said, "Well, Nancy is a nice girl, and if she can stand his rough ways and he can stand her temper they ought to make a happy pair."

Burnley and Randel opened the door for them with laughter, and Mrs. Roantree waited, smiling, with the light taunts one saves for those who announce their engagement, publish their infatuation.

Nancy put out her hands at Burnley's first joke and pleaded:

"Oh, don't! For God's sake! Clelia! We found Clelia!"

"Where? Why doesn't she come in? What's happened?"

Mrs. Roantree demanded.

Nancy flung herself on a great couch and hid her face in her arms. They turned to Larrick and he mumbled:

"She's out there—down there—in the ice!"

Frantic questions dragged the truth from him piecemeal. Mrs. Roantree went quite mad. The ancient autocrat became a terrified child, humbled and incoherent as any farmer's wife.

She was for darting out to find Clelia and take her up in her arms. She had to be restrained. Her days for moving through snowdrifts were long done, but she fought and wrestled, thinking of every desperate sorrow this sorrow meant to so many.

"Her poor mother! Her father! He idolized her! They trusted her to me. What will they think of me now? And to think what I said of the blessed child! There was nothing I didn't accuse her of! Oh, I ought to be struck dead—I ought to have my vile tongue torn out. And all the while the poor baby was dead! Dead! and I was blaming her for the bother." On and on she ran through all the paths grief takes for its own increase. Her anger came to her rescue at last and she turned on the men she had kept busy and cried: "But why do you stand there gaping? Why aren't you out there bringing the baby in? Must she lie out there in the ice forever? The darling is cold! Won't you hurry? Hurry!"

While she stormed like a deposed queen who has only her wrath left of all her pride, the maid Berthe had heard the news and run away to a distance where she could pour out her cries without insubordination.

Jeffers, having heard her wailing, came upon her where she lay in the snow, freezing as she screamed. He picked her up and carried her in and then dashed to the lakeside and pondered the situation. He shook his head stupidly and flung off tears that surprised his hard eyes and shamed him in the presence of Kemp, who followed him.

"A pirty thing as ever was," Jeffers muttered, "and as nice a little lady as could be."

"And knew more about a car than what I did," the chauffeur contributed. "Afraid of nothin', too. What could have brought her down here like that? And who gave her that gash?"

"Who was she prayin' to? If you knew that you'd know who it was done it."

They came soon to practical conclusions concerning the necessary tasks, the odious realities and harsh circumstances that belittle the awe of death; the making of coffins, the setting of them upon trestles, the carrying of them on shoulders to hearses, and all the rest of the tasks of carpenters and joiners, undertakers and embalmers, hack drivers and grave diggers—the mob that must walk across the solemnities of grief.

Larrick found Jeffers and Kemp when he left the house to escape the sight of Mrs. Roantree's suffering. Nancy would have been glad to follow him, but she had to stand by the older woman.

It shocked Larrick to find the two men staring at Clelia in her nightgown. He felt an impulse to fling something over her, but the fatuity of that checked him.

Jeffers answered the question in Larrick's mind:

"We can't leave her there, o' course, though she wouldn't change till come next Aperl. One of my jobs is gettin' in the ice, and I guess we got to cut her out and take her ashore, and then—I guess we got to get over to town somehow and bring in a nice box. And there's a preacher there. He'd come across the mountain, I guess, and— Well, that's about what's got to be done, as I see it."

And that was what was done. Jeffers brought out long saws and axes and timbers. Standing over Clelia, he pulled the saw up and down through the ice in a great rectangle. It was inconceivable that Clelia should not move or breathe or blush or sigh during all that time.

Jeffers chopped away a free space and lifted masses of ice out with tongs, and laid down a path of scantlings from the bank.

Then he led down a team of oxen with a drag chain and fastened to it ice hooks whose jaws he set in the edges of the floe inclosing Clelia. Then with cries of "Gee!" and "Haw!" and blows he sent the oxen forward and the block came lurching and splashing forth, shining like a diamond of fabulous size, like a great gem in whose heart a girl had been enamored.

Larrick and the chauffeur kept lifting the timbers after the block had slid beyond them and running ahead of the oxen to lay them down again as a runway.

And so Clelia reached the Big House at last. And then there was a new problem.

Mrs. Roantree ran to her, fell down to her knees and tried to embrace her, but was frustrated by the jagged frame. She commanded that the block be taken at once into the room where the fire could melt it. But Jeffers

said what the others had not the courage to put into words.

“Better leave her there, ma’am, till we can get over to town and bring across a proper casket for the pore little lady. It would be more advisable.”

And so in her gruesome loveliness Clelia was kept in exile yet awhile.

With huge effort the block was lifted and stood upright against an outer wall of the porch to wait till the chauffeur and Jeffers could hitch a team of horses to a sleigh and try to break through the wilderness of snow. Mrs. Roantree gave them telegrams to send, breaking to Clelia’s mother and father the fearful truth.

When they had set out, Mrs. Roantree and Nancy and Berthe and the three men stood gazing at Clelia, like beggars before a window of deep glass.

She seemed now an angel afloat in the air, a virgin lifted upon unseen wings toward an immaculate conception, meek in her glory, her hands praying.

Mrs. Roantree and the others were silent a long while, wondering. Then Mrs. Roantree’s eyes caught the wound in the brow and she began to call for vengeance. She began to name names—Coykendall, Frewin; she mentioned a woman or two, and in her insanity of suspicion turned her eyes even upon Nancy Fleet.

CHAPTER XII

EVERY suspicion seemed to annul itself by its own implausibility. The whole thought of murder seemed ridiculous. Murder itself is hardly believable in spite of its innumerable frequency in history and in the daily histories.

Only recently in New York a girl had been found guilty of killing her own sister; a clergyman had been tried in the mid-West for butchering a whole family. Boys and girls younger than Clelia had committed frightful crimes. A few years before, a woman and her craven lover had persuaded her powerful husband to let himself be bound as a joke. Then the paramours had added assassination to their guilt. In American cities, villages, and countrysides murder was more commonplace than anywhere else in the world. Four years of war had developed slaughter into a matter of emulation among professors of chemistry and a dream of shy inventors. Yet in spite of its unequaled familiarity it seemed impossible that it should have happened here.

No other explanation was so clear, however, and a blank indictment against some culprit must stand until some other explanation could be found of Clelia's fate.

Mrs. Roantree's theory was dreadfully simple.

"Somebody struck the poor child down with a weapon—in her room, perhaps—or after he called her out somehow. Then he flung her sweet body in the lake and ran away. It might have been some stranger. It might have been one of the men—or women—who left the house yesterday morning."

There was a frightening directness about the charge. It was almost convincing, but not quite. Yet it challenged a better theory. And nobody had one.

Randel ventured to say, "Of course she might have flung herself in the lake."

Mrs. Roantree and the others met this with exclamations

of such protest, such fierce Whys, that he tried to justify his guess. He moved to the bookshelves and Larrick expected him to select the volume of Pepys in which he had found a story of suicide. But he went to a row of Russian novels and took one up, saying:

"I've been devouring Dostoevski recently and in *The Brothers Karamzov* I ran across a reference to a girl who"—he found the place and read—"who after some years of an enigmatic passion for a gentleman, whom she might quite easily have married at any moment, invented impenetrable obstacles to their union, and ended by throwing herself one stormy night into a rather deep and rapid river from a high bank, almost a precipice, and so perished, entirely to satisfy her own caprice and to be like Shakespeare's Ophelia."

But this tragic affectation, this pitiful effort at being dramatic and classic at any cost, was so alien to every trait of Clelia's that Randel himself shook his head as he closed the book.

Clelia could not have tossed away her life and her rapture in it with the careless gesture of one spilling dice. Her life must have been wrested from her against her will and wish.

With such a case before the court, there seemed to be accusation in the very air. Everyone searched his mind for an alibi and wondered what explanations the others had.

Merely to say, "I was in bed, asleep," seemed not to be enough.

Nancy Fleet, having been seared already by one of the glances from Mrs. Roantree's fierce eyes, said:

"Oughtn't we to look in Clelia's room for signs of a struggle or some clew or something?"

Mrs. Roantree nodded and led the way. She opened the door upon a deathly chill. The little Empress bounded into the room, whimpering and searching in vain for her goddess.

Berthe had dismantled the bed while she waited for her young mistress, but the pretty clothes were still waiting in their bright colors, their dulcet textures.

The Empress leaped to ensconce herself in them and purred loudly. The little comforts of life—ribbons and laces and the devotion of dogs—make death more pitiful than all the somber grandeurs.

Mrs. Roantree turned and ran from the room. The others tiptoed about half-heartedly, seeking some clew. But there was proof enough that there had been no struggle here. They felt their unskillfulness as detectives and gave up the pretense.

Nancy Fleet gathered the Empress up to her breast and carried her away in spite of her struggles. Larrick closed the door and hurried back to see if Clelia were still where he had left her.

Burnley and Randel peered through the window that gave on the porch and commanded a view of the block of ice.

Miss Fleet tapped on the glass and beckoned Larrick within

"You mustn't stay out there and kill yourself," she pleaded.

"She's out there," Larrick groaned, and turned aside to conceal the rush of tears to his eyelids.

Nancy Fleet reached for his hand and squeezed it hard. And she walked away to spare him and to hide the tears that welled to her lashes—for his sake.

Larrick regained his self-control and went to the window where Randel and Burnley stood. They were both artists, and their sorrow was turned to wonder by their response to the strange exquisiteness of the sculptural masterpiece of death and winter.

Randel was reminded of one of Martial's epigrams that he had translated in his college days. It concerned a tiny ant caught in a drop of amber and made precious by its very death. Randel reverently admired the grace of the girl, and the eloquent rhythms of the many-wrinkled silk, sculptured with minute complexity and superhuman delicacy.

He could reproduce some of these graces and his mind was meditating Clelia as a monument, but he knew no way to copy the enveloping ice that gave the statue an aureole of splintered lights in slanting shafts and prismic radiances.

The color entranced him, too, for the silk was of an old-ivory-hue tint, and the flesh pale, but not white.

He murmured this thought to Burnley.

"If I could perpetuate that vision it would be something worth while, wouldn't it?"

"If you could!" sighed Burnley.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY did not know that Larrick had overheard. He had none of the expressive arts, but only the dumb longing of the layman. He had been agonizing in his still heart at the thought of the passing away of this Clelia before his eyes. The ice would melt, her body would be closed up in a case or given to the furnace to turn to ashes, and the world would never know her as she was. This annihilation was too wanton for him to bear, and, hearing the artists musing aloud, he was moved to put them to the task of defeating death in their own way.

"You two men are going to save something from all this, I hope? You weren't thinking of standing here idle and letting a beauty like that perish from the face of the earth, were you?"

They smiled at him indulgently and with gestures implied their incompetence to the opportunity.

But Larrick's face turned grim as he said: "Seems to me you owe it to her, not to say the world. You both said some mighty unkind things about Miss Clelia while she was out there, and I should think you'd feel it a sort of a duty to do her what justice you could."

"I might make a sketch," Burnley said.

Randel mumbled, "And I might—" He did not finish, but he fell into deep thought, and walked away to debate with himself an idea of strange audacity whose rewards might atone for its impiety.

Randel was afraid that his own years were not many before him, and his terrifying project teased him as a way to render both Clelia and himself immortal. But he dared not broach it to a soul, hardly dared to debate it with himself.

Burnley, however, sought his painting material and, placing a blank canvas by the window, began to ply his

brushes. He was a realist, and he did not dramatize or allegorize what he saw. It was much and enough if he could translate with his brushes what his eyes beheld. He beheld a beautiful, beautiful girl in a crystal casket. As his brushes ran from palette to canvas the lights in the sky shifted swiftly and sunset scarlets incarnadined the snowy background and glinted in the ice.

Early twilight ended his sketch before it was more than a memorandum for later development.

Randel had disappeared, and when he came back he would tell no one where he had been. But his great resolve was made.

It became evident that Jeffers would not return from the village by night. He had said that he would probably have to wait for the morning light to get through.

A hush and a fatigue of grief weighed the mourners down, and they went to sleep. Larrick had volunteered to keep the vigil over Clelia that custom required.

He placed himself a chair by the window and became her sentinel. The twilight swathed her away from his sight for a while, save for a dim and haunting glamour in the ice. But by and by the moon overtopped the mountains and flooded the world with blue fire, turning the ice to a mass of tremulous sheen as if the ice were water again, twinkling, and coruscant.

It had an hypnotic effect and he had to fight off a drowsiness that seemed heartless but would not be resisted.

Whether it was that he only remembered, or that he dreamed it, with the baffling velocity and detail of recollection or of dream experience, in that night he went vividly over all his life from the curious events that had sent him out of the so different world of his youth into the alien planet of Clelia and her people.

He retraced everything, and marveled at the little accidents and impulses that had built his destiny to this tragedy. Intolerable as it was, it was precious; and he would not have been absent from it for any other ecstasy that might have been his, if any of the infinitesimal influences conveying him hither had shunted him along any other path.

An infinity of other fates might have been his, but this was the one that befell him, and he was broken-heartedly glad of it and utterly determined to see it through.

And so, while the household lay in the stupor of slumber, he was more than awake, so busily adream, indeed, that his life ran before him in review. By a familiar miracle of memory he turned time back and let it repeat itself. He saw himself from a distance as if his disembodied soul hovered in the clouds and watched his body wandering the paths whose conclusions it could not foresee, though they were all too plain to him now. Here he saw purpose where there had been none, and he found a mystic intention in results that were but the algebraic total of accidents.

And while he scanned his life, as it rolled past his eyes, he kept searching for some hint that might set him on the track of the fiend who had turned the livingest creature he had ever known into that figure so incredibly still in the ceaseless shimmer of the moonlit ice.

His shattered hopes were but one hope—the solving of the riddle of that wound in Clelia's brow. He was warned by one fierce ambition to "get" the man.

He had in his day trailed murderers and cattle thieves and Mexican bandits and had learned the art of the scout, the relentlessness of the hound on the scent.

He stirred in his chair and clenched his fist, his jaws, and even his throat as he groaned: "I'll get him! By God! I'll get him good and plenty—the rattlesnake!"

Book II
THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

"THE rattlesnake!" was a compellation that Larrick repented instantly. He had dwelt and moved among venomous reptiles so long that the word sprang to his thought from old custom. For years it had been his habit to shake his shoes before he put them on, lest a tarantula or a centipede had taken possession there, to go through his shirts and breeches for scorpions, to move warily and keep on the eternal lookout for Gila monsters and various sorts of rattlesnake.

At one of his first teas in New York, when his hostess had sounded an electric buzzer Larrick threw his cup into the air as he leaped to his feet. The tinny whir had reminded his muscles of a rattlesnake, and they had thrown him on guard before his mind could remember where he was.

He smiled sorrowfully now to recall how fascinated Clelia had been when he told her once:

"My best friend was a rattlesnake. If it hadn't been for a rattler I'd never have known you."

It was a rattlesnake that brought him to this remark and he marveled to think that he should have heard one in her company and in the depths of the most expensive luxury.

For the recapture of the Adirondacks from the lumber vandals and the hunters was a most expensive luxury, and, strangely, the turning of a mountain range into a vast public park surrounded by private parks and the protection of the zone from fires and marauders has had the ironical consequence that the poisonous serpent is being welcomed back into the restored Edens; the bear is seen once more, wolves are heard, and the deer tear up the golf links and startle the automobilist as far south as Westchester.

It was at Mrs. Roantree's camp that Larrick encountered

his first Northern rattler. The word "camp" had amused him as much as the "mountains." "Camp" and "mountains" had meant to him either the military tent colony or the lone bivouac of the cowboy in the parched and grassless wastes of the tortured Texan desert.

But here everything was velvet, the camp was palatial, and the mountains suave and serene. In his eyes the Adirondacks were upholstered in green plush.

Soon after his arrival Clelia had taken him out for a clamber. He had rejoiced in her prowess and her grace. There was something of the young panther in her combination of fierce energy with fine raiment.

Suddenly she stopped short and fell back plump into his arms.

It was the first time he had found her there, except in a dance. He would never have dared to gather her in, though he had ventured an audacity with Nancy Fleet at the first opportunity.

Clelia nestled close to Larrick and shivered with violence. She even drew his arms about her and made no secret of her terror. It was the first time he had seen her reveal fear. He excused her because his own hair had risen along the back of his neck. They were scrambling across a shelf of rock when they heard a clatter like the escape of the mainspring of a clock. Both of them knew that a rattlesnake was close at foot.

Both of them stood stock-still till the alarm died out. At the first movement it shrilled again.

Larrick held Clelia fast while he searched the ledge with keen eyes. At last he made out the timber monster. He had just shed his banded skin and he was black as patent leather. He lay coiled for his thrust, his erect tail shuddering, his odious clubbed head retracted on an S loop, his sharp syringes of venom poised.

But he made no advance and asked merely to be let alone. The implacable pacifists who insist that preparedness means aggression are contradicted by the habit of the best-armed and the readiest of our American animals, who never advances beyond his own territory for a fight.

"Kill him!" Clelia whispered, and Larrick, drawing her back to safety, cast about for a club of proper heft. The rattler, having satisfied his dignity, was for moving quietly away. He had only a few days more of sunlight before his withdrawal into the seams of the mountain for his winter sleep.

As Larrick advanced, the snake returned to his coil and repeated his "*Noli me tangere!*"

Larrick rejoiced at the prospect of battle, but paused to say:

"Dog-on it, Miss Clelia, it don't seem right to me to kill a rattler. If it hadn't been for a rattler I'd never have come up North. I'd never have struck it rich. I'd never have met up with you. Seems like I owe everything worth while in my life to a rattlesnake—not forgetting a bear and a pair of mules and a cayuse that throwed me."

Clelia was woman enough to love a story that she hated, and she demanded the answer to Larrick's riddle-some poser.

She chose a safe resting place in the embrasure of a great tree's roots on the brink of a tumultuous brook and ordered him to begin.

She had always treated him as a sort of living story book, a collection of quaint adventures told in a dialect of captivating uncouthness. He fascinated her by his difference; as Othello, Desdemona. Larrick was almost as swart as the Moor, but Clelia had none of the look of Desdemona where she perched in her boyish costume, cross-legged and impudent as she rolled herself a cigarette.

She was as curious to Larrick as he to her; her dialect as quaint and her adventures as astonishing.

On that day he had blessed the rattlesnake that brought him all his good fortune. On this later night he felt that he had spoken his gratitude too soon. His happiness had only been an exaltation to prepare for a more disastrous fall. He felt that it would have been a greater happiness to him if the serpent had filled his veins with its poison and saved him from the baser treachery of fate and the bitterer anguish.

But now he recalled the bright eyes, the eager attention, the impertinent comments of Clelia, as he told her how he that had been the poorest of men became almost instantly a man of wealth. There was a something of the "Arabian Nights" in the miracle, except that it really happened. It would have been inexcusably fantastic coming from any other author except the historian of fact.

CHAPTER II

SAVE himself in retrospection, there was no witness of Larrick's actions on that fateful day a year or so before, when life, after seeming to neglect and discard him utterly, caught him up with a rush of glory.

Life found him in the dimmest of regions, with no hope and little ambition. His very heart had been dried out of him in that country where, as the saying was, there was not moisture enough to rust a nail. He was stranded in one of the man-forsakenest and apparently God-forsakenest parts of the American wilderness.

Excepting a settlement or two and a dozen tiny hamlets and one county seat of fifteen hundred souls strung along one rope of railroad track Brewster County is a blank on the railroad map of Texas. Yet Massachusetts or New Jersey with their populations of two and a half or three and a half millions could be laid down (if either of them could be picked up) inside the borders of Brewster. Its confines would almost contain the whole of Belgium with her seven and a half millions.

Outside of the town of Alpine, Brewster had less than four thousand people in its domain. The loneliness of that realm can be guessed if one considers that Belgium has nearly seven hundred people to the square mile, while Brewster County has hardly more than half of one person to a square mile. And two thirds of that half is a Mexican who knows the American language just well enough to answer a question with, "*No se Ingles!*" It is desert waste, and chiefly mountain desert, with the Comanche and the Santiago chains cutting across it and a chaos of peaks to the south, where it ends in the eastern gut of the Big Bend of the Rio Grande River.

These mountains are volcanic and sedimentary and as

ugly, as empty of majesty, as mountains can be, except for an occasional benediction from a sunset or a sunrise or from the peculiar poetry of desert twilight, which seems to change the very air to a new and bewildering vapor. The two great bodies of water refreshing this aridity are Calamity Creek and Terlingua Creek, and both of them are most of the year mere furrows in the sand and rock, so dry that a few hours after some infrequent cloudburst has shot them off into torrents they seem never to have known a feeling of dampness.

It was less strange that Larrick should be in such a dreary waste than that anyone at all should be there. Humanity is an animal of various tastes, and the more inhospitable the region, the more it challenges certain types of defiant man.

Larrick was not there from any such heroic quality. He had merely chanced to meet a rancher from that inferno in the town where he had chanced to save Norry Frewin's life when Spot Caper flourished his pistol at Frewin and Larrick insanely, or divinely, chose to step into his place and to press his forehead against the muzzle of the drunkard's gun and from that coign of disadvantage dared the sot to shoot him.

The next day after Larrick had shipped young Frewin home to New York, on money that Larrick had borrowed to lend, Larrick was plunged into a pit of despondency. Envy and disgust sickened him.

Frewin had been born to wealth and glory. Frewin had known New York so well that he had tired of it. Frewin was going back to the paradise he had run away from. But Larrick had never been to paradise. He had never been anywhere worth the trip except to Houston for a time, when he was in the military service. And even then he never got to France, never got to New York, never got out of Texas. And there was no likelihood of his ever getting out. Young as he was, he was as doleful and felt as senile as the old man who never had been to Carcassone—of which Larrick had never heard.

Larrick was as pessimistic as a man could be who had had so short a life to practice pessimism in. And then

he met up with Josh Milman, whom he had known as a fellow soldier. Milman was looking for cow-punchers for his father's ranch, and he offered extra pay to Larrick to come along.

The thing that decided Larrick was Milman's recommendation:

"It is the loneliest, dried-uppatest, goldamnedest sink hole that Gawd ever spit on, and nobody would live there that was fitten to live anywheres else."

"That's the place I'm lookin' for," said Larrick, and closed the deal.

They took train to Alpine, and from there took horse and rode nearly a hundred miles due south almost to the Rio Grande, from whose ignoble bed most of the water was carried in wagons for twelve miles or so.

In that hell beneath hell water was the everlasting problem. Wells were practically unknown, and rain was almost never heard. Big tanks were sunk in the rocky sections to catch and hold what little fell from the rare clouds that visited that kettle lid of a sky.

Here in this peninsula of the United States, thrust into the side of Mexico, and still Mexican in the main, Larrick took up existence. He was a kind of savage vegetation, a sort of roving cactus or Spanish bayonet, getting along somehow on almost no water, and bristling at all points.

The few whites who owned the fewer ranches preferred white cowboys to greasers, and the eternal race feud furnished the chief excitement. The cowboys carried "six-guns" and rifles, and found their own forage when they rode herd. Here flourished in one of its last strongholds the American epic estate, established by the old West before the barbed-wire fence strangled it to death. Here one might have his fill of that civilization so incessantly represented in the moving pictures and so nearly extinct elsewhere.

The Mexican bandits came over the border now and then and the wilderness thereabouts was the haunt of desperadoes who were "wanted" for various reasons.

Horses and men had a hard life and even mules were put to the test of their mettle. Larrick had grown morose and

as dangerous as a rattlesnake. He abominated the environment human and natural, but he could not muster the courage to rise and move on to pleasanter pastures. Then a complex chain of events in that eventless clime hoisted him abruptly out of the dry well into the blue sky.

Oldman Milman had a sportive disposition, and one day while he was crossing one of those cast-iron stoves, called the Chisos Mountains, he startled a black bear. The bear waddled off about its business, but Pop Milman put after it with his lariat swirling. He settled the noose about the shaggy neck and detained the traveler. Whereupon the bear turned and put after Pop Milman.

Remembering how High-Chin Bob in the ballad lassoed the lion and was condemned to an eternal flight of dragging the prey that pursued him, and could neither be released nor worn out, Pop Milman spurred his panicky cayuse toward a big tree that stuck out of the rocks like a huge mistake. He flung the rope over a low, stout limb, caught it as he rode on, and proceeded to lynch poor bruin, fastening his end of the rope to a stump and leaving his captive to dangle and choke.

The cayuse hardly got the old man to the ranch house before it broke down in a nervous collapse that rendered it a useless invalid for life.

Old Milman bragged of his feat to his wife and promised her the bear's pelt as a rug for her sitting room. He invited her to ride out with him in the buckboard, which was drawn by the best two mules in southern Texas, and assist at the skinning.

As soon as the mules sniffed the bear from afar they whirled and bolted, throwing the two Milmans overboard. Pop was knocked senseless, and when he recovered he found that his wife had suffered one fractured leg among her many injuries. The dazed couple lay there broken and broiled on the skillet of the rocks until the mules, returning to the corral with the empty and shattered buckboard, gave the alarm.

Larrick and young Josh Milman leaped on their horses and flashed away to the scene of the disaster. Their horses

bucked, snorted, and rebelled as soon as they reached the aroma zone of the bear.

The young men thereupon dismounted and approached on foot. The hanging bear had taken abundant revenge for the unwarranted assault on him.

Larrick and Josh bolstered the cracked and bleeding victims against the hot rocks and, recapturing their horses, rode away again, Josh to fetch a wagon and Larrick to seek the nearest doctor to set the old woman's shattered femur.

This meant for Larrick a hundred and eighty miles of travel to Alpine and back; but that was better than a lifelong limp for the dear old lady, whose goodliness preserved Larrick's respect for womankind. Womankind thereabouts meant Mexican women, mainly of the poorest and looest sort. Their uncleanliness was next to their godliness, and they had a convenient theory that sin confessed and paid for could be renewed indefinitely on the same terms without immortal peril.

Larrick did not tell Clelia much about these greasers. It did not seem to him the thing to tell the "cream dee la cream" about what he called the "grease dee la grease."

But it had amazed him to hear the metropolitan moralists throwing all the blame for girlish wrong-going on the moving pictures, the naughty plays, and sex novels, the dances and the décolleté gowns—since the wickedest women of Larrick's acquaintance had never seen a play or a moving picture, could not have read a romance if they had known where to buy one, had never been to a dance, and paid little heed to their shapeless but sufficient clothes. Furthermore, they were intensely religious and they never had heard of divorce, the other scapegoat of all social disorder.

Yet they had somehow learned to practice almost every known vice from blasphemy, bestiality, and incest up to covetousness and false witness.

Larrick thought of these things often later, and when he came to know the truth about people of wealth and fashion dwelling in a world of art and beauty and cleanliness, his respect for the loud-mouthed satirists and the pulpit-pounding slanderers was not increased.

On this ride he thought of other things, never dreaming as he rode that he was riding straight out of poverty and the desert into the demesnes of all opulence.

His thoughts were on poor Ma Milman, a stalwart heroine, as powerful as a man—and as gentle as a man—fearless in a bandit raid, tireless in making her boys comfortable and feeding them well. She swore so majestically and smoked such strong tobacco that when Larrick came to hear a lady utter a damnlet or see her puff a dainty cigarette he was not so horrified as he might have been. The woman who had been to him what his mother would have been if she had lived wore breeches, cursed, drank, smoked, and had not been near enough to a church to go to one for twenty years. There was a tradition that Ma Milman had been known to chaw terbacker when the smokes were short, but Larrick could not verify this.

It only bewildered him to find people who seemed to think that such things had some vital connection with virtue; that not to do these things was to accomplish a great and noble life, and that heaven was an exclusive club whose members had never played cards, danced, dressed up, seen a play, a movie, read a love story, revealed more than a minimum of skin, quaffed a liquor, or set a tobacco roll on fire—or who, if they had done any of these things, had put themselves in a brief Hades of repentance and burned out the carbon in their cylinders.

According to certain people whose diatribes Larrick read and heard, the angels of heaven spent most of their time snooping, eavesdropping, and keyholing, and recording the very thoughts and whims that drifted through the souls of the candidates for heaven. They blackballed all of the candidates who were not lily-white or covered with ashes of regret. And there was only one other club (or at the most two) to belong to—the largest and most liberal of them all being hell with an eternal membership and a grillroom even worse than Brewster County at its worst.

But these psychologies were for the after-life that Larrick was riding toward unwittingly. His resolve now was to get to the nearest ranch and borrow a flivver that he might

make the rest of the way to Alpine at a higher speed than his broncho could maintain.

He was remembering old Milman's words, "If that damned doctor don't want to come, fetch him, the way I done fotch the b'ar."

Larrick was riding over pathless territory, making a short cut from the scene of the accident to the road north. The quick, almost snaky motion of his horse swung him into a mood for song, and he howled melancholiac strains that must have discouraged the coyotes.

The horse swerved from a short, green rattlesnake, twisted through endless clumps of cactus, slashed through mesquite, gave the bayonet plant a wide berth, and kept his wits swift and sure.

The sun poured down the only rain there had been for months, and it was almost audible as it beat on Larrick's broad hat brim, shimmered on the rattlesnake skin that served for a hat band, and fried the horse's back.

Coming to a tiny pool of sweet water somehow mislaid in that place, Larrick dismounted and squatted at the brink, taking his hat by the crown and using the brim for a saucer to drink from. The cayuse at his side gulped with ill-mannered noise.

Then they swung away again. Larrick sang what he could remember from the "Dance at the Ranch" and grinned to recall some of the plump "sage hens" he had romped with. Any village big enough for a dance seemed like a metropolis to him now, and he grew a trifle lonely for a less lonely existence.

His heart was unconsciously hungering for a love affair with somebody—almost anybody who was not a Mex. He was tempted to linger in Alpine for a day on some excuse, sending the doctor back without him. It would not be quite white, but he was "lonesome, Gawd-awful lonesome."

He had had what he grandiosely called a "superfluous sufficiency" of the desert. The scorching wind with its meanness, aggravated by an eternal little blizzard of sharp sand, was ripping old bunches of sagebrush from their dry roots and sending them rolling and jouncing across the hate-

ful scene. Everywhere there were trees blown into postures of crippled agony and everywhere tumbling clumps of sagebrush scuttering and driven like frightened rabbits. His own life was as aimless, yet as driven, as that of any dead sagebrush.

There was nothing but melancholy in the heavens, the air, the earth, and the products of the earth. It was all misery and caricature.

He ought to settle down in a town somewhere, be a blacksmith or a clerk in a grocery store, eat in a nice boarding house, and have a girl to call on. As the Oriental poet, Sheerkohf, put it, "Song is the dew of heaven on the bosom of the desert; it cools the path of the traveler." So Larrick fell to singing of the houri of Occidental poesy:

"Biscuit-shootin' Susie
 She's got us roped and tied.
 Sober men or woozy
 Look on her with pride.
 Susie's strong and able,
 And not a one gits rash
 When she waits on the table
 And superintends the hash."

He was reveling in a dream of fair women—railroad lunch-counter waitresses who had waited on him. How he would love to wait on one! His ambitions did not climb so high as the grace of some of the ladies who had fed the soldiers, met them at the stations with sandwiches and coffee, or passed them dainties at the canteens.

One of the beauties of the Fred Harvey system would be queen enough for Larrick. He was so nympholept that he began to compose a song of his own—the next step would be sunstroke. As he worked it out it ran something like this:

"There's a little girl in Alpine
 And I'm goin' to spark her sometime.
 She's the belle of Brewster
 And I'll be a lucky rooster
 If she'll be mine alone
 And make with me her home."

Larrick rather liked this. It was the makin's of a classic—a classic being anything that was not intentionally a comic.

He cantered into the second stanza.

“Oh, little Alpine lady,
Wilst thou be mine—oh, maybe—”

His afflation was interrupted as his frenzed rolling eye caught a glimpse of a huge diamond rattler just ahead, moving straight and slow toward some prey. Its color and its scales were so close akin to the color and texture of the dead gray sand in the dry creek the broncho was dipping across that Larrick might not have seen it if it had not moved.

But it had to move. It was nearly seven feet long, and as it heard him it whipped itself into a coil, drew in the great breath that swelled it fat, and set off its clattering alarm, proffering the ugliest cup of poison that could sicken the human heart.

Before Larrick's mind could meditate the situation his right hand had snatched out his pistol, aimed it, and fired it. The snake did most of the aiming, sending its fang-pronged lance head straight at the pistol's one eye, and meeting the bullet halfway.

The bullet nipped off the head, which glanced harmlessly from Larrick's box stirrup, spurting its venom as its fangs smote.

Larrick's horse had also coiled for a spring out of the serpent's reach. The odor of the bear had made it hysterical beyond its wont, and now it had not expected the report of the pistol. So it went through the air in the slanting hurtle of a hooked tarpon.

Larrick did not go with it. In the words of the bard:

“Though it's nothin' they take pride in,
Still most fellers I have knowed,
If they ever done much ridin'
Has at different times got throwed.”

This was one of the times when Larrick did the "hoochy-koochy dance, moppin' up the cañon's surface with the bosom of his pants."

He came down in a nest of cactus in whose shade a pair of amorous horned rattlesnakes had taken refuge from observation. They left immediately in the grotesque bias loops that have given them the name of "side-winder." They resembled pieces of agitated lariat running away.

Larrick grinned at them in spite of his pained amazement. He lifted himself from the cactus bed with many an oath, the spines plunging into him wherever he rested an elbow or a hand to pry himself free.

As he told Clelia afterward: "I was as full of pins as a new-boughten shirt. When I stood up I felt something knock my foot. It was that fool rattlesnake tryin' to bite me without any head on to it to bite with.

"A little ways off the head was nippin' at a rock, forgettin' it hadn't any body on to it. I noticed the piece of black rock the snake was wastin' its time over. There was a lot of red about it.

"At first I thought it was blood. I looked again, and, lo and beholes! it was cinnabar."

He looked at Clelia with dramatic effect, as a child does who finally springs the great word of a long story.

Clelia's face was a blank of polite suspense, waiting for the point. He repeated the tremendous name:

"I say, it was cinnabar."

"Yes. And then?" said Clelia. "You know, cinnabar means nothing in my fair young life. What is it? Any relation to the cinnamon b'ar that your old Pop Milton lynched?"

Larrick was disgusted. He had led up to his grand climax with the utmost ingenuity and it was a hopeless fizzle. He took a cinch in his self-control and with violent patience explained:

"Cinnabar is what mercury comes in. It's the ore of mercury. Simply full of it."

"I see. Like a thermometer," Clelia conceded, and added, "Go on, strahnger, your story interests me."

"Well, that's my story!" Larrick groaned, surrendering.

"Oh!" sighed Clelia. "Most exciting!"

"Don't you see?" Larrick pleaded. "Of course you don't, but it's like this. I was riding over one of the branches of the Terlingua Creek, and Terlingua is where the quick-silver mines are. Everybody in Brewster County knows cinnabar when he sees it, and I'd found a pocket of it.

"If I could prove it was on land that hadn't been claimed by anybody, I could record it in my name and work it or sell it. Well, it hadn't been, and I did, and I got two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for it; sold out to a syndicate that everybody says is owned by the Rothschilds."

"Oh, now you speak a language I can understand," said Clelia. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Cinnabar. So that's how you became a millionaire."

"Well, I'm only a quarter of one—or I was. But it was some jump, at that, from bein' a cow-puncher on next to nothin' a year and no prospects. And I owe it all to that poor diamond-back."

"And to several other animals," said Clelia. "If that bear hadn't come out of that mountain just at the moment that Pa Millington rode by. And if he hadn't been cruel enough—"

"Oh, don't say anything against Pop Milman."

"Well, then if he hadn't been kind enough to lasso the bear and bring his dear old wife out to see it, and if those darling mules hadn't spilled her all over the sweet old mountains, and if you had taken any other one of a million short cuts except just that one past just that divine rattler, you'd still be in Brewster County and that snake up there might have bitten me if I had chanced to come out alone. Good Lord! but you are a complicated young man. The angels must have sat up nights working out your career."

Larrick mumbled with a sudden gloom, "Maybe it wasn't angels that did it."

"Why do you doubt that?"

"Because my story isn't finished yet, and I won't know

whether I'm meant for heaven or hell till you tell me whether—"

"Oh, you're not going to start that again!" Clelia laughed and, rising, darted down the mountain side.

Larrick lumbered after her, feeling like a bear pursuing an antelope—one of those antelopes he had seen in Texas, where the attempt was making to domesticate them and cross them with more stolid stock.

In his pursuit of Clelia they came suddenly upon Norry Frewin, who was stealing along a trout stream. Frewin's face lighted up when he saw Clelia, but it darkened when Larrick appeared.

And then Larrick wished that he had never stepped in front of the pistol aimed at Frewin, had never placed his brow against the muzzle and saved the jealous fiend.

But then he would never have found Clelia. He realized with torment that it seems impossible to unwish one slightest thing in the past and to keep anything else that followed it.

CHAPTER III

GOOD deeds, in spite of all the advertisement they get, are as often repented, perhaps, as evil deeds; and nothing looks sillier or more mawkish in retrospect from an altered point of view. And nothing is bitterer than a repented gratitude.

Larrick and Frewin, who had begun their acquaintance as instantaneous comrades, a very Damon and Pythias in a moment, were glaring at each other now with distrust and hostility. And this just because a volatile girl had floated between them like a silver bubble.

Time would show that neither of them was to catch or hold that bubble, but at the moment it was the one important thing on earth, and the rivals were ready to trample each other down as stepping stones for a higher clutch.

Clelia plainly understood the jealousy she inspired, and plainly reveled in it. She was at the age when Nature seems to demand that the highest female ideal shall be the exciting of as much jealousy and as frantic a desire in as many males as possible. Laws and moralities and fairy stories of love frown on this instinct as a deviltry, but Nature has her way, let opinion be what it will. Everybody laughs at King Canute for ordering the tide back and getting his feet wet, yet everybody is always imitating his folly and commanding the domestic tides to stand still or to ebb when they are on the flood.

Larrick, looking back on the living frivolity of the Clelia who stood just outside, all froze in the moonlit ice, shuddered to remember how cruel she had seemed to him that day as she giggled over the torments she inspired in the two men who worshiped her, and hated each other instead of their tormentor. At that moment he had hated her a little, too, but with the hate which is the sharpest proof of love.

After he had glared down from the high path at Frewin knee-deep in the tumult of the stream, and Frewin had glared up at him while the torrent carried his hook into a tangle of roots, Larrick felt compelled to say something, and could think of nothing better than:

“What luck you havin’ down yonda?”

Frewin had snapped back: “Rotten! And the same to you up yonda!”

Larrick reddened with angry confusion, but Clelia snickered aloud, and, more to nag Frewin than to comfort Larrick, called down:

“Don’t tell on us, Norry darling. We have decided to keep our engagement secret for a while.”

Then she seized Larrick’s hand and, drawing it close to her side, marched down the steep path leaning on his arm and howling a wedding march:

“Hail to the bride! Hail to the bride!
Lah, de-de-dah de-de-dah de-de-dah-dah!”

Larrick could hear the enraged Frewin lashing the air with his fishline, and he was in a worse psychological snarl as to his own duty in the premises.

Should he accept Clelia’s announcement as pure burlesque and try to laugh with her over what was no laughing matter to him? Should he affect to misunderstand her and take the announcement as a final surrender to the proposal he made every time he got her alone?

The latter seemed the more gallant thing to do, though he was not at all surprised when she flung his arm away the moment she was out of Frewin’s sight. He caught back her hand and pleaded:

“I’m takin’ this mighty se’iously, Miss Clelia. I’m goin’ to announce our engagement to the fust pusson I meet.”

She put her finger in her mouth, cast her eyes down, and in a parody of Priscilla simpered, burlesquing his Texan accent:

“Whah, Mista Larrick, haow praoud you make me!”

She fascinated him so with her incorrigible impertinence

that he grew desperate enough to reach for her in a frenzy of impatience.

She stood still in the loop of his arms and eyed him down as she spoke with more dignity than she had a right:

"Don't be any damner fool than you have to."

His arms fell away and he cringed with humiliation. She laughed even at this with that mercilessness of youth Nancy Fleet had spoken of. And away she went, like a tantalizing butterfly, drifting down the mountain side.

Larrick stood fast, trying to be man enough not to follow. But he was too much man to give her up, and jogged after her, feeling as ungainly in mind and body as a balky steer yoked to a galloping colt.

When Clelia was out of breath she sat down on a log that spanned the equally frivolous stream. She motioned Larrick to sit by her, and enjoined any sentimentalism by speaking as if he had never suggested love:

"You told me how you found your fortune, but you haven't told me about Ma Milman's leg. Did you get the doctor or didn't you?"

His self-respect debated whether he ought to sulk or to ignore his insult. He decided to be as good a loser as he could.

"Well—" he began, when who should emerge from the screening thicket but Nancy Fleet and Roy Coykendall?

Instantly Larrick felt so guilty before the eyes of Nancy that he hardly noted the sudden wrath that turned Coykendall's sun-scorched features livid.

But the fleeting impression photographed itself on his remembrance and was filed away and overscored, only to come forth in palimpsest now on this bitter night after these many weeks.

Coykendall's anger was as different from Frewin's as the touch of a toad from the wrath of a tiger.

It came upon Larrick that Coykendall, being a man of experience and cynical reaction to experience, had visited his rage upon Clelia and not upon Larrick. Frewin hated Larrick for pursuing Clelia. Coykendall hated Clelia for making a fool of Larrick and of himself. As always, he

treated Larrick with a certain disdain, more intolerable than Frewin's really flattering jealousy.

Nancy was for going her way after a casual, "Hello!" that failed to be as indifferent as she meant it to be.

Larrick was stabbed with a sudden intuition that if anybody could have murdered Clelia it would have been Coykendall. Frewin, he was sure, would have murdered a man, if anybody. He felt that he had turned up a clew, and went back greedily to his reminiscence of the encounter.

But Clelia sang out in the rural dialect she liked to employ:

"Set in, folks, and listen at the goldarndest yarn ye ever did hear."

Nothing sounds stranger on the ear of memory than the bad manners and flippancies of the dead, the silly little things tossed off in fleeting whims. It seems almost a disloyalty to remember them.

Larrick had been used to Clelia's childish way of making fun of him. He rather enjoyed it, but what hurt him wonderfully then was her invitation to the others to stop when they were going by. She insisted on turning their twosome into a foursome. He wanted to be alone with Clelia, and if she cared for him she would want to be alone with him; yet she insisted on dragging in outsiders.

This trifle convinced him mightily that he had made little impression on her heart, and he was cruelly disheartened. Thus love builds mountains out of molehills for its own despair.

Miss Fleet and Coykendall had their own spiritual discomforts to digest, but they stopped because they had not the courage to move on.

Clelia, holding them as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest, gave them a mocking synopsis of Larrick's serial up to the point he had reached.

"The mysterious stranger has just been telling me the story of his life, how he was a poor but honest cow-poker down in a hell hole of a desert, and his boss's wife broke her leg because a dead bear scared a mule, and Mr. Larrick started to fetch a doctor from an Alpine village a million miles away to set said leg, and as he was cutting across lots

a most obliging rattlesnake jumped at him and knocked him off his hoss and he fell into a quicksilver mine worth a million dollars and sold it afterward to his friend Rothschild. And I was just asking him about the next installment when you two young lovers butted in."

As Nancy and Coykendall both notoriously loathed each other, this allusion added to the discomfort that Clelia loved to create in her impish moods.

But it was a dull afternoon and Nancy was as unwilling to leave Larrick alone with Clelia as Coykendall was, so they dropped on the ground and begged for the story.

Larrick did not want to go on, but Clelia bullied him into it, so he yielded rather than to appear to want coaxing. He soon warmed up to the theme as one inevitably does who tells his own story to an audience that sits still and makes at least a pretense of interest.

"Well," he welled, "after my hoss th'owed me and I picked up that chunk of cinnabar I sat still a long while, figuring out how much money I might make in case I made any, because I wasn't plumb sure that place wasn't staked out.

"I looked around and found there was quite a showing of cinnabar as far as I could see. The stream had washed away the sand down to the rock; then the winds had blowed the sand over the rocks again, and hid it from anybody else who might have been passin'—if anybody did. Then just before I came along another wind had cleared off a little of it again.

"Well, I had run across a pocket of cinnabar. There were close on to two hundred tons of it there, though I didn't find that out till later, of course.

"I wrapped that chunk of cinnabar in a handkerchief and tucked it inside my shirt. Then I caught my hoss. He was foolin' round, feelin' too lonesome and lost to run away. Then I lit out for the nearest ranch. I remembered poor Ma Milman and her broken leg, and I was pretty much anxious to get to Alpine on my own account before that cinnabar pocket did a vanish.

"I realized that that hoss of mine was going to take too

long to make that ninety miles to Alpine, so I turned in at Bowditch's ranch. I didn't want to, because old Bowditch and Pa Milman weren't any too good friends, and Mrs. Bowditch had plumb insulted Ma Milman because she heard her swear once on a Sunday. Ma was drivin' a team of mules at the time, the same pair that broke her limb for her when they got scared of the bear. And anybody that blames anybody for cussing out a mule has funny ideas. But the Bowditches had a flivver and Mrs. Bowditch couldn't run it, anyways, so she had no occasion to swear. But she wasn't speaking to Ma Milman at the time.

"I felt kind of delicate about borrowing the Bowditch flivver on Ma's account, but on second thoughts I decided it was all the more reason to use it. So I rode in and asked Bowditch to harness up the fliv and take me to town. When he asked why, I told him, and he allowed he couldn't spare the time. I had put my gun on when I went out to see what scared the mules home, so I put the gun in Bowditch's stummick and allowed that I could tell him where he'd spend eternity if he didn't step along right smart. So he did. He rolled out the rusty old tin lizard and we got into the can as snug as a pair of sardines.

"We began the jounce across the desert, making such a rattle that the rattlesnakes gave up in disgust. But we hadn't gone many miles before the engine began to sputter and loaf. Bowditch got out and looked her over and said the blamed old radiator was leakin'. We'd been trundlin' that old sprinklin' can across the sand and wasting precious water on a place that even a cloudburst couldn't do much more than moisten down for a few minutes.

"Down there in Brewster County water is the fust and last thing we think of. They sink big tanks where they can to catch rain water when there is any and hold it between showers. But we were a long ways from the next water hole and a longer ways from the last one.

"Old Bowditch scratched his head a long while and allowed we could never make it, on account of the radiator. I got out my old six-gun and said it was feelin' right leaky, too, and he'd better pray for an inspiration or something.

There was just a mite of water in the radiator and it was tricklin' out fast, but Bowditch got his inspiration, though it was a long while a-comin'.

"He found a box of Uneeda biscuits in the car. He'd brought 'em along for his supper. Well, he crumbled the crackers up and fed 'em into the radiator, and they made a kind of a paste, I reckon, and stopped up the leak wherever it was. Then we emptied our canteens in on top of what water there was left, and the engine began to pop once more. We moved like a bull snake with the rheumatiz, but we crawled to the next tank. Always carry some crackers with you, folks, when you go motoring.

"Well, anyways, we loaded the radiator up good and went flyin' along the trail. But we were a long ways from Alpine when it come on dark. Then Bowditch found that the lights wouldn't work. I'd 'a' shot him right there, but I didn't want to be left alone in the desert with a flivver, and we couldn't go very far without a lamp. But, as luck would have it, just before the twilight petered out we came to an old 'dobe barn with a thatched roof.

"There was nothing to it but to put up there till daybreak. So we did, and mighty glad not to have to sit up in the flivver all night.

"Bowditch rolled himself up in the lap rope and told me he hoped I'd die durin' the night.

"The next thing I knew, old Bowditch was shakin' me and sayin', 'Are you allowin' to lay abed all forenoon? It's nearly five o'clock.'

"We pushed on in the car and made Alpine in pretty good time, considerin'. The doctor didn't want to go to the Milmans' much. He said he had all the patients he could handle in Alpine. But I told him what Pa Milman had said about fetchin' him one way if I didn't another. And I allowed that if he didn't set Ma Milman's bones he'd have so many of his own to set that he wouldn't practice on much of anybody but himself for considerable of a time; so he said he'd come along.

"While we were waiting for the doctor to leave farewell pills on all his patients I put my claim in the hands of a

lawyer I could trust and promised I'd give him a rake-off if he made good, and I'd shoot his head off if he didn't run straight.

"Then we piled the doctor and his kit of tools into Bowditch's flivver and we went pirooting back to the ranch.

"Poor Ma Milman was almost dead with that broken bone those two days and all that night and we didn't dare tell her the doctor came in the Bowditch car or she'd have refused to see him. The doctor fixed her up fine, and before I left Alpine she was up and about, cussin' the greasers out and babyin' the white men the same as usual.

"I took Pa Milman into my confidence about my discovery and he said he'd lend me the money to buy the land from the state, if it was state land, or from whoever owned it. He wouldn't go shares with me, either. He said I'd worked hard for him and saved his wife from being a cripple, and if I could turn over a few dollars by selling a little loose mercury I was welcome to it.

"Old Bowditch nearly suffocated when I told him he had to take me and the doctor back to Alpine, but I saw to it that he did. As soon as we reached town, what do you suppose I found out? Don't trouble to guess, for you'd never make it. My lawyer told me that land was part of Bowditch's property!

"I nearly passed out right then. But I went up to the old skinflint and told him I'd like to buy a piece of grazin' land off him down near the Milman ranch. He said I couldn't have it for less than five dollars an acre, and after a lot of hemming and hawing I said, 'All right!' Then I felt kind of guilty and as if I ought to ask him about the mineral rights. But he spoke up fust. He says, 'For a dollar extry per acre I'll sell you the mineral rights, too.' I could tell by the yalla look in his eye that he was tryin' to put something over on me, so I felt better; it didn't seem so bad stealing from a thief. So I says, 'All right,' and the lawyer fixed up the quit-claim deed at six dollars an acre, bindin' me to pay so much down and the balance within thirty days. When I signed it Bowditch like to laughed himself to death, tellin' me how he'd stuck me.

“‘You didn’t happen to know,’ he says, ‘that I can’t sell you the mineral rights, because I had only the grazin’ rights, the mineral rights bein’ reserved to the public-school funds?’

“Texas land laws are complicateder than anything this side of— Well, anyway, you see when the Texas Republic consented to join up with the U. S. she kept all her unclaimed lands for herself and turned ’em over to the school funds with a lot of reservations. But my lawyer had looked it all up and told me that the old law had been changed and the title to what was under the ground went with what was on top. When he told Bowditch that the old fool’s jaw dropped, but he says: ‘It don’t make any diff, for there’s no mineral there. I been over every foot of it.’ I says, ‘If you didn’t find any, then a hawk couldn’t,’ and that pleased him so he rode me back to his ranch and I went the rest of the way on my hoss that I’d left there. Pa Milman loaned me some greasers, and I went out to work the claim. I turned up some pools of mercury, and sold what I got for enough to pay Bowditch without borrowing a cent from Pa Milman.

“When Bowditch saw me carryin’ my first wagonload of quicksilver past his place to Alpine and learned what I’d found, he almost shook himself to pieces like he was his own flivver.

“Well, I was putting a little money in the Alpine bank every so often and some of the swells in town were invitin’ me to stay to supper and some of the leaders of society there were dressin’ up special for me.

“My highest ambition was to buy a house in town and live under my own palm tree and windmill—every yard in Alpine has a windmill bloomin’ like a big, immense sunflower, for water down there is what champagne is up here since prohibition extended the desert from coast to coast.

“Then one day a mining engineer wandered on to my property and asked a lot of questions and poked his nose around a good deal. Pret’ soon he asked me if I didn’t want to sell out. I said, ‘Not ’specially.’ So he offered me ten thousand dollars for my claim. I nearly fell off my hoss

on to his neck, and I nearly laughed myself to death. I was thinking of all the things I could do with ten thousand dollars. But he thought I was makin' fun of his offer and befo' I could sober down, he says, 'Well, how about twenty thousand, then?'

"I'd played one or two games of poker in my day, and I'd kind of learned to size up a bluffer, who was pretendin' his hand was not very good and just bettin' easy to encourage the suckers. So I stopped laughin' and threw a little bluff of my own. I growled, 'What do you mean comin' down here and belittlin' my property when I been polite to you?'

"Well, it worked. When he bid fifty thousand I ordered him off the place. He said, 'Seventy-five,' and I told a greaser to lead him to the road. He h'isted her to a hundred, and I says, 'I got no mo' time to waste on you,' and I rode off at top speed. The first big rock I turned I stopped and peeked round, scared to death for fear I had pushed him to his limit. But there he come ridin' after me, so I jammed the rowels into my cayuse and beat it for the little 'dobe house I had put up.

"Well, he got there soon after I did, and his fust words were, 'A hundred and twenty-five.' I says, 'Light off and let me give you some supper. I hate to see a po' crazy man goin' hungry raound here.'

"My greaser cook gave him some *frijoles* and *tortillas* and coffee and I gave him a genuine alfalfa cigar. Well, he wouldn't let me go to sleep befo' he'd pointed out how foolish it was for me to try to work that claim in all the heat and sweat, and havin' no access to the real market. He told me that I ought to sell out and go to New York or Paris and have a good time. 'You don't see the Baron Rothschilds down here eatin' alkali,' he says. 'You'll find them swellin' round in Paris and Monte Carlo, like you'd be doin' if you had any sense. I'm actin' for the Rothschilds,' he says, 'and I'll give you twice what you could earn on your own and give it to you in a lump. These mercury pockets are tricky and they don't last forever. You've got about a quarter of a million dollars' worth of it here, if

it's worked scientific, and that's my last price. Take it or leave it.'

"I told him I was sleepy and rolled over. But all that night I dreamed of being a swell. I'd never been out of Texas; born there, like my grandfather was. My great-grandfather was born in Missouri when it belonged to Spain. His father went there from Virginia with old Moses Austin, who fought Indians with one hand and mined lead with the other. When the Austins went down into Texas my great-grandfather went along as a boy. The Spanish gave him a hundred and sixty acres; every child got that much and every slave eighty.

"Then Mexico broke away from Spain, and the trouble with the Americans began. My great-great-grandfather was one of the men who founded the Fredonian Republic. You never heard of it, I reckon. It only lasted a few weeks.

"Mexico freed the slaves and that made trouble with the Americans. My great-grandfather was at the consultation that started Texas off as a republic. Then he went with Colonel Bowie to the Alamo, and of course he never came back. So you see we came from one of the original families there were in Texas."

The word "Alamo" had a vaguely heroic sound in the ear of the Northerners, but Clelia was weak on history. She ventured to ask:

"Why didn't your father come back from the Alamo?"

Larrick glanced at her aghast. "Good Lord! Don't you remember the Alamo?"

"I ought to, I suppose, but I don't," Clelia confessed.

"Did you ever hear of Thermopylæ?" Larrick asked, outraged to sarcasm.

"Oh yes! That was pounded into me at school."

"Well, as the saying was, Thermopylæ had one messenger of defeat, but every man in the Alamo died fighting. Two women and two children and two slaves were spared. That's all. Four thousand Mexicans attacked a hundred and eighty Americans and paid a mighty high price for 'em. But they got 'em all. A great-aunt of mine was one of the

two women left, and she carried the news of the massacre to General Sam Houston and was on the retreat with him. So was my granddaddy, and he was at the battle of San Jacinto when the President of the Mexican Republic attacked the President of the Texas Republic and got his whole army annihilated or captured. They caught old Santa Anna himself the next day and the Mexican Republic kept the flags at half mast for months while her President was a guest of the Texas Republic. They ought never to have turned the old scoundrel loose.

“You Northerners didn’t want to let Texas into the United States and it took ten years to persuade you-all. But here we are, and I reckon everybody was satisfied. But it took a lot of blood to make old Texas what she is to-day. The Indians used to take a shot at nearly everybody while the greasers rested, and vice versa.

“My own grandmother fought Indians and my grandfather was killed with two of her children. She was dragged out of the burning cabin when her last shot was fired, and she took along her nursing baby. That was my father. While they were dragging her along an Indian buck cut off her hair and fastened it to his own to make it look longer. He was going to kill the baby for crying, and grandma knocked him down with a big stick. The other Indians laughed at him and he let the baby live. Otherwise you-all would have missed the pleasure of my society. A trader finally ransomed grandma for four hundred yards of calico and some blankets. He married her later.

“Oh, you see I come from one of the very first families as you come up from the South. But you didn’t ask me about my pedigree. I was tellin’ you about that mining engineer and how he offered me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for my little mercury farm. I didn’t believe there was really that much mercury in the world, but I said to the M. E.:

“Well, seeing as you are so set on getting my little old mine for your baron friend, I reckon I’ll have to let you have it. I never could deny a baron anything. I suppose he’ll expect me to pay him a long visit on his ranch at

Monte Carlo, and we'll ride in and shoot up the bank every Saturday night.'

"The M. E. allowed we would and we closed the deal. I wanted to divvy up with Pa Milman, but he threatened to cut my nose off if I didn't get the hell out of there. I bought Ma Milman a few presents, includin' a Packard so's she could ride over Mrs. Bowditch whenever she'd a mind to. Then I got her a Victrola and some records, for she was very partial to Caruso, and now she's got that Dago almost wore out singin' to her every night.'

"Well, it was the strangest thing how different the world looks when you look at it from the top of a pile of money. I'd been dreaming of a pretty little pine shack in Alpine with a palm tree and a couple of ornamental cactuses and a windmill all my own. But the minute I got money Alpine looked kind of small. I wanted to hit out for the white lights. I decided to buy New York and push old John D. off the map. When I got here I found that my quarter of a million would only buy a little stack of white chips, hardly enough to ante with, to say nothing of any reds or blues. But here I am and here I stay while my pile lasts."

Clelia had listened to him as to a visitor from Mars; his life and his language were almost as unlike hers as if he came from a foreign planet. Perhaps he mistook her curiosity for fascination. As long as her eyes were bright upon him he would talk about himself.

Now she wondered how he had ever drifted into her realm, for she belonged to what the excluded call the exclusive set, though the circle is far easier to enter than any labor union if one chances to prove interesting—and it is hard to see why anybody should be admitted if he is not interesting.

Still, Clelia had wondered how Larrick had happened in, and she said:

"It's amazing how many accidents it took to get you your money. What accident threw you in with our gang?"

"Oh, it was just my run of luck," said Larrick. "I had happened to meet up with Norry Frewin when he was visiting our little state, and when I came to New York I

just thought I'd look him up. And I did, and he took it upon himself to save me from falling in with the wrong folks, knowing I was young and innocent and not to be trusted with money."

"Tell them how you happened to meet me in Texas," Frewin said.

"Why, when did you horn in?" Larrick asked. "Last I saw of you you were trying to whip a trout to death."

Frewin had joined the group unseen by Larrick. He had wrenched his line free, leaving his favorite fly in the rocks, and had followed Clelia. When he had seen Coykendall sitting next to her his anger toward Larrick had been mollified by his greater distrust of Coykendall. He was afraid of Coykendall and afraid for Clelia in the man's company.

Frewin had warned Clelia to beware of the fellow, but that had made him all the more fascinating, since playing with fire is one of the favorite games of young girls when they can find any fire to play with.

Somehow it struck Frewin as good tactics to magnify Larrick. Perhaps he thought that he could divert Clelia from Coykendall by heroizing the Texan. He had little real fear that she could ever take the cowboy seriously.

So now he repeated his behest to Larrick:

"Tell them what you did for me in Texas."

Larrick's brown face turned a little ruddier as he mumbled:

"I been braggin' about what a wonderful feller I am. Don't make me give myself away for a thunderin' imbecile."

"You did the bravest thing a man ever did," Frewin insisted, and he would not be estopped.

He made a little epic of it, and though Larrick grew sheepish with embarrassment, the women liked him all the more for his humility under praise.

Clelia, with a young girl's idolatry for physical courage, was troubled with a feeling of awe, an emotion so unusual to her that she grew shy and awkward under its spell, as everybody does when a new emotion catches him unawares.

She sighed: "To have saved somebody's life!—how marvelous! I'd give my right arm just to be able to say I'd saved somebody's life!"

She sprang to her feet and strode homeward. Frewin scrambled up to follow her, but Coykendall managed to interpose himself and shunt Frewin aside. He made off down the hill with Clelia. As a punishment for Larrick and a torture for Frewin, no doubt, Clelia took his arm.

Frewin gathered up his fishing rod and empty creel and turned back to the trout stream.

Larrick, left alone with Nancy Fleet, stared after Clelia's captor with a rancor poorly disguised:

"That's what we call cuttin' a heifer out of the herd. Coykendall is a pretty slick article."

"He's a beast and Clelia knows it," Nancy snapped. "You'd better go along and chaperon them."

Larrick would have been glad to, but he could hardly leave Miss Fleet alone in the Adirondacks, so he spoke with rather labored courtesy:

"I'd rather be with you, if you don't mind."

"Liar!" said Nancy. She was in a somber mood, and Larrick felt that he had not been honorable or even polite to her. She had been the recipient of his first gallantries when he came North, and he felt that he had incurred a certain obligation to keep them up, even though Clelia had drowned her radiance as the will-o'-the-wisp lures the eyes from the moon.

Then, as they strolled toward the camp and lost sight of Clelia and Coykendall in the piney labyrinth, Larrick began to suffer from the venerable sense of obligation the male inherits from the immemorial past, an imagined obligation to offer the dubious compliment of an embrace to every personable female he finds himself alone with.

He was grotesquely crass in his motive and its expression, and nothing could have been more idiotic than his ursine clumsiness when they walked into a perfect opportunity. A lofty cedar sent down its green boughs to the earth, making a wigwam of sheltered solitude.

Here Larrick paused and, laying hold of Nancy's firm, round arm, drew her toward him and stammered like an overgrown lout asking for his first kiss:

"It's been a mighty long while since—since—"

The words were too gross even for his stupidity, so he drew her in to his bosom and closed his long arms across her fine flat back. Once she was in his embrace, he remembered with a kind of surprise how bewitching he had found her once, and how the apposition of her form to his had once thrilled him.

He stared into her eyes and found them mystical and her mouth luscious. But when he bent his head, her eyes blazed with indignation and her mouth trembled with scorn and with the hurt of being scorned.

She made no struggle, but simply groaned, "Oh, for God's sake, spare me that!"

His arms fell to his side and she walked away.

Larrick could only follow at heel. He did not speak, because he could not honestly make the true amends. He was compromised in his own soul by his courtship of Clelia. He decided that he was unfit for the society he had blundered into. The boarding-house waitresses in Alpine were about his measure. He wished himself back there, and wondered why he had ever left. His money had made a jackass of him as of so many other men, from Midas down.

How dazzling had been his vision of the conquest of New York, and how unexpected everything had turned out. His zigzagging memory ran back now to the day of his departure from Alpine.

CHAPTER IV

THE railroad built with such slow and bitter toil across the desert where, as the saying was, "a crow would have to tote his rations," offered the swift and magic escape.

The Sunset Limited, that gorgeous flying serpent on its twenty-five-hundred-mile flight from San Francisco to New Orleans, reached Alpine after two days of travel through every imaginable scene from the Pacific shore, over mountains, down below sea level, and up and down, through orange Edens and through deserts where even the sagebrush falters. It crossed the sullen Rio Grande at El Paso and climbed over the doleful mountains where Alpine perched five thousand feet above sea level.

At half past nine when the desert night was chill it stopped and took aboard only one passenger, though he had the celebration of a bridal party. Nearly everybody in Alpine was at the station to bid Gad Larrick speed, and every citizen had his farewell joke to fling at the delegate from Brewster County who was going North to dehorn the foolish cattle of Broadway.

Larrick found his car in the long, dark train, and the porter led him to his drawing-room. He would leave in nothing less, though he had had to buy two tickets for the privilege. There was many a girl in Alpine who had laughed at him once, but would have been proud now to share his state as a bride. But young Lochinvar rode out of the West alone.

Leaving his very new luggage in the drawing-room, he made haste to the rear of the train, and there on the observation platform took his leave of his origins. The butterfly was pulling out of the shell on the rough bark and preening its gorgeous wings for the rose gardens of the Orient.

The train began to move as he leaned on the brass rail.

It drew away from the darkling town and the dim corollas of the windmills everywhere. As the rear platform reached the station the throng made a great hullabaloo of farewell, a chaos of good will, of envy, of ridicule, of hilarity, and no little regret at his loss. Alpine had seemed a metropolis to him, with its electric lights and its brick buildings and its long tie rails where so many horses were always hitched.

He felt his heart ache a bit, for the county had been mighty good to him, and most of the people kind and jovial. It had made him rich, and he was a traitor, a deserter.

The uproar died as the neighbors of his mediocrity were drawn into his yesterdays. He wished that he might take the brave and much-enduring little town into the Eastern ease and gayety with him. He supposed that he would never come back, and that filled him with a hundred little lonelinesses. He did come back, and under circumstances he could never have foreseen. But that was far away in his future.

A red switch light made a ruby in the dark, then winked out. The mournful telegraph poles, which were all the trees there were hereabouts, sprang up and ran back mournfully. Three of them seemed to pause for a moment on a height and he thought of a picture he had seen of three empty crosses on a hill against a livid sky. But the train ran away from the symbol as the world runs away from Golgotha. The train ran with a clickety-clickety-click as if a darky minstrel troupe were accompanying it on the rattle-bones.

For a time there were only the familiar stars in the heavens and never the light of a home on the soil. The serrated horizon rose up behind the train and mountains closed around the region, embracing it as a man might enfold a little woman. The horizons took on a nobility. The sky was quickening with the moon dawn. And slowly, as if a great eyelid were being lifted, the west whitened, and finally the eyeball of the moon rose above the black fan of the mountains.

Soon the sky was hued like a turquoise matrix. The mountains grew mellowed of outline and became at length such round hills as the Greeks called breasts.

Mile after mile of morose land swept by. Some day it

would be conquered and sown with grain, shaded with imported forests, illuminated with bright homes and crowded cities. But now the only hints of mankind were the occasional dots of color as a switch light blinked from red to green automatically.

Now and then a white culvert was passed with a grunt.

After a while the train came to a halt in the most dismal solitude. Larrick wondered if some accident were going to keep him here for hours. The train began to back. He grew frantic. To reappear in Alpine now would be an unendurable anticlimax.

But the train was simply adjusting itself to a siding. By and by from the far away came a long, faint wolf howl. Then with the increasing pulse of a cavalry charge, the wild hoofbeats of Indian horsemen charging on a train as in the olden days, the west-bound express came up, and shot by with the roar and the nebulous glitter of a comet. As it died out in the backward hills Larrick's train began to groan and move heavily. Then it gained power and speed and resumed its course. Larrick was glad he was Eastering with money instead of going West to make it. Some day he would like to see California and Hawaii, but now he was for New York. He hardly imagined the magnitude of his country. He was just about midway now and at the southern edge. The train that passed him would rush for days before it reached the Pacific, and his train would rush for days before it reached the Atlantic.

He was a little disturbed by the short posts that bobbed up into the light shed by the observation platform and shot the word "Derail" into his eyes before they were erased. Life is so full of derails!

Larrick sat puffing the best cigar he could buy in Alpine and watching the little tresses of smoke float back like wafted farewells. The desert had been a hell to him for a long while, but it had grown familiar, and he felt a dull pang at climbing out of it, a growing fear of the fabled lands and the terrible splendors of the great cities he was committed to.

He brooded over the heights he was leaving till he was

the last passenger remaining on the observation platform under the dome of light that ran through the benevolent night like a lantern. All the strangers who were going East with him were taking their souls and their purposes to bed with them for a brief respite from their own hopes and fears.

Finally, tired out with a bewilderment of emotions, he flung his cigar overboard, watched it strike and scatter in sparks and vanish. Then he entered the train and walked slowly along the flying platform, staggering through curtained aisle after curtained aisle, bumping into muffled forms of men and women, sidling round men and women undressing or clambering to the upper regions, a curious company lost for the nonce to the usual conveniences. He reached at last his own drawing-room.

It was his first drawing-room. He had, indeed, never lodged in a first-class hotel. He was like a pauper child in a palace. He played with the hot and cold water and the ice water, and undressed with deliberation. He did not know enough to put his shoes outside the door, but the porter with a porter's intuition for character knew that it was innocence and not miserliness that withheld the shoes.

To one who had thought a bunk in a ranch house luxury after nights spent on the hard ground there was a glory in the privilege of creeping between linen sheets and stretching out on mattresses. He felt as majestic as the hero of Bryant's "Thanatopsis," lying down in state and drawing the drapery of his couch about him.

As he reposed he was dragged, as it were, headlong by the neck at sixty miles an hour, faster than the dead Hector in the dust of Achilles's chariot and with as little knowledge of the landscape.

The next morning he was not wakened by the bawling of the foolish white-faced Hereford cattle with their brick-colored hides that had usually sounded his reveille when he was riding herd, nor by the racket about the bunk house. But habit woke him as the daybreak cut in like a paper-knife under the curtain he had left a little up. He looked out and gave a lazy peek at the sleeping town of Del Rio;

then he pulled the curtain down and turned his back on the busy world.

This was his first great sip of the wine of opulence. He could lie abed and let others work for him. Thousands of men had nailed this railroad to the desert for him, and hundreds were seeing to it that he was carried to his destination. He should worry!

But he had not learned to sleep late and life drove him from his bed. He dressed with a deliberation in his Aladdin's-carpet tent, yet he was the first man in the dining car for breakfast. Here again he made a *début* into magnificence. He felt a very grand vizier as he dipped a silver spoon into a golden melon, and he lifted his coffee cup with the amiable arrogance of the Sultan himself.

At mid-forenoon the train reached "San Antone." He knew the city. His great-grandfather's name was on the monument there at the Alamo; his nearest approach to success was to have "made a good end," like Polonius. But the great-grandson stalked about the station during the twenty-minute wait as if he could buy the city if he wanted to—but did not want to, because it was not costly enough for him.

There was another twenty-minute wait at Houston. Larrick had been there as a soldier for a time, a poor private, always tired and always hungry. He wished he might stop now for a banquet on the airy roof of the Rice Hotel. But he was on his way to even greater caravansaries.

The next morning the porter had to call him. He was already learning to sleep late. At New Orleans he had several hours to kill. He hired an automobile and lounged about the city, through the narrow streets whose iron balconies and Creole charm he did not understand. He was not for narrow streets and time-worn buildings, not he. The brand-new was what he searched for.

The first thing to win his royal amazement was the long passage of the Illinois Central through the flooded bottomlands of the Mississippi and Lake Ponchartrain, which he supposed to be the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico.

To Larrick, who had spent a good part of his life wondering

where the next pint of water was coming from, and had lived somehow in absolute droughts, lasting at times through a year of unclouded skies, nothing was more dramatic than this appalling misplacement of water. The train ran through miles of swamped country whose damp inhabitants lived in shacks built on piles with rickety plank paths zigzagging among the half-submerged forests. This burlesque Venice would have reminded him of the lake dwellings of primeval Switzerland and the crannogs of Ireland, but he had never heard of them.

He bewailed the wanton folly of nature which drowned one region and let another die of thirst. He mooned over some great plans for diverting the Mississippi into the deserts of Texas as others have schemed to turn the Mediterranean into the Sahara, that vast empire of waste in which the whole United States and most of Alaska could be planted without overflow.

But Larrick forgot his fantastic projects and left the desert to its own devices when he reached Chicago. This was his first great city. Here he saw his first skyscrapers, his first art gallery. The huge lions of the Art Institute held him spellbound. He lingered for several days, fascinated by the wonders of the place, and, after being knocked aside by the crowds, learned to forbear gazing up at the tall buildings.

He studied the manners of city people with an eager eye and replaced his store clothes with costumes less conspicuous in the city.

And so when he reached New York he was not quite so green as he had been. He made himself a trifle foolish about the big hotel, but he was as quick to catch the amusement or the scorn in the beholder's eye as he had been to scan the desert for a rattlesnake.

He had by nature the gentleman's desire for protective coloration to blend with his background, and the horror of blatancy, and he shed his outlandishness with great rapidity. Days and nights of riding about the city and the beaches in taxicabs and in Seeing-New-York wagons exhausted him. He began to be oppressed by that loneliness which has

always made cities harrowing to strangers. He made a few of such acquaintances as every town offers to the visitor, but their easy vices did not satisfy his soul.

The only New Yorker Larrick had ever known was Norry Frewin, and Larrick hated to look him up because Frewin owed him money.

But the memory of their brief friendship and the hunger to meet some one who had once cared for him broke down his reluctance to impose himself on anyone, especially on a citizen of that New York so famous for its alleged indifference to the rest of the country.

Finding young Frewin was not easy, but his father's business address was in the telephone book and Larrick visited the bank. With some difficulty he learned Norry's number and called it.

A valet answered in a prim voice and asked Larrick's name. The next thing Larrick knew was the rattling of his eardrum as Frewin hailed him in a prairie voice with the cordiality of one desert waif to another. Frewin assumed that the telephone centrals were not listening, and with necessary expurgations his welcome ran somewhat as follows:

"Gad Larrick! That isn't you? Why, you — — — old — — — — —! — — — bless your sweet soul, what in — — — are you doing in this — — — awful hole? What in — — — name ever became of you? I sent you back your — — — money, and it was returned. I supposed you had been shot up by that Spot Caper and buried in his private graveyard. How long have you been here? You don't mean to say that you've been in this — — — hole a week and not let me know! Why, you — — —!" etc.

If Galli-Curci had been crooning a lullaby to him Larrick could not have been more soothed and reassured. Frewin offered to come and get him at his hotel, and Larrick went down in the lobby to wait for him.

It was not on his own account, since he cared little for other people's opinions, that Frewin was anxious lest Larrick should turn out to be the same wild primitive he had met

in the cattleman's saloon. Frewin was afraid for Larrick, lest other people stare at him and disprize his golden heart.

He was comfortably disappointed when a well-dressed young giant whom he had not recognized at first glance spoke in a voice that he knew at once.

Frewin was the noisier of the two in his greeting, and the more violent in his hand-wringing. He even embraced his rescuer.

He demanded that Larrick give up his hotel rooms and move to the apartment he kept, but Larrick refused—on altruistic grounds.

He refused also to go with Frewin to dinner. But Frewin would not let him off:

"You can live at the hotel if you insist on it, because I don't want to interfere with your private flirtations, but you're not going to get out of my sight to-day. I'll put you in the way of some real flirtations. To-morrow I want you to meet my dad and mother. They are going out of town to-night. They'll both take you into their hearts. I know my mother prays for you every night and on Sundays at St. Bartholomew's. The old man was so scared by my disappearance and my adventures that I've got him eating out of my hand. He pays my debts as fast as I can make 'em and he keeps so quiet about my taking up a serious business that I'm beginning to be tempted to try it. Besides, I'm kind of crazy about a girl—Clelia Blakeney. I want you to see her. She's to be at the dinner. Keep your eyes off her. There'll be enough others for you to fascinate."

Suddenly he remembered that he had not asked about Larrick's affairs or his evident wealth. It was so natural to Frewin to see people rich and in New York that his curiosity was not aroused at first. When he heard of the fortune that had come to Larrick he groaned:

"Oh, hell! Now I can't do anything for you! I was in hopes that you were down and out and broke and I could save your life as you saved mine and set you up in business as you did me. And now you've gone and got yourself rich

enough to buy and sell me a dozen times a day. Just to save my self-respect, will you let me pay back what you lent me?"

Larrick was already sophisticated enough to suppress his natural tendency to make a battle over the return of the loan, but he said, "Keep it for me till I go broke."

THE JOURNAL

of the ...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
...
...

Book III

MISS NANCY FLEET

CHAPTER I

LARRICK had bought himself evening clothes of the highest-priced tailor the hotel clerk could refer him to. He had thrown himself on the mercy of a fashionable haberdasher. As far as nine tailors could make him he was a man in style. He was a gentleman, too, in his high and easy-riding pride, and according to Sir Herbert Tree's definition of a gentleman as "a man who doesn't care whether he is one or not," Larrick carried his self-respect like a concealed weapon. He was courteous to others and he was ready to demand what he gave. He was not a New York gentleman, but he was a desert gentleman, and he wore the uniform of the occasion. He was big and handsome, humble and haughty, and he was afraid of no man.

So Frewin knew that his guests would find him worthy of their company.

"When I tell them what you did for me they'll make a lion of you," he told Larrick, who promptly began to buck.

"If you're goin' to spring that fool yarn you'll make a jack rabbit out of me," said Larrick, earnestly. "If you don't promise not to mention it, even, I'm not going to be there at all."

He forced Frewin to guarantee him against any such homage, and Frewin kept his word. Larrick was accepted as Norry Frewin's friend. If he had a past, that was his affair. His immediate behavior was all that concerned the new acquaintances.

They dined on the roof of the Ritz-Carlton and, thanks to the daylight-saving law, it was still twilight, though the advanced clocks said eight. The mixture of daylight with the lamplight made the women's dinner gowns look a little more startling than they would have in the artificial light alone.

Larrick had seen a good deal of modish dressing and undressing in the theaters and hotels where he had wandered like a steer lost in a city street. But the dresses of Frewin's women guests!

He was introduced to men and women who bore names that sounded impressive even to Larrick's little-tutored ear. Some of the women were wives and their husbands were along. And they seemed to be honest-enough women.

But the amount of paint and powder they had on and the amount of clothes they had off!

Even to look at some of them terrified Larrick—not because they were not good to behold, but because he could see so much more of them than he thought he had a right to. He drew the premarital line rather high, and the post-marital, for Mrs. Roantree was there, and she had been a widow for fifteen years. She was bulky and not flirtatious, yet she dressed as low as the rest of them. It must be a custom of the country! Larrick would come in time to see that costume has little relation to morals, but for the present he was almost paralyzed.

He was acutely embarrassed and kept his eye on his nude plate and the décolleté clams. The guests paid little attention to him, as is the New York wont with strangers who do not command it. They chattered rapidly to one another, answered him pleasantly enough if he spoke, but made no effort to entertain him or draw him out. So he retreated into silence, feeling as absent and transparent as Banquo before Macbeth caught sight of him.

Frewin had been fuming since the guests met in the lobby and all the way to the roof because Nancy Fleet was late and Clelia did not come at all.

"That's the damned little Clelia of it!" he raged. He had got the crowds together to be with Clelia, who did not care for solitudes, and she had not come and did not come. She did not even telephone a kindly lie.

"The cat has forgotten all about it or she has been offered some other date that she likes better. I could wring her neck!"

Henceforward Clelia was a name stamped on Larrick's

memory by her emphatic absence. He forgot, before the night was past, the names of the other guests, but not Clelia's.

He forgot Nancy Fleet's name, too, but not her face! Nor the rest of her! She came in with Randel, the sculptor. He might have modeled her as she stood making her apologies for being "held up by a damned traffic cop who rowed with her fool of a chauffeur."

She nodded to Larrick when he rose to be presented, and went on talking volubly, impatiently, with a venomous cynicism that her laughing features belied, and her singularly voluptuous form and carriage.

Her place was just across from Larrick and she never looked at him, except when her glance flicked across his face in passing from one end of the table to the other.

And Larrick carefully avoided looking at her. He avoided her with a violent intention as a modest citizen caught out in the streets of Coventry might have kept his eyes off Lady Godiva on her famous ride—and for much the same reason.

But Larrick listened to everything she said. She startled him, frightened him by her reckless words, the profanity that sprinkled her phrases, as if it had no meaning to her, the shocking freedom of her allusions and her audacious opinions.

She fascinated him as a sort of gleaming and beautiful serpent. But he watched her only out of the corners of his eyes—which is, of course, the best place to watch from, though that was not Larrick's motive. He was afraid to gaze at her. She blinded him a little with her splendor and the freedom with which she revealed her radiant surfaces.

As the long, long dinner went through the elaborate ritual, the waiters so solemn, the captains so attentive, the changes of silver and china so frequent and complex—the whole service so high-church (and the conversation so low-church), Larrick began to feel that Miss Fleet was no more ignoring him than he her.

Such impressions are made up of so many, many little emotions and manners, inhibitions and excesses and artificialities, that they seem intuitional, occultly magical,

though they are no more miraculous than the overwhelming mysteries of all speech and understanding. But somehow Larrick was assured that, as in his own silence, his averted gaze, his avoidance of any remark, there was a tremendous recognition of Miss Fleet's importance; so she was paying him the same tribute, thinking of him while she talked to everybody else, meditating profoundly upon him while she seemed to utter only the shallowest of chatter, and communing with him by making him the sole recipient of her silence.

This thought kept him enormously interested through the dinner. Frewin wanted to talk to him, but Mrs. Roantree was at his right, and she was immense and continuous in her overbearing tirade about something or other that Larrick was too busy to attend. And he was very busy with this new kind of game, fencing blindfolded against a blindfolded adversary, with buttoned foils and no danger of bloodshed, but an intense excitement over points.

At last the coffee came along, and the tobacco—though, for the matter of that, both men and women had smoked before and during the entire dinner. There had been no cocktail, no wines, no liquors—people were getting along without them in public, resigning themselves dolefully to the inevitable, and solacing themselves as best they could in private, growing stingier and stingier with their own failing supplies and more and more greedy of other people's. It was dismally noted that in the homes the cocktails were tending more and more to become unmitigated orange juice.

Miss Fleet pushed away from the table, sat endwise, crossed her knees, and all but turned her back on Larrick. She was rattling away to Randel about a lot of people Larrick never had heard of—and had not missed much, to judge from Miss Fleet's reference to them as muckers, bounders, rotten cads, and dirty pups.

Now Larrick's flattering theory of the masked attention Miss Fleet had been paying him fell to the ground, and his pride suffered a severe sprain. Surely if she were really fencing with him she would not have turned her back on him completely.

He suffered the more from realizing how beautiful a prize he had lost, for now he could steal a look at her when the others were not looking at him. He was astounded at her loveliness, at the bewildering pattern of her coiffure, such a maze of architecture built out of such delicate and innumerable silken threads. He stole voracious glimpses of her profile that ran down from under the eaves of that hair, the brow, the nose, the felicitously cut lips, the delicious swirl of the chin in the throat, the flexile shaft of her neck, and the lines and planes and curves that ran from the root of the throat, across and around the shoulder and the one arm whose elbow was on the table, and the shoulder blades, and the—the—the word in his mind was "the chest," but it did not seem quite up to the opportunities.

He was despondent with the loss of his mad fantasy that this glittering creature had been conversing with him in thoughts and not in words. He did not know her name, even, though he heard her called "Nancy" at intervals. He was sorry to have lost her. He wished bitterly that he might have interested her a little as she absorbed him much.

Then the dinner was over. Frewin signed the check and left a bank note on it that set the covey of waiters to bowing and whisking away the chairs.

As the guests quitted the table, this one and that one stopped to speak to some friend. Larrick noted that some of the men did not stand up even when a woman stood by them. It was too much trouble to be always rising and falling, he supposed, but he had been taught otherwise. Larrick, who knew nobody, was left alone. He found himself for a moment standing at the side of the neglectful Miss Fleet.

To his stupefaction she turned her wonderful head and murmured across her pluperfect shoulder:

"I've had such a glorious flirtation with you to-night. If you talk as well as you keep quiet, come and see me sometime."

Just then a woman at a table clutched for her and dragged her into a knot of heads to hear the latest horrible story.

Larrick's heart was beating like a triphammer as he

realized that his mad guess was indeed an intuition. He had made a conquest or at least a hit with the queen of the world. If only he knew her name!

It seemed that the story at the table would never end. As he stared across the straight incline of Nancy's back his unseeing eyes were wakened by a surprising sight.

At a lonely little table near the door a lone woman sat. She was dressed like the rest, in much-disclosing gown whose brilliant inspiration even Larrick could vaguely recognize. But her face was swathed in a thick veil.

Larrick, recent from the desert, had been bewildered by so many so strange phases of New York City life that his faculty of wonder was a whit fatigued, just as the city man, railroaded through the American deserts, sees so many twisted and distorted shapes of mountains and hills and trees that by and by he hardly lifts his eyes from his book to study the most diabolic contortion of landscape. Only it was beauty, infinitely multifarious, that exhausted Larrick.

It had startled him a little, though, to see, among the brilliantly undressed women dining on the Ritz-Carlton roof, one woman who was barearmed, barebomed, and barebacked, but not barefaced.

He had time to watch her for a moment during the brief stasis in the outbound progress of the party he was with, time to be puzzled at the thick veil swathing her features. It was odd to see her lift it away just a bit to carry her fork to her unseen mouth. And it was doubly odd, when he ventured a backward glance, to note that she had a cigarette pressed against her hidden lips and was puffing smoke through the mask. There was something almost infernal in the vision; her face was only a black veil veiled in light smoke.

What we can't see is what we want to see, and Larrick wasted no attention on the otherwise challenging revelations of the woman's shapely thorax. His brief but consuming inquisitiveness was solely concerned with the configuration of her nose and mouth and eyebrows and ears. Such inquisitiveness would have been considered indecent if it regarded other portions of womanly anatomy, but, outside

of Islam, is permissible when directed only to the facial figure.

Larrick had, however, only a moment or two of torment, for Nancy stood erect, laughing as she lightly smacked the cheek of the man who was telling the story. And she moved on with Larrick in her train. He was wondering less about her now than about the woman in the lace mask.

As Frewin and his flock passed out through the door Nancy waved her hand to the woman and the woman waved to her.

Mrs. Roantree stopped the traffic to demand:

"Who was that person in the veil? Some actress trying to get up a mystery for advertising purposes?"

"No, my dear," said Nancy, "that's Mrs. Coykendall."

"But why the melodrama?"

"She's another poor victim of the craze for eternal youth."

"Then why doesn't she stay at home?"

"But she has no home."

CHAPTER II

NORRY FREWIN, like a bellwether, led his flock from the dining room to the elevator. In the lobby below the men and women parted, the men to take up their hats, the women for a bit of primping.

Then they climbed into limousines and were taken to a fantasy of Murray Anderson's, a review of dances and songs and comedies, with moments of extraordinary grace.

Here there was less than usual of the effort to startle by unclothing the female form malign. There was reliance rather on draping it and posing it and enveloping it with imagination, using it as a part of a fascinating ensemble.

From the long array of graces one grace was pre-eminent, the Bubble Dance of Grace Christie, who played with a great iridescent floating sphere, tossing it from her gracile fingers and drifting beneath and about it, till they two made a kind of witching music for the eyes. One hardly noted how she was garbed except in poetry.

Larrick had wondered what was to become of those poor theatrical managers who had once earned a precarious and surreptitious living by giving undress parades and charging naughty men high prices to witness hired girls in or out of tights. For the war had sent half of womankind into breeches, and the latest styles in beach wear, especially in the Middle and Far Wests, had crowded leagues of sand with half-naked legions. The crusades of this year that thrilled the nation most were whether or not the one-piece bathing suit should be allowed or arrested and whether or not stockings were essential to morals. It was a battle that harrowed the whole continent.

In Chicago, when Larrick had tarried there, he had ridden for miles and miles along shoreside avenues disclosing tens of thousands of mothers and wives and daughters who

haunted the long lake's edge in costumes growing daily "smaller by degrees and beautifully less"—and were the cleaner and healthier in mind as well as body for it.

Times were changing too fast for record.

Only a few years before, a popular New York dancer had been arrested and fined for capering on a Forty-second Street roof in trunks that did not come halfway to the knees. And this June the graduating classes at the most sedate universities for women had celebrated their Commencements by pirouetting solemnly about the chaste quadrangles, clothed only in little puffs of chiffon. They had flaunted their white thighs entire in numbers counted stately and worthy of the attention and the applause of throngs of mothers, fathers, and others.

These young ladies must have been respectable because they were respected. Studies in eurhythmics had been put on a plane with ethics and as much spiritual value claimed for them. Right or wrong, these 1920 girls were fearfully different from the earlier generations who had been taught that while most girls are cursed with legs, good girls never let anybody suspect them of them.

The world has gone far, far (in one direction or another) from the good old times when an allusion to a peeping slipper-tip was audacious and the mention of anything between a "well-turned ankle" and a well-rounded throat was unprintable. A slender waist was granted, but the rest was *terra incognita*.

A decision of womankind to confess at last that everybody has a standardized anatomy and everybody knows it, and that no apparent good had ever resulted from devoting a complicated lifetime to hiding what everybody had and knew, was one of the profoundest revolutions in human history. Whether it is a progress toward sanity, as some maintain, or a drift toward general ruin, as others aver, it is undeniably a change of era.

It came along with a world-wide revolution toward cleanliness—asepsis, the compulsory toothbrush in public schools, neat back yards and alleys—the universal scrub. People reverted to the Greek ideal that it is well to wash often and

completely. This paganism had a long and desperate fight against religion and respectability and there are many women living who were taught as children that they should not be unclothed even in their bathtubs lest God see them and be shocked. And so they kept their little nightgowns on and did the best they could beneath the veil.

Ideas of God change with ferocious rapidity to suit the whims. People justify their desires by making them sacred. They call their fads gods, and create their creators as they go along. The physical culturists were as fanatic in 1920 as the physical occulturists. Millions were as fervid in their desires to make themselves seen as millions were to delve into the unseen. In fact, almost the only things left unseen were the disembodied spirits, and the only bodies about which there was much excuse for curiosity were the astral.

The revolution had come so gradually in the great cities that few realized how vast it was. It took some man like Gad Larrick, who sprang suddenly from the back regions into Broadway, to realize it.

He went about in a state of daze.

In the theater he was pleasantly aghast. He was young enough to take a fearsome delight in wickedness. He was as mischievous as only a cowboy can be, grown up. He was drunk on new wine and he would be a long time sobering. All about him were women in thin clothes that were either absent or transparent, and next to him was a nice-looking girl whose short skirts and fidgety attitudes made him aware that she also had adopted the 1920 fashion of rolled-down stockings

Philosophers and scientists would have told him that costume is only a typographical error for custom, and makes no real difference. But Larrick would never have believed this.

He would have agreed with the preachers that the world was pretty well come to that mysterious realm known as Hell-and-gone. But he was glad to go right along with it.

Nearly everything fascinated him. He loved nearly every chorus darling on the stage and thought them all wonderful in their several endeavors. As he put it to Frewin while they smoked cigarettes outside between the acts, "Every

little cutie is doin' her damnedest to look her pirtiest." Perhaps there was something divine in his sympathy with beauty. He could not understand the jaded indifference of Frewin and Nancy Fleet and the rest. He was sorry when the last curtain fell and Frewin said, "Let's go dance."

Larrick did not dance, as the word was understood up here, and he did not enjoy watching others dance—except on the stage. But he went along meekly. Frewin took his party to a dance club where he hoped Clelia might join them through repentance or lack of other amusement.

But she did not come and only a few members dropped in.

Larrick had cut up hilariously in lower Texas at gatherings of cow-punchers and sage hens, but he would not trust his heels in this sedate assembly where the sparseness of the numbers made the earnestness of the couples who spun solemnly round and round all the more depressing to him.

Mrs. Roantree was official chaperon and contented herself with lumbering round the hall three or four times in the arms of Norry Frewin and an elderly gentleman whose name Larrick had not caught.

Thereafter Larrick had Mrs. Roantree for his sole companion, except during the brief spells when the music stopped and the other couples sank down, panting for a respite, to drink White Rock or nibble at the supper, which they forsook the moment the jazz was resumed.

Although it was a criminal offense under the new prohibition law to take or give a drink outside one's own home, and though the pocket flask was as illegal as the pocket pistol, Frewin produced a small hip flagon and warmed all the glasses more or less secretly.

Nearly everybody was a criminal nowadays, for the dry law had put the whole country on the moral plane of the Kentucky moonshine districts and three fourths of the nation connived at the evasion of an amendment that three fourths of the nation had passed. Revenue officers and liquor burglars continued to make enormous raids on the hidden stores, but the supply was mystically replenished.

The highballs he imbibed quickened Larrick's emotions, and the sight of Nancy Fleet transferring herself from one

manly bosom to another kindled a resentment, almost a repugnance, in his heart.

His occult flirtation with her was suffering a hopeless check. She was dancing farther and farther away from him and he could not follow. He felt that certain rights of his to her attention were being violated. The claim he had staked out was being jumped. That was a shooting matter in Brewster, but he was helpless here to defend his prospects.

Seeing how his eyes burned after her, she dared him to make a try, but he shook his head sadly.

She realized that there was a tribute in his timidity and counseled him to go to a teacher. He took a mighty encouragement from this, for he felt that she wanted to dance with him. The indirect flirtation began anew.

"To be in New York and not know how to dance," she urged, "is like going abroad without French. There's a love of a girl who could turn you out a regular Maurice in no time. She was in France with the 'Y,' and when she wasn't washing dishes for the soldiers or selling cigarettes to them she was dancing with them. Poor Sylvia, she must have one-stepped and fox-trotted a million miles. Do go to her! I'll give you her address."

To resist such an appeal would have been a rebuff that Larrick would never have dared or cared to administer. So he promised, and she wrote down the name and telephone number of Mrs. Harry Kadrew.

From then on Larrick watched the dancing in another humor. Now he tried to discover and remember the little mannerisms that distinguished the moderns from the old-fashioned dubs who hobbled about the floor in manifest obsolescence, trying to fit last year's steps to this year's jig.

At two o'clock the musicians twisted a strain of "Home, Sweet Home" with the jazz, and in spite of the wails of more or less perfunctory protest, shook their heads and left the stage. And the dancers took their inexhaustible feet to their cars.

Miss Fleet's hand lingered warmly in Larrick's as she bade him good night. He would have been glad to beau her home, but Randel had that privilege. He did not seem to prize it

as he should, for he broke in on Miss Fleet's gracious words with a yawning gruffness:

"Oh, for God's sake, Nancy, break away and go to bed. I've got a model coming in the morning."

Larrick thought that he ought at least to shoot the dog down, but Miss Fleet sighed, "And I've got a damned hair dresser at nine." And she climbed into the limousine, leaving Larrick on the moonlit curb with Frewin, who was still cursing Clelia for her truancy. Larrick murmured:

"Yew-all are suttainly grand cussers, and I think the ladies have a little the best of it."

CHAPTER III

THE next day Larrick telephoned to the dancing teacher Nancy Fleet had commanded him to, and a hospitable voice invited him to call.

He found Mrs. Kadrew a tall, slim sprite, who introduced a husband, a handsome young fellow and pleasant-spoken, who did not seem surprised or offended when his wife took the stranger into her embrace and jounced him about.

It struck the uninitiated Larrick as an odd job for so nice a girl as she evidently was to be teaching men how to wrestle a woman around a room to music.

He could not get it out of his head that there was something essentially wicked about dancing. His early training had fastened the idea upon his soul, and he could have understood, though he might not have approved, the Methodist Church that had just refused to admit a young woman to membership because she taught dancing.

There had been a brief civil war in the Methodist Church that year on the whole relation between amusement and damnation, and the hope had been raised that the ancient ban on theaters, dances, and card games would be removed, but the ministers in synod confirmed the taboo by a vote of two to one. It was a great year, 1920, for enacting prohibitions. But a poor year for observing them.

To Mrs. Kadrew dancing was an honorable and helpful profession that she practiced without hesitation in her husband's presence. To the Puritans it was an abomination. To Larrick and his sort it was a curious indoor sport, more enhanced than hurt by the reproaches of the unco' guid. His soul felt a pleasant impropriety in it, and he thought hardly so much of the steps Mrs. Kadrew took as of the next step Mr. Kadrew was likely to take.

There was a sense of intrigue, almost of elopement,

shaking up Larrick's heart when, after a brief lecture, Mrs. Kadrew affixed herself to his astounded form, set his timorous right arm about her waist, and made off with him down the hall, humming a melody broken with sharp commands.

Larrick half expected Mr. Kadrew to produce a gun and empty it at him, but Mr. Kadrew was plainly trying to keep from laughing aloud at Larrick. Mrs. Kadrew made no secret of her own amusement, but her laughter was not insolent.

"Don't be afraid of me. I'm not afraid of you. Go on and walk on my feet. Good Lord! I've had my toes crushed by hundreds of the best feet in the world."

She had indeed given her body and her grace and her electric energy to the arms of an army of soldiers, men on their way to the trenches and on their way back, men just out of the hospitals or freshly returned from hells of terror and misery.

In other wars most of the women who followed the camps were a vile herd, and around the camps at home in America the worst of women hovered like buzzards. But the troops in Europe were protected by the ocean and the passport screen, and the government sent dancers and actresses abroad with the credentials of vestal priestesses, sacred ministrants.

Mrs. Kadrew was a veteran of that strange service and her peculiar experiences had filled her heart with a wholesale sisterliness. She had inspired a reverence hard for strict, old-fashioned souls to comprehend. If some of her soldiers had been old-fashioned, too, and, finding her delectable in their arms, had crushed her a little too fervidly and wooed her wordlessly too boldly, she had understood and forgiven and danced away their satyrism with a redeeming hilarity. The best way to put out a fire is to remove the oxygen—when that is possible.

Mrs. Kadrew had occasion to rebuke Larrick, too, by simply ignoring or pretending not to understand the tentative messages he (almost) unconsciously conveyed until he forgot to flirt and began to study. His feet annoyed him by their

stupidity and disobedience, but before the first lesson ended he had begun to catch the knack and to guess the spirit of the new dance.

Mrs. Kadrew accepted his money with a fine simplicity. She was a language teacher and she was nothing more or less. He made an appointment for the next day, and took his leave a gayer and a wiser man.

He felt so proud and smart and citified that he decided to call on Frewin and take him out to lunch. Frewin had put him up with two weeks' cards at an assortment of clubs.

It never occurred to Larrick to telephone and ask if his visit would be untimely. He picked up a taxicab and tried to look as if he had been cradled in one. When he got out he slammed the door and paid the fare and the tip as carefully carelessly as if he were acting the part before a movie camera.

Then he stalked into the hall with his stick swinging in the best Frewin manner. The apartment was one flight up and the elevator was on high, so he decided not to wait. He turned to the stairway and was scooting up two steps at a time when he heard a peal of wildly impish laughter. He heard a shower of footsteps and in the dark crook of the stairway collided with a girl whose slight form was descending with such velocity that she almost knocked him over.

"Sorry!" she giggled and vanished below.

Before he could recover his balance heavier feet ran down and Frewin crashed into him. He was calling, "Clelia, wait!" and instead of saying, "Sorry," he flung Larrick aside and growled, "Get out of my way, damn you!"

Larrick did not know what to do, so he went up and waited at Frewin's open door. Then he decided to take the elevator down and escape undiscovered, in order not to embarrass Frewin. Also, he was considerably shocked at encountering the famous Clelia in a visit of that character. But Frewin came up bareheaded and caught him before he could get away.

His rage collapsed into perfect bewilderment.

"Howdy!" said Larrick. "I was just passing by, so I

thought I'd drop up and say, 'Howdy!' And now I've said it, so I'm on my way. S'long!"

Frewin could not accept this, but he was befuddled.

"I can't ask you in. I'm horribly sorry. I'm—er—not alone. The worst of it is that little devil Clelia chose this time to call on me. Of course she knew it was a terrible thing for her to come alone to a bachelor's apartment. That's why she did it. Just to get a thrill and a lecture from me.

"She rang the bell and I answered it; and she said, 'I came in person to apologize for being such a rotter and breaking all my engagements!' She wanted to come in, but I couldn't let her in, and I made a mess of it, of course, and said, 'Sorry I can't ask you in, but the place isn't made up yet'; and she said: 'So I see. Her hat is still left on the consol!' Then she began to shriek with laughter and wouldn't let me explain. Not that I could. But she ran downstairs whooping and jumped into her machine and drove off, honking like a hoot owl.

"And now I've got to go in and try to quiet the other hurricane that's waiting for me. Oh, Lord! such a life! I'm afraid I won't be free to-day. Can you get along somehow and excuse me if I neglect you till I straighten out this mix-up?"

This gave Larrick a good tirade for his exit, and he made the best of the opportunity.

"Good Lawd, man, if you don't quit actin' like I was a baby left on yo' do'step, I'm goin' to leave this man's town *pronto*. You don't have to be a wet-nuss to me, and that's got to be understood."

Frewin agreed to understand.

CHAPTER IV

THAT evening Larrick dined alone and, in spite of his wealth, simply. He put on his dinner jacket in order to impress the waiters, but his stomach, too, had to learn the new steps, the jazz of the chefs. He picked his way with care, making one or two experiments for his gastric education, and returning to his familiars for the bulk of his diet.

He had grown beyond the first stage of ignorant opulence when he was like the ancient sudden-rich prospector who could only display his splendor by ordering "forty dollars' worth of pork and beans." Indeed, Larrick was now entering the mental stage of beginning to see the reason for all these forms of beauty that money develops—beauty of plate and tureen, of sauce and garniture, of flavor and spice.

If his earlier self could have seen his present self, the cow-puncher Larrick would have been disgusted with the new Larrick, and called him a disgraceful fool, a snob, and a toady, ruined by good fortune and the society of the rotten rich.

Everything New-Yorkish and European and capitalistic had been despised by him and his fellows in the rough country.

It was not the sour-grapes spirit of the philosophical, optimistic fox. It was the contempt of those who had never tasted grapes and did not know what they had missed.

And now Larrick was submerged in the vineyard, and eating his way in deeper. In spite of himself he was finding New York a wilderness of delights, an Eden of amazing innocences, sweetnesses, heartinesses, a playground of games outside of office hours and during worktime, a marvel of efficient wisdom.

He had found the policemen amiable, the street-car conductors ready to pass the time of day or even to lend him his fare when he found once that he had left his purse in his

room, and twice the skillful pickpockets had made off with his money without disturbing him in the slightest. The waiters were of a hospitable disposition toward Larrick, ready to earn their tips in advance. Nearly everybody in this so much-abused city seemed well disposed to the well disposed, and he felt enormously at home.

His dinner was soon ended and he set out to walk the unfailingly fascinating Broadway. It was too early for the theaters, but the moving pictures were available all day, and they ranged from little ten-cent halls with pictures of the dime-novel sort to the largest theater in the world, the sumptuous Capitol, a temple of incredible distances, the light from the projection machine streaming down across a sea of heads with the effect of heavenly shafts illuminating a seraphic multitude.

In the Capitol, the Rivoli, Strand, Rialto, and other cinemacoliseums, every olden art supported the new art that America had given to the world, an art more nearly universal than music, more persuasive than the drama, more legible than any other literature.

The critics reviled it and gave it no assistance; but its progress was as irresistible, its growth as Gargantuan, as its blunders were inevitable and unimportant. Its very platitudes and patterns were part of its world manna.

Larrick was early for the crowd, but late for the beginning of the six-reel feature. He sat down in the midst of the plot. Movie audiences had grown used to the new form of pleasurable perplexity. They dropped in at any time and let the current of the story carry them along to the end. Then they sat awhile longer and watched from the beginning to their point of entry. Then they went home and gave way to others.

Women had been doing this for generations with novels, reading the latter half first. It is as good a way as any, and novelists often practice it themselves by beginning their stories toward the end. It is as interesting to see a knot untied and wonder how it came to be tied as to watch its tying and wonder how it is to be solved.

The picture Larrick saw was one of the innumerable cow-

boy stories that America never tires of any more than any other nation ever tires of its demigods and heroes—the cowboy stories of which the rest of the world never gets enough.

Larrick thrilled with the accuracy of its detail, the perfection of its horsemanship, and the familiar eternal plot, the classic protagonists, the sheriff (now hero, now villain), the fugitive (now villain, now hero), the girl (always heroine).

After the six-reeler the program of the evening began. The orchestra assembled, the huge pipe organ bellowed. The conductor came in dramatically and led an overture by an old master, while an electrician made a new art and a new poetry of living colors, an art hitherto practiced only by the angels who paint the dawn, the sunset, and the moonrise.

Then a dancer came forth on the full stage in an American Orientalism. She was no less a personage than Evan Burrows Fontaine and she danced with grave passion. She wore trousers of cloth of gold. Her shoulders and her waist were bare, with jeweled disks and chains across the breast; and her bare feet were jeweled. She told a gloomy story in a rhapsody of posture and transition. Larrick was spellbound with the drama and with the flight of beautiful moments and colors, following pell-mell as in a kaleidoscope whirled at top speed.

A news reel followed, showing the armies of the nations at war six years after the Great War had begun and ended: the Greeks, the Turks, the Arabs, the Irish, British, French, and the Poles retreating just before their mighty return, when Pilsudski threw back the barbaric tidal wave and saved Europe from the East as John Sobieski had done in his ancient day.

Next was a travel picture that took Larrick along on the Shackleton antarctic voyage. He felt the keen wind, saw the white mountains loom and pass. He hung out on the bowsprit and watched the ice shudder and split and veer away as the ship cut deeper and deeper into the dark water; he loved the dogs and laughed at the penguins, as solid and stupid as the lumbering critics of the movies. And finally he stood with the rest of the marooned crowd and watched

the death struggles of the ship as the ice slowly and grimly overflowed it, crumpled it, and buried it.

He understood the epic of those men in the desert of ice at the under end of the world, and its white barrenness reminded him of his old home in the sand and alkali. He wondered that men should leave such paradises as New York for the strange privilege of exploring remote hells and testing bitter death traps.

But that is man's way. Larrick had felt the need of the void himself, and he would feel it again. Just now he was the sailor ashore and he mocked the sea and its dupes.

The inexhaustibly versatile camera followed the antarctic scene with an ambrosial idyll of boy life in a mid-Western town, and Booth Tarkington's lovable little rascals gave their version of "Hamlet" in an Indiana barn, with tragic results for Edgar, the actor-manager.

Then the six-reeler began again. Larrick saw what he had missed, and rose to go. He pushed through the mob standing and waiting and made his way to the door.

He was astounded to find that a great rain had been raging while he had been traveling on Aladdin's carpet. Just as he stepped out a rush of lightning ripped the gloom from the streets and buildings and revealed them for a moment in a noon glare as if to make a perfect target for the broadside of thunderbolts that crashed across the roofs and strangely left them all intact. Then a deluge until the people under the eaves and the awnings felt that they stood in back of Niagara.

But the crowds regarded the storm rather with disgust for its inconvenience than with terror. For the electricians had followed Ben Franklin's lead; they had snatched the outlaw lightning from the sky and given it a steady job. The wrathful flashes of the storm were almost lost in the cascades of the advertising signs where the chained lightning was toiling over the iridescence of a butterfly's wing, the burlesque thunderbolts of a theatrical advertisement, the caperings of kittens, and the grotesque behavior of acrobats.

The Subways and the bowling alleys outroared the thunder. But the rain was wet, and ruinous to silks and slippers.

Larrick beg-pardoned through the men and women huddled under the glass and iron awning and looked for a taxi. Some of the women ruefully regarded the destruction of their street market by the rain that falls alike on the decent and the indecent, and Larrick was sorry enough for the poor things to feel a kind of Samaritan obligation to offer one or more of them a share in his cab. But there was an embarrassment of wretches, and he plunged into the first cab up. He gave the name of his hotel, which by a familiar tmesis he still called the "Worldoff."

The taxi cut through a cross street into Fifth Avenue where at this hour there was almost no travel. The cab was shabby and jolty. It had seen better nights as somebody's limousine; but, unconsciously, Larrick adjusted himself to the seat in the pose of an emperor. Somehow one almost always does grow haughty in a cab, especially at night when nobody can see. In the daytime one looks still haughtier by trying to look unconcerned.

Generations of carriage habit seem never to destroy the majestic feeling of being alone in a chariot moving triumphantly through crowded rainy streets where the commoners huddle in doorways or hurry along in misery. Some of them may be aristocrats waiting for their own, or rich strangers unable to get a taxi—but they all look poor and peasant to the rider-by.

Larrick was as arrogant as a Roman soldier just elected emperor and crossing the Rubicon to take possession of the town. Fifth Avenue was now his own private Appian Way. As the sky flashed and sketched in dramatic cornices and porticoes he felt quite the conqueror.

The new signal towers gave a gala splendor to the occasion. The long yellow beam, clearing the way for the north and south traffic, ran down to Larrick's cab in a tape of gold spread across the striations of light on the wet pavement.

Suddenly a red ribbon ran alongside it and then the gold blinked out and the green lights, releasing cross-town traffic, drove away the red. Larrick's cab came to a stop as if checked by an invisible hand, though there was no officer on duty there except a ghostly discipline.

A mail truck lumbered across the Avenue and vanished. A curious exultance filled Larrick's frame, as if the electricity uncharging the air had found his nerves.

When a big limousine drew up slowly and stopped alongside, Larrick cast it a glance across his shoulder and felt oddly like a lion. He became a man at once, as he made out a woman alone in the other car. She gazed idly at him across the little promontory of a left shoulder under a summer fur. She looked as if she felt like a lioness. There was a strange sense of animalism at night in a jungle. A torch of lightning blazed stagily as if powder had been lighted in the wing of a theater. Larrick was agreeably shocked, for he recognized his neighbor of the moment as Miss Nancy Fleet.

He had thought of her so much since she had challenged him with her comments on his silence and his dancelessness that she seemed to have followed him here as if to a tryst for a duel.

An impulse of cowboy impetuosity, vaquero vanity, shook him and dared him. He lifted his hat. She scowled, then stared. An obliging lightning disclosed him to her and flickered in her eyes and in her smile.

He called out, "Howdy, lady!" but she could not hear him through the glass. She shook her head and laughed.

She might be a Mexican girl mocking him darkly through a grilled window.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, pulled out a wadded bill—he hoped it was only a dollar, did not care enough to make sure; rather wanted the Cyranic gesture of an extravagance—swung open the door, stepped out, reached around the clock and tapped his driver on the shoulder, shoved the bill into the outstretched hand, and slammed the door after him.

Then he stepped on the running board of the other car. Miss Fleet's chauffeur, watching for the green light to give way to the red and then to the yellow, had paid no attention to Larrick. He threw off his brake and let in his clutch and the car was in motion when Larrick opened the door and flung himself in at Miss Fleet's side, repeating his desert hail of:

"Howdy, lady!"

CHAPTER V

MISS FLEET was not too long out of college to be able to say:

"Who's all this? Leander just out of the Hellespont? I'm Hero, I suppose."

Larrick had not the faintest idea what language she was talking—French, probably. But he saw that she was laughing and that was enough. He said:

"Where I come from we don't care what you call us, so long as you say it with a smile. And you're wearing some smile, believe you me."

He was rash enough to snuggle close at this and she edged off a little, protesting:

"Get away, Fido; you're all wet."

He sighed. "I'm lonesomer than I am wet. I must be awful good, for I was just prayin' for a sight of you, and here you are."

She spoke warningly: "You must be awful good or I'll put you out. Where are you bound for? I'll drop you there."

"I'm bound for wherever you're bound for, and you can't drop me at tall."

"But I'm due at Mrs. Roantree's for cards, and I'm late at that."

"Then I'll protect you that far and walk back."

"Walk back in all this rain?"

"Oh, Lordy! honey, if you could know how sweet this rain sounds to me after a year in that extra-dry desert! It hurts me to see it wasted, though. It's just like emptying barrels of champagne wine into a crick. The rain is only a nuisance up here, but down there—we'd be holdin' our hats out to catch it. Rain is one of the finest inventions there is, but the distribution is mighty porely managed, looks like to me."

"So you're from the desert," she said. "How fascinating! I think I should like it."

He proffered her the freedom of the wilderness.

"Come along on down and try. I'll give you the key to Texas."

"Are you going back soon?"

"I wasn't, but I will in a minute if you'll pay me a visit."

Nancy laughed at his impudence. He had the ingratiating of a child whose slyness is too transparent to be offensive. She would have slapped the face of almost any other man who lolled so close, but Larrick disarmed her. And yet he was more perilous than he seemed; and she also.

Nancy (unfortunately or fortunately) was a siren in spite of herself. She had an intelligence so shrewd that it made her an intellectual—in life. She read a great deal, too, mainly fiction and memoirs and social scandal, but she was wise in the world.

As certain flowers have a color, a savor, a something that draws the fertilizing insects and rewards them with honey or with death, so Nancy had a look, a manner, a presence, that was provocative. Her parents had been afraid for her (with good reason). Girls distrusted their lovers and wives their husbands in her presence, with good reason; for Nancy tempted helplessly and not always reluctantly.

She hated the quality when it drew to her adventurers or cads whom she disliked, and they found that she could cruelly rebuke a mood she had instilled. It humiliated her when she saw men in whom she wanted to inspire respect, higher admiration, and comradeship approaching her in a flirtatious humor. She suffered acutely and experienced an almost ludicrous yearning to be homely and highbrowed and bookish.

She welcomed Larrick because she thought that he would be a harmless playmate, a denatured flirt at worst. But suddenly she found that he had taken her hand and was fondling it. She was a little amused, not at all offended, and a trifle curious. She had never met just such a man.

By the time rough outsiders of his sort had worked their

way to the circle she moved in they had grown old or cautious or had been polished and subdued.

But Frewin had dragged this cowboy straight from the saddle and flung him into the drawing-rooms. Still, almost anybody who was different was interesting, and Nancy had felt that it would be fun to play this queer fish awhile before she flung him back into the sea. Already he had her hand. He was on the hook, and it pleased her to give him a little more line and see how game a fish he might be.

Larrick was disconcerted when he found that the heart-jolting courage he had shown when he seized this pretty lady's fingers in his was not rewarded with so much as a struggle or a rebuke—not even the, "Why, Mr. Larrick!" to say nothing of the, "How da'st you!" he had learned to expect in the town of Alpine.

He felt rather foolish. He studied the hand and wished that he had never picked it up. He lacked the courage to lay it down again.

He cast a sheepish glance toward Nancy and she seemed to be watching him with foxy eyes. He was driven to action.

"Mighty pirty hand for such a little one," he driveled.

"Thanks," she said, a whit bored by the stupidity of his procedure—the "normalcy" of it, to use a word the presidential candidate, Senator Harding, had just given a sudden advertisement.

Then, to the amazement of both of them, Larrick lifted the hand to his lips and kissed it. The cow-puncher was a Sir Walter Raleigh all of a sudden.

The formal gallantry was so unexpected to both of them that she could no more withdraw her hand than he could release himself from it.

He raised it again and pressed a long kiss on its silken back. There was more fervor in this than she had planned to permit, and now she tugged to withdraw it.

But he held her fast with an iron grip, as he turned her hand and buried his lips into "the sweet and tender inward of her palm." It was like a rose about his mouth, and he caught a quick stab of delight. The mischievous banter was already beautiful with romance.

"Please! Please!" she said, a little afraid of so abrupt a plunge into the depths.

"All right. I will," he laughed, playing on her word and mocking her intention as he shoved his long right arm back of her, disarranging her elaborate coiffure. He garnered her, flung her into his bosom, drew her round so that her face was turned to his, and kissed her full and fair.

She fought him now, more in anger at herself than him, for she blamed herself; and more in fear of herself than him, for she dreaded the self he was waking.

But her little strength was as nothing to his steel-cabled arms. Her battle only gave them excuse. It was glorious to have a giant's strength and to use it tyrannously. Her soul was in dismay, but even then she thought of appearances. Her hair was caught on one of his pearl shirt buttons. A bouquet of violets at her breast was being crushed. A rough pearl pendant of her was making a bruise that would require explaining. She thought of these things even as she fainted under the ruthless brutality of a kiss almost more of a conquest and discipline than of passion, a kiss that said, "Now will you admit that you're whipped?"

Larrick had kissed a hot-headed Mexican flirt that way once and had caught her hand reaching for his revolver. When he let go and fell back she snatched a knife from her belt and slashed at him.

Such an assault on the lips made a woman either a wild enemy or an abject slave. Larrick was afraid to let this strange aristocrat go till he found out which she would be. As he clenched her, waiting for some hint of her response, he noted that the car was slowing down and stopping at the curb under a street lamp.

He was dizzy with his own ferocity, but his sanity was not quite gone. He relaxed his arms and restored the girl to her corner, stammering:

"I'm sorry. You kind of drove me crazy, honey."

To his stupefaction, she spoke quietly, not to him, but to the chauffeur.

"Robert, I'll not get out in all this rain. Just drive me home, please."

The chauffeur touched his cap without turning his head. The car went on and, making a wide circle, moved north again.

Larrick felt a new guilt. He whispered:

"Lawd a'mighty, has that fella heard everything I've said?"

Miss Fleet shook her head with a dreary smile. She was still a bit giddy as she explained:

"He only heard me because I pressed this button. It connects the dictaphone. He can't hear otherwise."

Larrick mopped his brow with relief. There was a silence. Then he seemed to feel that he ought to resume the battle. He reached for her hand.

She said: "No more of that, I beg you. It was all my fault, I suppose. But I never dreamed you were so—overpoweringly sudden."

"It's you that's that," he answered. "You came over me like a cyclone. You had me locoed. But why didn't you get out where you were getting out?"

"I couldn't. My hair must be a sight. My gown's a wreck. It's easier to explain over a telephone."

"You could have blamed it on me going crazy."

She laughed sadly. "Mrs. Roantree would hardly have been convinced. Women haven't many illusions about women."

Larrick was downcast. "Aw, that's tew bad! I've spoiled your evening and your game of cards."

"You'll have to be very entertaining to make up for it."

He was delighted. He put his arm out to collect her again and renew the entertainment. She rebuked him in a tone there was no mistaking.

"I said 'entertaining,' not 'impossible.' What's the desert like? I've never been that far West."

"Well, I swore I never wanted to see it again, but the jail-bird gets homesick for the penitentiary, they say, and when I'm all by myself in the hotel or feelin' lonely in the crowd on Fifth Avenue I find I'm hankerin' for a good hoss between my knees and the old sagebrush all around. There's not enough room up here. The sky is just slices. I'm used to

the whole thing the whole time. Besides, I can't get used to so much walkin' and automobilin'! I was brung up in the saddle. Do you ride?"

"Yes. I was brung up in the saddle, too. I was nearly born there. Mother got home just in time. I've ridden to the hounds ever since I was able to sit a pony. I love it."

"I'd admire to ride with you sometime."

"Let's get a couple of horses at Durland's and go round the Park. My own horses are in the country."

"No, thank you," he said. "I'd make a holy show of maseff in the Park. I've seen those swells doin' the merry-go-round on those liver-pad saddles and risin' and fallin' like they were in the 'Piscopalian Church. But I don't belong. I hate a trottin' hoss like I don't hate a rattlesnake. You come along on down into the desert and you'll think you're ridin' in a limousine. Our hosses, when they're not buckin', skim along as easy as this car."

"What's the desert like?"

"Well, it's hell in the sunlight, of course. It kind of cooks you. But at night, when it's so cold you want to light a fire and the smoke goes straight up and somebody lets the stars down on strings and the coyotes are the choir and—oh, I don't know—it kind of gets you. I used to be almighty lonesome sometimes; used to keep maseff company sometimes by imagining there was a girl sittin' crosslegged on a blanket by the fire and me rollin' a cig'rette with one hand and holdin' on to her with the other."

"Was she a purely imaginary girl?"

"Always."

"It sounds wonderful. Roll me a cigarette with one hand, won't you?"

"And the other holdin' on to you?" he ventured.

"Is that absolutely necessary?"

"Yep."

He was in such a comradely spirit now that she had no misgivings.

He whipped out the makings, which he always kept at hand, sifted the tobacco into the paper, put up the sack, and then thrust his right arm out for her.

She flung back and the tobacco was shaken to the floor.

"Aw!" he began. She laughed as at a child, and bent her neck to the yoke of his arm. A flare of lightning made a long stay, and she watched the deft business of his fingers, while his left hand, with a kind of autonomy, achieved a perfect result.

"You smokin' this?" he said.

"Yep."

"Then you seal it up."

He held it to her lips and she ran her tongue along the free edge of the paper. Then he handed it to her, got out his pouch and paper again, and made himself a cigarette while he held a lighted match to hers and caught a light for himself just as the flame reached the end of the wood.

She drew in a long smokeful breath and exhaled it on a cozy murmur.

"And now that we're in the desert, what are you going to say to me to pass the long evening?"

"I won't need to say anything. Just—"

He drew her to him so sharply that she choked on her smoke and fought away from him.

"A little of that desert goes a long way."

He would not release her, but she was out of the mood. The lack of dignity, to say nothing of the mad folly of it, offended her common sense. She put her hand over the button in the wall of the limousine and said:

"Do you want Robert to hear the rest of this?"

It was a more effective weapon than a pistol would have been. He put his hands up in surrender. She sighed:

"I'm afraid the desert is not for me. I'm afraid I'd grow restless. New York bores me to death as it is. What would I do with nothing but sagebrush?"

He spoke very earnestly:

"Wouldn't love make any difference?"

"It never has made much with me."

"You been in love before?"

"Always. Haven't you?"

"Well, not really. I've thought I was, but I wasn't."

"Isn't that what everybody says?"

"But there comes a real love finally, don't you think?" He said it anxiously, like a child afraid of the dark.

"I'd like to think so!" she sighed. "I suppose we've got to go on thinking so. But— Well, here's my home. Good night."

"My God! You're not leavin' me like this?"

She laughed at the desperate sincerity of the compliment.

"We can't sit out here in the car. And I don't suppose you'd come in?"

She really did not suppose that he would. But he did not know enough to understand the rebuff in the invitation. He said:

"Sure will I."

Before she could protest, he had opened the door, backed out, and was rushing her through the light shower.

CHAPTER VI

NANCY was furious with him, not because the dash through the rain had spotted and ruined her gown of vast price, but because he was putting her at the mercy of her servants.

In the car she had realized in fitful flashes of reason across the dark sky of flirtation that her chauffeur was fully aware of the fact that some man had stepped into her car. He might have caught sinister reflections from the glass of the windshield or from the mirror in front of the goings-on inside.

She almost swooned now with shame at the thought of what such glimpses and suspicions would mean to her chauffeur, and of what stories he would tell the rest of the servants, and they the whole town.

This was not the first time she had run such risks and been talked about. She had even been told about being talked about, and had curdled with wrath at herself.

But when a chance to flirt arrived she almost always lost her common sense. She grew as helpless as a leaf in an eddy, and if she floated out it was rather to the current's credit than her own. She had not always floated out.

But she had kept her head up with all the more haughtiness and had trampled the gossip under. She felt herself a bluffing hypocrite, but she despised her critics too well to let them wreck her life. In her conscience, though, she found her private hell.

She was enraged at Larrick now, and would have dismissed him if she had known how. The only thing that saved him from having the door slammed in his face was that a servant opened it, and Nancy would not give him the luxury of seeing her snub a cavalier.

So she marched in and Larrick followed. He was so

startled by the splendor of the hall that the servant had some difficulty in extracting his hat from his hand.

Larrick had never entered a palace, and the Fleet home was one of the show places of New York. Larrick had not the faintest idea of the period or plan of its architecture. (And neither have I. Such details must be left to the interior-decorator novelists who rival the auction catalogues in their gorgeous particulars.)

Larrick found himself in a somberly majestic space as awe-inspiring as a cathedral nave (if he had ever been in a cathedral nave). Lights smoldered on carved things, on moldings and capitals and on column shafts, on rugs and consols and a marble floor. And an imperial stairway worthy of ambassadors and royalty marched away to unseen magnificences.

Nancy flung off her thin wrap, unpinned and tossed aside her crumpled violets, and paused before a mirror (which Larrick had supposed to be another room) to rearrange her distressed hair. For the sake of the second man she said to Larrick:

"I'm almost blown to pieces with the wind."

If the second man realized that it was not the wind he did not correct her.

Nancy walked from the hall with a carelessness that stunned Larrick, into a drawing-room that was even more overpowering than the hall. She motioned him to sit down on a chair that seemed to have been made for the Kaiser in full uniform.

As if the room were not crushing enough to have prevented Larrick from any attempt at love-making, there was an old gentleman asleep in a chair at a remarkable table in the next room.

Larrick felt that he had happened upon King Lear taking a nap, and he would not have been surprised if Nancy had knelt and addressed him in blank verse with a "Hail, parent revered!" Instead, she went up to him and kissed his bald crown and said:

"Dad, you poor old thing, get up and go to bed. You'll catch your death."

King Lear snorted and started and rose dizzily with a sheepish smile.

"Hello, baby! I was waiting up for you. Your cousin Louise has been telephoning every few minutes. She is in great trouble and wants to come over to see you the moment you're home, however late. You are home, aren't you? Or are you on your way out again?"

"I'll call her up in the morning."

"She's most anxious. She wouldn't tell your mother or me why. But she was crying. You'd better see her."

"All right."

She sighed, went to the wall, pressed a button, and asked the man who appeared to call up Mrs. Coykendall and say that Miss Fleet was at home now and would be delighted to see her.

She rejoined Larrick, who stood awkward and uncertain. She motioned him to a chair and he sat down, for lack of brains to decline.

"My cousin is coming over," she explained.

"I'd better be moving on, then," he faltered.

"Oh, she can't get here for some time. Do wait. Roll me another cigarette, won't you? I wonder what ails the poor girl now. She's the champion trouble connoisseur of the world. And it's real trouble, too. She— You saw her at the Ritz the other night, I imagine. Did you notice a woman with her face veiled?"

Larrick nodded eagerly, as if he wanted to hear more.

Nancy reached for the cigarette he had finished by now, took a light, and walked out of the room, followed by a trail of smoke. She told her father to go to bed for Heaven's sake, and kissed him and started him toward the door. She returned with a large photograph in a silver frame, sat on a divan, and motioned Larrick to her side.

"That's Louise," she said, indicating the photograph.

Larrick studied the woman, who seemed to study him, her great eyes half curtained by half-lowered eyelids. She had race and the pride of it; beauty in its ripeness, mellow a little, as if it were nearer August than June, but luscious still.

"All you people are beautiful," was Larrick's comment. The tribute that included her with an unconscious grace pleased her more than a specific compliment. He went on, "But I don't see why she hides a face like that in a veil."

"It didn't suit her. It couldn't hold her husband. Nothing could hold Roy Coykendall. Nobody ever did. But the poor dear fool tried to improve on her face. Look close and you'll see two lines between her brows, little crow's feet at the end of her eyes. See those furrows from her nose to her mouth; that fullness under the chin; that little pouchiness at the jaw; those wrinkles in her neck. Well—You say she's beautiful, and she is—she was. But she doesn't look like a pretty young girl, now does she? She hasn't any right to, of course. She's lived and loved and been loved and had and lost a few babies and a broken heart and other luxuries that young girls are denied.

"But a woman never forgives herself for her years. You can't console her for the loss of youth. Having been beautiful makes it all the bitterer to grow old. There was no help for it, though, and women used to take their medicine as pluckily as they could.

"Then these plastic surgeons came along and began to perform miracles. They erased wrinkles, lifted fallen chins, remodeled noses and mouths. Several actresses and actors turned time backward ten or twenty years at a jump. And, as usual, everybody tried to copy the actresses and actors.

"During the war the surgeons saved any number of poor soldiers from wearing masks. They built faces where there was nothing left but shapeless wounds and horror. They learned a lot that way.

"And now they've got most of the women crazy. I know several of them who have gone through the mill and been ironed out wonderfully. I'll probably take a chance myself one of these days."

"Is it safe?" Larrick mumbled.

"No. It's frightfully risky. That makes it all the more fascinating, of course. The pain is something terrific. That also increases the charm. There's something about

a sharp knife and pain that attracts most women, somehow. They just love to be cut up—and to hurt.

“Well, poor Louise began to brood. She said she owed it to herself and to her husband to get rid of her wrinkles. As if any husband who really loved a woman wouldn’t love her the better for every wrinkle their years together brought upon her. I tried to dissuade her. I told her her husband was no good, anyway; that he couldn’t be true even to the same chorus girl for a whole season. But she just vanished—left word she’d gone on a visit.

“One day she sent for me. She was in a private hospital. Her face was slashed all to pieces. It was cross-patched all over with strips of adhesive tape. The scars wouldn’t heal. There were infections along the edges of some of the cuts—loathsome surfaces. I was sickened at the sight of her. I almost fainted. I pulled myself together and asked her what in God’s name had happened to her. I thought she’d been thrown through the windshield of an automobile.

“She said: ‘I’ve had my face made over. I had everything done. And nothing has succeeded. I’ve sent for you to ask you to do me a few last favors, and to take some messages to my babies, for, of course, I can never see them again. Of course I’m going to kill myself.’

“Did you ever wrestle with anybody who wanted to commit suicide and had a good right to? No? Well, you’re lucky. It’s not much fun.

“I fought that poor, poor creature to a standstill. Finally, to get rid of me, she promised she’d live. Sometimes I think I did the wrong thing by her. But—well, that’s Louise. She can’t stay at home. She goes mad with loneliness. Her husband neglected her when she looked like this photograph. She goes about in a—you saw her in her thick veil. She has a beautiful body, a big heart, a fine mind—and no face.

“She’s not the only victim. Every now and then I read in the paper of some actress who has sued one of these surgeons for ten thousand or fifty thousand dollars’ damages for the ruination of her features. But that doesn’t stop the rush.



MRS. COYKENDALL



"Louise lives a living death. And now she's in some new trouble, God help her. What can it be?"

She put the photograph down and clenched her hands, wringing them in pity. She understood the lust for beauty and she could imagine the anguish of its loss. She could foresee it in her own destiny. It was the tragedy of all tragedies to her.

For the first time Larrick saw her in a mood of sorrow, and there is no beauty quite like the heavenly beauty of sympathy for another's woe.

Larrick felt a new pang in his heart. His hand went out to her writhing fingers and clasped them. She lifted her head and looked into his eyes with the longing of a wounded hound. She wanted some protection from the hideous cruelties of the world.

He could think of only one way to pledge himself to fellowship in her suffering. He bent his head and kissed her trembling lips with a kind of priestly solemnity.

But it did not look priestly to the servant who had gone to the door unnoticed and who now looked in to say:

"Mrs. Coykendall is here, if you please."

He fell back, and Nancy, in a tumult of wrath and confusion at being delivered once more to downstairs comment, leaped to her feet and ran out to meet her cousin.

Larrick, doubly trapped, stood up and wondered how to escape.

He could not help overhearing what Mrs. Coykendall was gasping to Nancy in the hall. She had evidently held her emotions back till they could no longer be controlled even by the habit of discretion. Nancy tried vainly to hush her, but her shrill whispers cut the air.

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy, Roy is going to sue me for divorce."

"Sue you! How can he?"

"Oh, he has evidence enough."

"Evidence! Louise! You couldn't!—you haven't—"

"Oh no. I'm innocent—all too innocent; but nobody would believe it in the face of the proof he has. It would convince any jury. What am I going to do now? Why

wouldn't you let me die when I wanted to? What am I going to do now?"

Larrick heard Nancy murmur, "Louise, darling, I'm not alone."

But the frantic victim of too many sorrows railed at caution: "What difference does it make who hears me? Won't it be in all the papers?"

"Come up to my room, dearest, and tell me all about it. You'll stay here to-night."

Larrick heard them moving along the hall. As they passed the door he saw Nancy glancing across her cousin's shoulder and forming the words "Good night" with her lips.

She did not run back to ask him to keep the secret he had stumbled on. He was glad of that. He paused a moment, then stole into the hall, found his hat, and let himself out at the great door.

His farewell glance at the superb chamber whose nobility had so humbled him when he entered it caught the figure of the two sad figures climbing the palace steps.

All this wealth so royally squandered had not built a citadel strong enough to keep out poverty or terror or disgrace. There was something Grecian in the slow ascent of the tall woman in black who rested her muffled head on Nancy's shoulder. Nancy was yet taller and her long, bare arm went about her cousin's shaken form to help and support her like an arm of marble.

And after her followed a coquettish little satin train, ending in a tassel that sprawled and caught on every step, flaunting its golden fringes mockingly at the heels of dismay, and seeming to tinkle inaudibly.

Larrick found that it was raining hard again outside, and he was glad of that.

CHAPTER VII

"HE has evidence enough. . . . But I'm all too innocent."

These two phrases played seesaw in Larrick's brain as he strode through a downpour that turned the cañon of Fifth Avenue into a vast shower bath several miles long.

To Larrick alone it had the invigoration, the ecstasy of a shower bath. His desert-tanned hide, his desiccated soul, rejoiced in the squandered floods. There were no fields here to drink the rain with welcome, no trees to hold out their countless palms for largess. Along the whole street there was not a front or a side yard such as the poorest homes in Texas made no boast of. These grassless palaces were drawn up shoulder to shoulder, aligned along the street like drenched soldiers parading in a storm.

The rain slashed down from the murk sky in bias streaks; it beat off from the walls of the houses; it caromed from the stoops; it shot up in an echo rain from the pavements. The teeming gutters carried it to holes, where it went in swirling and vanished by long subterranean channels to the river.

Waste, waste, waste! of life-giving waters, while millions of square miles of desert lay in a purgatory of drought.

And of love, it seemed to Larrick, there was the same mad waste. Love, the life-giver, the life-sustainer, the life-justifier, rained where it was not needed and flowed away into the dark, back to the river and the sea, while millions of men and women thirsted for it in vain.

This Mrs. Coykendall rained her love on the asphalt soul of her husband and it gave him only annoyance. And, meanwhile, she who wasted so much love parched for the lack of it.

Larrick wondered what kind of man Coykendall must be that a woman should love him so desperately? To forgive

his disloyalty once was a proof of strong devotion; to forgive it again and again was mania. Mrs. Coykendall had been born rich. She had always had all that wealth gave, and yet she was a whimpering beggar for love. And finally she gave her face to the knives and the needles of a torturer that she might renew herself for her indifferent husband. That was hardly less than the Hindu women had done who climbed their husbands' funeral pyres to keep them company in the grave—and to keep other women away.

Larrick marveled at the strange insanity called love. Some men and women drew it as the moon the tides, the sun the dew. Other men and women were lucky if they could by hunting and pleading discover some one willing to be loved and to return a little affection in payment for a life of service. And some men and women besought love as vainly as the desert pleaded for rain upon its gaunt bosom.

He had known Texas people to pray for rain and wait for rain for over a year and never see a cloud in the sky except now and then some flimsy vapor that stayed just long enough to make a fool of hope.

He had known the cattle to die by the hundred till the survivors had to be loaded on trains and shipped north to water. He had seen cornfields shriveled in vast areas of rusty jungle. He had known the earth to dry to such powder that, as Col. Will G. Sterett wrote, the insects perished and the field mice starved.

And all this while there were cloudbursts and floods wreaking vengeance in other lands.

And love was like that. Larrick had never thought much about it till now when he went striding down Fifth Avenue, his first and only evening clothes saturated with pounding rain, his patent-leather shoes squeaking with the pools inside. He was remembering how he had sometimes rasped his filelike tongue along his cracked lips and stared with bleary eyes at some dried-out water hole he had struggled to across the scorching sand.

It never rains but it pours. He had met up with Nancy Fleet in the rain, and he had tasted her lips, had been invited

into her home and kissed her again—only to have his feast interrupted by the specter of Mrs. Coykendall with her wild story of a husband that not only betrayed her, but trapped her in her own folly and threatened her with public shame.

What could she have meant by saying that he had "evidence enough"? How could he have "evidence" if she were "innocent," as she said—"all too innocent," as she had sobbed?

That was the last word in degradation. The poor thing had fallen so low that she was ashamed of her loyalty and her decency and her innocence, because they had been so indecently rewarded.

Larrick's heart was an unfailing spring of sympathy. He heard a woman weeping. That was enough. She was all right. She wouldn't cry just for the fun of it. His heart ached with pity and his head with curiosity.

What could Coykendall be like? He wanted to lay eyes on that fellow—lays hands on him, too. But what could he be like?

When he came to know him afterward, Larrick realized all too well that most idols are beautiful only to their worshipers. It is the infatuation that lends them their enchantment, as the desert twilight covers the most hideous foothills with majesty. The idolater puts the jewels about the ugly idol's neck, lays flowers in its stolid hands, and burns the expensive incense that comes back, unrecognized, as the idol's own sweet breath.

When Larrick came to know Coykendall he found him an idolater at the shrine of Clelia Blakeney, who paid no more heed to his prayers than he paid to his wife's. The lesser god was looking over the head of the worshiper toward a higher goddess, who ignored him. But that gave Mrs. Coykendall no comfort. She wanted love, not revenge. She had gambled even with her beauty, and lost that, too!

But that was for the future when Larrick was looking back upon it in the Adirondacks as his past.

On that night of deluge the rain seemed to enliven Larrick's sensibilities beyond themselves, as rain alone is capable of doing for all the plants and animals and men it falls upon.

Fifth Avenue had always been a word to him like Babylon or Samarcand. But now it was almost abandoned, a dead road in a deserted mining town. So few people were to be seen, and they fleeing in cabs as from a plague or darting from shelter to shelter like thieves, that he said to himself:

"I could just about steal the whole blamed street if I'd a mind to."

But as he slashed south he passed more and more shops, their windows idly alight overtime for the advertisement of the wares within. After a mile or so he turned into Thirty-fourth Street and entered the Waldorf, leaving a dripping trail as he went down the lobby, and wet footprints on the tiles and the rugs. In the mirrorful elevator a few women looked at him with dread lest his soppiness should smirch their fabrics. They drew their finery about them closer. But he felt wonderfully elate to be too wet, for once.

In his room he peeled off his togs, wrung them out in the bathtub, and sent the suit to the valet. Then he drew on his silk pajamas (they had cost him twenty-seven dollars) and slipped into an almost too exquisite brocaded silk bathrobe that he had been unable to resist (though he had almost toppled over when the haberdasher told him the price was eighty dollars).

He shoved his big feet into enormous slippers of limp morocco and stared at his bed, whose covers a maid had already folded back with fine exactitude. The white spread had a pattern in white, a carefully designed device to give it a little quiet beauty. Beauty was remembered and attempted in the blankets. In the lace curtains creamy figures filled a creamy mesh. The very bath mat showed a Greek fret. The towels, the faucets, the electric fixtures, the door knobs—everything from the trodden rugs to the paneled ceilings revealed an effort at grace.

He had to laugh at the image he caught of himself in the door-long mirror. He had hitherto considered that the only really essential preparation for sleep was the removal of his spurs. More came off if he had the time or the bed, but he

practically never slept with his spurs on. Now he had to dress up almost as much to go to bed as to get up.

He dubbed the reflection in the glass a "gawdam dewd," but the reflection did not resent it. It grinned. Then he hunted for the Durham pouch and the rice-paper brochure and rolled himself a cigarette.

This reminded him of Nancy Fleet, whom he had almost forgotten except as the satellite of the tragic Mrs. Coykendall. Now he forgot Mrs. Coykendall and thought of the luscious armful Nancy made. He exulted in the fairy story he had written for himself in a few weeks; his amazing vein of luck had included not only wealth and the acquaintance with people of wealth, but even a brilliant conquest of one of the beautiful daughters of wealth.

He had shot up into the sky from the depths of obscurity, as if one of those extinct Texan volcanoes of Brewster County had suddenly wakened beneath him and skyrocketed him to the clouds.

He could almost smell the sulphur. He supposed that before long he would come down like the rocket stick and thereafter lie as dull and dismal as the rugged lava patches that made iron islands and peninsulas in the sand sea.

But now he was going up, up, up, in a blaze of glory and he was immensely pleased with the view. Better to have soared and flopped than never to have hit the sky.

He smoked many cigarettes, imagining Miss Fleet at his side praising his dexterity, or rather his sinisterity, since he rolled them with his left hand.

He decided that he would have to teach her how to roll her own. It would be a ladylike accomplishment in these days when nearly all the city women seemed to be going mad over cigarettes. As he had said to Frewin in a Will Rogersy phrase:

"I see where it says in the paper that women in England are takin' to pipes—little ladylike pipes. I reckon befo' long they'll move on to chewin' tobacca—perfumed, most like, or flavored with pep'mint or somethin'."

There was much ado about women and tobacco and it was

generally denounced as a new and virtue-destroying vice, though it had not yet returned to the favor it enjoyed in the seventeenth century when children were sent to school with pipes in their satchels and the schoolmaster taught the neophyte the art. In pious Scotland in 1791 it was said, "There is scarce a young woman by the time she has been taught to spin, but has also learned to smoke."

But what could the poor preachers do if they were forbidden to call old vices new?

Larrick's delight in the prospect of teaching Miss Fleet the high art of cigarette making was hampered by a dread that she might carry out her threat of making him ride a trottin' hoss. She had ridden to the hounds, too, she said, and, as he had heard tell, that included jumpin' stone fences. He had stuck to all sorts of jumping-jack bronchos, but none of them had ever leaped a bob-war fence with him. He shuddered at what would happen to him if they ever put him aboard a leapin' hoss and sicked him on a snake fence. He had seen pictures in the papers of young ladies soaring over hurdles as if they rode sea gulls, but he reckoned it was not for him.

Still, Miss Fleet had driven him to taking dancing lessons and maybe they was somebody somewhurz who would sell him a set of jumpin' lessons. He wondered if they was a cor'sponding-school course in it. He had "seen where it said in the paper" that you could learn singing and pianna-playing by cor'spondence. So why not jumpin'?

Anyways, he was going to take all the lessons there were in this being rich business, leastways as long as his money held out to burn. At the rate it was smoking, two hundred and fifty thousand would last him about a year.

This sadly solemn thought made him drowsy and he thrust his lank figure into the fine linen and slept till all hours.

In fact, he was wakened by his telephone. Some luxury, that, just to reach out of bed and pull the telephone over, set it on your chest, and talk to a lady without getting up and dressing first!

He had never expected to hear Miss Fleet's voice un-

chaperoned in his bedroom, and he drew the covers hastily over him when he caught her almost glittering accents.

"I hope I haven't got you out of bed," she began when she was sure it was he.

"Oh no! I been up for hours," he lied, with fine chivalry.

"Well, I've been up all night," she groaned. "My poor cousin has just fallen asleep. She talked herself out, and it's my first chance to escape. I really need some help and some advice and I don't want to go to any of our friends. It struck me that you were just the man of all men to do us a wonderful service. If you would! Would you?"

"Anything you want, from killin' one or mo' min, up or down. I'm your man."

"I think one killin' would be enough," she answered, "and it would just about solve the problem! But I'd love to have a word with you first. It's not exactly a telephone subject. You say you've been up for hours. Could you come here at once for a little while? I've got a luncheon date I simply can't break. Could you come right away?"

"I'm nearly there now!" he cried.

"Good-by, then!" she said, and was gone.

He sprang from the bed as if he had felt a Gila monster under him. He had learned from casual allusions that it was indecent not to begin the day with a bath, so he sped into the shower and out. He put into his clothes as if the telephone girl had told him the hotel was on fire.

His gifted left hand worked at buttons while his right manipulated comb and brush.

His gallant lie cost him the privilege of breakfast, and he was still reassuring himself that he was all buttoned in when the elevator took him down.

He told a taxicab driver to run over any traffic cop that got in the way, and they made the distance in much less than the legal minimum, without arrest.

When he was ushered into Miss Fleet's presence he explained his delay by saying that the taxicab had broken down on the road.

She led him into the home office of her father, who had left for Broad Street long before. It was a somber wilder-

ness of precious books and tables and cabinets, and of chairs like the laps of the gods.

Larrick had indulged himself in visions of gathering Miss Fleet into his arms as soon as he met her, but she looked too haggard and anxious, and she was in no mood for romance. She was tasting the too bitter ashes of it.

She motioned him to a vast fauteuil of almost smothering comfort, but she sat on the edge of a great carved table or walked the floor as she told him of Mrs. Coykendall's plight.

She answered the riddle of the night before, but she posed a new one whose solution was not a matter for curiosity, but for action.

He looked upon her as a sphinx, but he was no *Œdipus* when it came to solving the puzzle.

CHAPTER VIII

“YOU heard so much last night,” she began, “that you have a right—and an obligation—to hear more. You did overhear something, didn’t you?”

“Well, yes, something,” Larrick mumbled. “I couldn’t he’p maseff. But don’t tell me anything you don’t want to, unless I can he’p you. You didn’t ask me not to tell anybody, and I hope it was because you knew I wouldn’t.”

“I thought you were safe,” she smiled, drearily. “But just what did you hear?”

“Well, I heard the lady say her husband was goin’ to sue her for divo’ce and had evidence aplenty, but she was innocent—‘all too innocent,’ I think she said.”

Nancy nodded grimly.

“I didn’t ask you last night to keep this and I don’t ask you now. If a person doesn’t keep such things by instinct, no promises will hold him. But I trust you. Lord knows, I trusted you with my own reputation last night—a poor thing, but all I’ve got. But no matter about me.

“It’s insane of me to tell you the rest of Mrs. Coykendall’s affairs. I’ve no right to burden you with them, but Louise has made me as hysterical as she is. So here goes. It would take all day to tell what she took all night to tell, but this is the gist of it, if you want to hear it.”

“I want to hear anything you’ll do me the honor of tellin’ me.”

“Very graceful, especially for so early in the day, but—well—Louise—I told you last night what a rotter—what a flitter her husband was—is!—always will be. But Louise couldn’t bring herself to believe him hopeless. She tried all the schemes she had ever heard or read about; and I suppose there are more fool suggestions for holding love than for curing colds. Every daily paper is full of both

and none of them are any good, either for cold hearts or noses.

"But Louise read a book or two and saw a play or two where a wife tried the old dodge of making a careless husband jealous. It never failed to bring him back forever—in the books and plays. So she decided to try the record on her own Victrola. It was her last desperate effort before she turned her face over to the surgeon.

"She dreamed it all out. She would pick up some fool man and throw herself at his head where Roy, her husband, could see her. Then he would hurry back to her on his knees. Well, just in time, as luck would have it, Roy himself introduced her to a handsome man—O. K.'d his family and all that—and left them together.

"It was so providential and so pat that Louise ought to have suspected it.

"I've always found, in playing poker, that if I needed one card to fill a flush, and drew it, it wouldn't do me any good. Somebody else would have a better hand, or nobody would bet at all.

"But Louise was too blind with love to have either wisdom or conscience. She began to lead this young fellow on. He was good-looking, too good-looking to be trusted. And he walked into the trap entirely too easily.

"Louise began to feel a little guilty when the luck ran her way, and it hurt her to see how quickly the fellow fell in love with her. She vowed that as soon as she won Roy back she would find the nicest, prettiest girl in town for Boyd Cowper—that's the man's name—and make her marry him.

"In the meanwhile she managed to have Cowper hanging around at the hours when Roy was expected home for dinner. He came home and found the man there a few times and scowled and went on up to his room. Louise thought she was succeeding gloriously.

"When she and Roy went out to a dance anywhere together she saw to it that Cowper was invited and she paid him marked attention, danced with him too often and hung on to him in a lovesick way.

“Roy commented on this once or twice and Louise told him that she had a right to other men’s attention since he gave her none. Well, this went on and on, but Roy’s jealousy didn’t seem to be turning to love.

“Louise grew frantic. She took a long chance. It’s easy to say she oughtn’t to have done it and she deserved what she got, but it was her wifely infatuation with a no-good husband that was the cause of it all.

“This fellow Cowper began to make love to Louise as if he had rehearsed a part in a play. She encouraged him just a little to keep him interested. She permitted a caress or two, rebuked him, but forgave him and let him call again. He grew bolder. She got a little frightened, but was still more afraid to give up her scheme, since she’d gone so far.

“Once or twice a new second man happened in just as Cowper was holding her hand. Once or twice a new maid blundered upon them. We don’t have many old family servants any more—just a procession of new ones. Louise suffered agonies of humiliation, but, like a crazy gambler, she hoped that the next bet would turn the luck.

“One afternoon when she’d been riding in the Park she came home and found Cowper there waiting for her. He said he had met Roy and Roy was going to take a girl to tea at the Biltmore. Louise decided to go there and make him jealous. She asked Cowper to take her, and rushed up to her room to change from riding togs to dancing. It never occurred to her to lock her door, and she was just—well—between costumes when, to her amazement, her horror, Cowper slipped into her room. She ordered him out. He refused to go. He took her in his arms. She ought to have called a servant, but that was just what she didn’t want to do. She was sure she would be blamed for encouraging him to such audacity. She blamed herself bitterly. But the man had been so meek and manageable before that she was sure she could put him out quietly.

“She commanded him to go, but he wouldn’t. Then the new maid appeared, said, ‘Oh, I beg your pardon!’ and vanished.

"Louise almost fainted with shame and rage. She just dropped and began to cry.

"She hadn't the strength to tear Cowper's eyes out. She hardly knew he was there till she realized that he still had her in his arms. Now she implored him to go and never come near her again. But he clung to her till she got hold of a pair of scissors and threatened to drive them into his eyes. Then he went.

"At the foot of the stairs he met Roy coming up. Instead of killing him Roy dashed up to Louise and called her every name he could think of. He wouldn't listen to her, but had his things packed and sent to the club.

"Of course Louise wouldn't see Cowper again. In fact, he took her at her word and never came near her. She was frantic. Roy wouldn't answer her letters. He wouldn't come to the telephone at his club. At his office he left word that he was always out when she called.

"It was then in her desperation that she read one of those beauty-doctor advertisements, promising eternal youth. It struck the poor crazy thing that here was a way, the only way, to get Roy back—to appeal to his love for a pretty face by getting herself one.

"She lost no time. She went right to the private hospital and had everything done, including a few new experiments. I told you the ghastly result.

"Well, if Roy Coykendall were fit to live, Louise's pain and sacrifice for him would have broken his heart for her. He would have taken it as a penance even for the guilt he accused her of. Instead, he began to demand that she divorce him. The poor mad creature refused.

"He stormed at her, 'Then, by God! I'll divorce you.'

"She laughed through her veil, 'It takes evidence for that, dearést, thank Heaven!'

"'Oh, I've got the evidence, all right!' he said.

"'You can't have,' Louise answered, 'because there's been no guilt.'

"'Tell that to the jury,' he sneered. And then he flung at her copies of affidavits he had secured. The maid testified to what she had seen and what she had imagined. She

confessed to calling the second man and he testified that he had peeked through a keyhole and seen—well, he corroborated it. And then, to crown the whole nightmare, Roy had secured an affidavit from—you'll never believe it—a sworn confession from Boyd Cowper!"

This incredible thing sent Larrick into the air as if a copperhead had struck at him without warning. He felt the ugliness of it like a venom running blazing through his veins. It poisoned all men.

He gasped: "Cowper! He confessed? What could he confess to?"

"Oh, to all the lovemaking, the meetings, the fact that he was in Louise's room. Then he stopped and said he refused to answer further lest he incriminate himself. That's worse than if he had actually sworn to a lie.

"I believe Louise is innocent. I know she is. She's the kind that would have boasted of deceiving Roy if she could have brought herself to it at all.

"She's almost insane. She's lost her beauty, her home, and even her good name. That's a pretty tough price to pay for loving one man and trying to hold him, isn't it? When you think of the women in this town, and other towns, rich and poor, who don't care what they do, and still hold their heads up and keep their homes, it's pretty tough, I say. If it doesn't put Louise in the madhouse it's because her blood is as pure as her heart. She's the decentest damned fool I know and—"

The little swear word broke her and she began to blubber. She was one of the new women who cry so seldom that they do not weep gracefully. She hated her tears and despised herself, flung about, trying to shake off the weakness.

Larrick gathered her into his arms to uphold her, but she thrust him off, scolding.

"Oh, no lovemaking! None of that awful rot in mine, please!"

He ached with pity for her and for the woman asleep somewhere in the gaudy mansion in her sordid woes. As he pondered the matter the figure of Cowper overshadowed all the others in its reptilian odium.

"I see what you want of me," he growled. "You want me to kill Cowper."

"I could do that myself," Nancy muttered, "but he's vanished. Louise, when she had read the affidavits, called him on the telephone at once to appeal to him. But she got word that he had left town and his address was unknown. The servants had gone, too. She couldn't find them.

"Then she thought of me. We'd always been pally. She telephoned every few minutes. But I was out in the rain, spooning with you. My God! I deserve what Louise has got, and here I am asking you to help us."

"It's the proudest thing I ever had happen," Larrick sighed, "and all I want is for you to tell me what to do—who to kill and where to find him at—or anything."

Nancy seized his arm and clenched it in acknowledgment of his proffer of knighthood. But she was as empty of inspiration as he. She had mainly wanted somebody to share the curse with.

She felt that Larrick would really have committed death upon anyone she designated. It was horrible, but it had a beauty in it.

He came of a civilization where old-time chivalry survives with all its evils and all its irresistible splendors, where duels are common upon the highways, and where a woman's name had a fatal import; where "draw and defend yourself!" refers to a pistol instead of a sword, but is otherwise as frequent and as deadly as in the days of Malory and Froissart.

In New York there was more shooting than in any other city in the world, perhaps, except Chicago and one or two other American cities, but robbery was the cause of most of it, or gang quarrel; or, if love were involved, it was likely to be some wretched mockery of it, some vile passion.

In the South it still held a certain dignity because it retained the tradition of the feudal days.

After her crisis of tears Nancy Fleet seemed to be restored to sanity. The fierce lust for revenge took on a morning-after chill, and she saw in Larrick a quaint and frightful survival of another period. She was afraid of him as he stood waiting only for the word to go and hunt a man down.

She felt a revulsion toward Louise Coykendall as well. To her, life was as much too precious as it was too cheap with Larrick.

"After all," she said, dismally, "I suppose that Roy is only doing all this to force Louise to divorce him. He is determined to get free of her if he has to drag her in the gutter. But he would probably be glad to furnish her with evidence against him if she would accept it and use it. He offered to several times before, but she wouldn't have it."

Larrick felt a slump from the rough crags of tragedy to the dull sands of commonplace.

"Divo'ce ought to be easy enough in this state," he said, "seein' how easy it is in Texas."

"Oh, but it's almost impossible in New York," Nancy exclaimed. "There's only one ground, you know."

"Don't they allow it for desertion or cruelty or any of those things?"

Nancy shook her head. "There's only one ground."

"Why, in Texas, we allow it on six grounds, and down there we think Texas is the most moral state in the world and New York the most immoral. We think that if a couple don't hit it off they got a right to try again.

"A friend of mine hitched up with a right nice girl, but they didn't gee, somehow. She was something of a hell cat and wouldn't let him off, so finally he sued her on the ground of cruelty, 'renderin' life unsuppo'table,' as the law says.

"He testified that her cookin' was awful bad, and took all the meanin' out of his vittles. The judge knew 'em both well and liked 'em both, and, besides, he was very fond of his food—weighed over two hundred—the judge, I mean. So he allowed that bad cookin' was one of the cruelest cruelties there was and he granted the divo'ce. Everybody said he was a wise judge and nobody thought any the worse of the girl. She married a fellow who struck oil and could affode a cook, so she's right happy now. And her first husband is happy, too, with a lady who runs a lunch counter.

"Looks like to me that you-all up North would get along betta if you didn't take things so serious. If New York

loosened up in her divo'ce laws it might improve things. Lots of preachers are always howlin' about so many divo'ces, but as far as I can find out the places where they are hardest to get is where they need 'em most.

"Some folks say that tight divo'ce laws would save the Ame'can home, but I've found that nothin' makes a cayuse buck like a cinch that's too tight. He'll naturally buck himself to death if he don't bust the strap or somebody don't onloosen him.

"Now this fella Coykendall. I don't like him the least bit, from what you tell about him. But if he had his wife down in Texas now, and couldn't stand her any longer, he'd just go to co'te and bring some of her biscuits along to prove her cookin' was no 'count. The judge would allow him free and no disgrace to the lady. Looks like to me that this Mrs. Coykendall—"

But he stopped short. He must not say what he was thinking. He had little sympathy for anybody, man or woman, who insisted on hanging on to a woman or a man who did not want to be hung on to, and he would have approved any gentle, but firm, method that Coykendall might have employed to pry Mrs. Coykendall's grip loose. But to blast her good name and accuse her of being fast, to bribe servants to swear to it and scare a white-livered lover into a false confession, that was the act of a desperado. Shooting was too good for him.

Larrick would have been glad to make one of a lynching bee to string him up to any of New York's multitudinous lamp-posts.

He was not religious. He had been little to church as boy or man. He had never even heard that marriage had been declared a sacrament about the time that America was discovered—and not before.

He could not see what religion had to do with marriage, since it was specifically stated that there was none in heaven. As for earthly bliss, it was well known that religious disputes were the bitterest and the most incessant of all. Many couples had split because they could not agree on the church to get married in. Some of his friends had been spliced

by parsons and some by justices of the peace, and he had seen no difference in the results. Some of both sorts were failures; and some, successes.

If a man could marry again as fast as his wives died he did not see why he should not marry again if his wife divorced him. Most of the Texan couples he had known in his humble experience were as happy as their temperaments permitted. Most of them had known so little of luxury and had asked so little of life that they had expected little of marriage and, having got it, had been content.

But up here in this realm where luxury was daily bread, and where the appetite for rapture and beauty of every kind was whetted, not appeased, by gratification, too much was being asked of marriage, perhaps. Perhaps no man or woman could give as much grace and charm, novelty and everlasting refreshment, as the other party to the union required to keep interested.

It was not that the poor millionaires were as sinful as their critics insisted—those ruthless satirists who never dream of wasting justice or mercy or pity on people who have money. It was simply that they longed for delight.

They wanted love to be an art, a music, a poem—not an eternal slicing of the same loaf of bread, the better for being stale. At least some of them did, or were so advertised by the newspapers, which make nothing of the poor mobs that pour through the divorce mills, and make everything of the occasional rich who fall into it.

As a matter of fact, the well-to-do were more likely to dwell happily together than the poor—and did, with fewer quarrels and more infrequent tragedy.

Nancy's father and mother had never fought more bitterly than is to be expected in a lively home. Their wedlock had been as comfortable as could humanly be. Yet Nancy forgot them and the very solidity of the home they had built in her resentment of the Coykendall fiasco.

She had hardly listened to Larrick's chatter about liberal divorce. She knew the New York ordeal. She foresaw how greedily the scandal would be seized upon and magnified. The papers would give it the prominence of an inter-

national war. And none of the allied relatives and friends would escape.

Nancy was fearless of nearly everything but the newspapers. She was governed by that phobia which has become the chief terror of modern life.

She threw all the blame for the past secret sorrows of Louise and for her future notorious sorrows on the institution of marriage, and it froze Larrick's blood to hear her rage!

"My cousin Louise's romance had the most ideal beginning—lifelong acquaintance, insane love, brief and happy engagement, parental approval on both sides, plenty of money on both sides, magnificent church wedding, a few beautiful early children—everything!

"And now it has gone to smash as if all the rules had been broken and a curse put on it by everybody.

"I suppose if the truth were known, Louise is as much at fault as Roy. But it's marriage that's really to blame. I've seen so many marriages of every kind, elopements, conventional attachments, rich and poor, native and foreign; and, Lord! how they fail!

"I hope to God I'm never fool enough to take the plunge off the cliff. It will be lonely sometimes, but there's no loneliness like what so many of the wives I know are suffering—and some of the husbands, too. No marriage in mine, thank you!"

Larrick had not asked her to marry him and had no dream of daring so high, but he could not endure to hear a woman so marvelously equipped and modeled for love, so plainly, so beautifully intended for marriage, denouncing it wholesale and forswearing her destiny. He put out his hand toward her and murmured:

"Now, honey—"

But she knocked his hand off and snarled:

"Agh! you men!"

When she saw the hurt look in his eyes she patted his hand apologetically and laughed:

"And for the matter of that—agh! us women!"

She went on laughing, a low, monotonous, uncanny laugh that she could not stop. It became a kind of gibbering.

Larrick expected her to begin to shriek with hysterics, but she had just enough self-control to deny herself that relief. Suddenly she caught sight of the clock.

"Oh, Lord! I'll be late to my luncheon, and it's with one of those delightful demons who gets hurt and won't wait. My car must be outside. Give me two minutes and I'll be right down and take you with me. Where shall I drop you?"

"You're always droppin' me!"

"But I always pick you up again. Where shall I drop you this time?"

He looked at his watch.

"I'm due at my dancin' lesson, but I don't reckon there's any use takin' any mo' lessons. I suppose there'll be no mo' dancin' now for us."

Nancy mocked his pathos:

"Oh, there'll always be more dancing. I'll bet you anything you like that Louise will be dancing one of these days again. She'll put off her mask, too, in time. Nothing lasts—love or grief or shame or anything. They're always renewed, all of them, but the old grief gives way to the new, and— But I'd better stop before I get literary. Go on and take your lesson. If you don't dance with me, there's always somebody else."

"There'll be nobody else for me but you."

He said it with such sincerity that she gave him a quick, searching glance. There was a hunger of yearning in her eyes, but she denied it at once.

"I remember Roy Coykendall saying almost those very words to me once. 'There'll never be anybody else for me but Louise,' he said and he meant it. And now look at the damned things.

"I wonder how long it will be before you get a new craze. I give you a week to forget me. Try to love me till I get back. I'm just going upstairs to wash my eyes and get a dry hanky."

She turned for a postscript.

"But there's one thing you needn't worry about: I'll never pursue you when you run after somebody else. So

please feel perfectly free. I don't love you, and I'm not going to—you or anybody."

How true a prophetess she was in one vaticination!—how false in another!

Nancy's two minutes were nearly half an hour. Larrick had time to wander about the great room and marvel at a few of its treasures. He was as ignorant of their historical or artistic significance as a porter from the river Kasai would have been. He had merely a sense of stupefaction at the labor expended in the cover of a book, the tooling, the gold-work, the comfort to the touch that made it as pleasantly caressable as a woman's skin almost. There was a piece of chiseled ivory in which the maker had evidently set himself almost impossible problems just for the pleasure of conflict, tiny modelings of almost microscopical delicacy. Hardly anyone would even see it or admire it, and yet it had pleased some long-dead carver to go blind for the sake of this infinitesimal anonymous monument.

Larrick's heart was wrung with thwarted sympathies and ignorance as he sauntered from curio cabinet to bookshelf and back. He was gazing up at a time-tarnished portrait of somebody by somebody when Nancy's voice made him jump.

He whirled and found her a work of such superhuman wit that he forgot the other wonders for this. The same instincts that led him to stroke the bookbinding with gladdened fingers, and to study the ivory carving with delighted eyes, carried his hand out to touch this human object of *vertu* and draw her close enough to study.

But Nancy frowned with a tormented smile, dodged him, and marched out into the hall, where a sentinel stood waiting with Larrick's hat and stick. The opened door revealed Fifth Avenue in a blinding glare of morning light and, opposite, the trees of Central Park in motionless, glistening green.

Nancy paused in terror of the heat, then made the plunge and hurried to her limousine. Larrick climbed in after and she gave the driver Mrs. Kadrew's street number.

She smiled into the greedy eyes of Larrick. There was

always something back of her eyes and they always seemed to see something back of his eyes. She played with love as with cards, asking no advantages because she was only a girl. She alternated bluff with frankness, inscrutability with candor, but she never expected or would tolerate any mercy.

"Now that we women have got the vote," she would say, "we've got to give up all that old stuff and nonsense about being the weaker sex, being betrayed and abandoned and wronged. When we lose a love fight we've got to take our punishment like good sports."

She was feeling quite the gambler now. This plainsman who had interested her at first as an uncouth novelty was fascinating her now as a dangerous opposite with a new line of tricks, a different technic. The fact that he was unconscious of his own skill and doubly perilous because of his desperate sincerity made him all the more exciting.

As the car stopped at Mrs. Kadrew's door she said:

"If you'll make a good lesson of it to-day, I'll put you through your paces to-night, and we'll have a dance together."

"I'm afraid I won't be ready."

"You'd better be. I'm leaving town to-morrow on my father's power boat. Dad has a big house at Newport, and you won't see me again, not then unless you come there."

"Good Lord! You're not goin' to leave me all ba maseff in this man's town?"

She was touched by his dismay at the thought of losing her. She squeezed his hand and said:

"I made this date before I knew you. I'd break it, but—it wouldn't be white on such short notice. Call for me to-night at—say, at ten, and we'll have a farewell dance somewhere."

This was so amazing that he stood gaping as her car left him. He forgot to lift his hat till it was too late for her to receive the salute. But then she had just cast formality and gallantry overboard with a splash.

The extent of this jetsam terrified him. She was evidently not in the least afraid of him. That made him utterly afraid of her.

CHAPTER IX

THE extremes of the emotional experiences of these New Yorkers made Larrick giddy. Their life was like a scenic railway at a cheap amusement park—shoot up to the tree tops! plunge to the depths! whirl round a curve! roar through the dark! climb and swoop! risk everything, bodies and souls and all—and pay for the privilege!

This Nancy Fleet who had wept before him for the fate of her cousin had waved to him with the cheer of a girl ignorant that sorrow had even been invented.

She had talked to him about never loving anybody, yet she had let him kiss her and never implied that either of them had incurred a solemn obligation. She frankly told him she was on her way to lunch with another man, and would go on his yacht, and yet she asked him to take her out to a dance at ten o'clock.

Of course all this could have been duplicated in any village. There were facile and fickle girls in the cowlands, too. There were general flirts, and sly sage hens who were up to any mischief so long as it was secret; and high-chinned girls who would ride anywhere with anybody and stand no nonsense either from companions or gossips.

He had ridden alone with more than one girl, miles from the sight of man. He had gone buggy riding to far-off dances and brought his girl home at daybreak, and her father had never thought of shooting him down or insisting on a shotgun wedding, a military wedding they called it nowadays.

There had been plenty of sin and scandal back there in Arcadia, too, but it was part of the credit and debit of life's bookkeeping.

The poor and plain were forgiven for their lack of conven-

tion, and, if they fell sometimes, it was usually thought of gently.

But the rich, the city folk—there was something damned about everything they did. A girl dressed in the latest fashion was already a bad one in the homelier eye.

Larrick would have been merely tickled at an invitation to take one of his desert beauties to a late dance. He would have looked forward to a bit of spooning and selected a tractable horse. The girl's paw and maw would probably have joked him about driving with one hand, and said, "We was young ourse'ves once."

To go buggy riding with the gorgeous Nancy Fleet, though, and to a dance in Babylon town—that gave him a scare. But the scare was only a spur to his broncho imagination and his heart was bucking gloriously as he went to his lesson. His mood was just the mood for the new dances, and Mrs. Kadrew found that in place of encouraging him not to be afraid she had to caution him to moderate his hilarity.

She enjoyed the romping, but she warned him that he would be dancing in a crowded ballroom and not on the lone prairie. He had the knack of it now, at least, and his feet had learned to obey his whim. His partner could be relied on to foreknow his next step and meet it with the complementary maneuver.

That was one of the miracles of the modern school—the rapport of the partners who moved, spun, sidled, dipped, or tiptoed in a mystic oneness of spirit and flesh.

What young Mr. Montague felt when he stole through the garden to young Miss Capulet's balcony was what Gad Larrick felt when his taxicab halted before the moon-silvered mansion of Miss Fleet, but he had no Shakespeare to dress up his vague yearnings in godlike poetry. Juliet was merely infantile when her father tried to force her to marry the wrong man and drove her to the tomb. At twelve Nancy Fleet's father thought of her as still a babe. She had her love affairs, of course, but they still smacked of the nursery. The thought of her marrying would have

been counted outrageous. Any New York Romeo, indeed, who ran away with a girl who was under sixteen would have been guilty of abduction and punishable by imprisonment.

Nancy confessed to twenty-two, with no guaranty of the accuracy of the count. Her father would as soon have attempted to carry a wildcat to the altar as try to force her to marry according to his orders.

A parent's wish, indeed, had come to have a little less than no influence at all with the matrimonial plans of the American girl; parental approval served as a slight handicap to the suitor.

And this is all for the best, since nothing imaginable could be more hideous than the results of centuries of parental power over matrimony. There are new ways enough of heartbreak, but it is well that some of the old ways are dead and gone.

As Nancy came downstairs to meet Larrick she thought she was paying a sufficient tribute to her father when she stopped in at the library (where he was mulling over a new invoice of first editions with uncut leaves) and kissed him friendly.

He said, "Just coming in?"

She said, "Just going out again."

He shook his poll like a deposed monarch and sighed, "Try to get back before daylight."

She sighed: "You poor old-fashioned thing! We don't dance all night the way you and George Washington did. The musical union won't let us."

He smiled. "You're very beautiful and very precious."

She silenced his too great tenderness with a hug, and ran.

She found Larrick so handsome and so smartly groomed that she had to bring him down:

"Oh, looky at the cowboy in his bran'-new store clothes!"

He slumped at this, having no margin of self-confidence; and she had to rescue him.

"You really are beautiful. I'm stunned. Bear me away in your swift taxi, whither you will."

As he helped her into his cab he had to ask her where she wanted to go.

"I had hoped you would have selected a lugger."

"I don't know any luggers."

"All right, the Biltmore. Art Hickman's there with his San Francisco band."

As soon as the cab started, Larrick did the expected, but she put his arm away, protesting:

"Please realize that I've got to appear in public in these rags, and I won't be rumped. You'll have to hold me long enough to music. Save your strength."

She loved to play with fire, but she could keep her hands from it when it endangered appearances.

The elevator at the Biltmore took them up nineteen stories to the high hall throbbing with music and thronged with dancers. While they waited outside the rope for Nancy to be recognized and led to a table, Larrick watched and wondered (as he always wondered when he was not dancing) why couples permitted themselves to be seen dancing, why the law permitted dancing in couples. He did not wonder at all that the Puritans forbade it and most of the preachers denounced it in terms more shocking than the dance itself.

But the moment he stepped into the current and gathered Nancy Fleet to his breast and gave himself up to the weird mood of letting the music rule his heart and his heart, her feet and his own, and their di-une body, he no longer wondered why people danced. He almost wondered why they ever stopped dancing.

The tunes ranged through all the humors, all the history of flirtation in short snatches like clandestine meetings. There were musics that implied dignity of approach, compliment, invitation, admiration, advance, retreat, sarcasm, raillery, flattery, audacity, devotion, elopement, and passion to a honeymoon fullness.

Now and then a strangely amorous flute played by drawing a cord added its plaintive seduction to the hankering persistence of the homely saxophone, the cave-man trombone, the sirupy violin, the 'cello in its agony of desire, the hysterical piano, and the drummers' dozen cacophonies that drove off any lingering demons of self-respect.

Larrick shook his head at one interval:

"Gosh! after a tune like that and the way some of these couples take it, seems like to me the only thing to play is a weddin' march, and play it quick."

Nancy was not shocked as he had hoped. It seemed almost impossible to shock these women up here. They had put off mental prudery with prudery of costume. Yet they kept a certain delicacy and subtlety about them, and it was clumsiness of audacity that gave them quickest offense.

What Nancy may have thought of Larrick's brutal remark was lost in her real shock:

"See that girl—the one in cerise, the dizzy one just beyond the— Oh, she's gone now."

The dance was resumed and she explained as they stepped into it:

"That's the girl Roy Coykendall is said to be crazy about. I wonder if he's with her. Let's look for her. She's the girl he wants to marry when he shakes off Louise."

It was an odd pursuit, winding in and out of a human jungle that moved in an indescribable eddy of eddies. They turned on their own axis, darted in and out of crevices, collided, crushed ankles and toes, and had their own crushed in return. Nancy kept twisting to descry the woman she hunted. Larrick's heart was in a sick excitement.

There was a kind of funeral majesty to his delight now. It might well be that he should find Coykendall and have to insult him—kill him, even. Then he would be dragged away to a cell, to loneliness lasting for months, years, perhaps, and ending, it might be, in the electric chair.

He was under the slightest of obligations to avenge a woman he had never met upon a man he had never met, at the behest of a woman he had met but thrice. Yet of such demands the history of knight-errantry was made.

The less he wanted to fight Coykendall the more shameful it seemed not to. He danced the more eagerly now, for this might be his last dance on a solid floor with a tender woman in his arms.

CHAPTER X

“WHAT cannot be said can be sung.” And what cannot be sung can be danced.

Larrick had never danced with a woman like Nancy Fleet—so beautiful, so sleek, so lightly, yet so richly clad, so schooled in grace—so unafraid.

He had never danced to such music—the dance music of dancing musicians who played the fool or the satyr or the dreadful dreamer, while they suckled the saxophone, fondled the violin, and breathed into an uncanny trombone that laughed ha-ha-ha-ha!

Let those who declare the dance to be ungodly and unholy and against God’s will explain why it is so indomitable, so immemorial, so universal.

Back in King David’s time his wife mocked him because he danced, and it is solemnly recorded that the Lord made her childless for her lack of sympathy. Dancing, indeed, always had a kinship with that love and those rites whose blessings and risks concern the getting of children.

As soldiers practice and perfect themselves for war in sham battles, so the dance is perhaps a kind of sham marriage.

In Shakespeare’s day, old Stubbes, in his *Anatomy of Abuses*, said that dancing was “unpossible to be good.” He traced it to its source: “S. Chrisostom saith plainly that it sprang from the teates of the Devil’s brest, from whence all mischief els dooth flow.” And again he thunders, “No man (saith a certain heathen Writer) if he be sober, daunceth, except he be mad.”

And in 1920 the Reverend Doctor Straton, New York’s most zealous whip, declared that dancing ought to be prohibited as well as liquor. He called for the complete destruction of the abomination.

How venerable, how primeval are these old excitements

and their counterexcitements! (And I am willing to bet any man alive in the glorious-infamous year of A.D. 2920 six copies of this classic work against six copies of the worst work of the cheapest sensationalist of his day that in 2920 the older dancers will be complaining of the dances of the day as "not modest and graceful like the dances of A.D. 2910" (which the older dancers of 2910 will have denounced as lacking the modesty and grace of the dances of 2900, and so on backward in crawfish progression)—also that the popular satirical preachers will be denouncing the whole craze for dancing as an abomination, and demanding that the police stop it at once. Some of the most liberal preachers of 2920 will, however, say that they would not object to dancing if it could be conducted in the stately and respectable manner of the classic jazz and the innocent shimmy of 1920—but that the new wriggles are intolerable.

(If I lose this bet the winner is entitled to anything he can collect.)

In the meanwhile, in the Biltmore, young Mr. Larrick and young Miss Fleet were not thinking of ancient or of future comments on the dance.

They were hardly thinking of the present moment. Their hearts were too dizzy for thinking. They were simply exploiting their emotions, in the mystic, inexplicable sway of rhythm.

Millions of men and women in the world were dancing at that hour. As the earth rolled round into the night the dancers rose like fireflies, flashing their cool fires in the ecstasy of blazing—like ants taking on wings for a brief nuptial flight in clouds, ceasing to crawl or toil, and soaring in air in wild revels. The old fireless fireflies and the ants past their wing-time doubtless were horrified, were shamed, and could not understand.

But dancing, like all other human raptures (and pains and activities), is past understanding.

It is rapture that the people want; must have, will have; and they find it in innumerable inscrutable ways. One rapture is as blind and as dangerous and to its enemy as ridiculous as another.

The martyr at the stake found himself among roses. The hermit in his cell found voluptuousness in his hair shirt, his whip, and his famine, and turned in disgust from the devil-sent naked visions to the good sharp rocks of salvation. The nun found her dull cell all alight with the presence of the bridegroom Christ and in His blood found warmth and wedlock.

Each of these enraptured ones found preparation for the future life in the earthly crisis of emotion; pain Here meant so much bliss There that pain became bliss, disgrace glory, and crucifixion election.

So the dancers, it may be, looking forward only to their earthly future, seeking hither and yon the mate of mates, try all and their arts, and try all arts, in order to perfect themselves for earthly bliss.

The dance brings rapture only to those to whom it brings rapture. But to them it means that strength and beauty embrace and revolve about each other; one commands, one obeys; one pursues, one flies, or indulges in the pretense—and so they play about the brink of entire union, mimic communion. And all this in a realm of music, and all heightened by the interaction of mob multiplication.

Larrick was too wise to analyze. He enjoyed. He drained the beaker instead of asking for its chemistry, its origin and reactions. His regret at the danger of encountering Coykendall on such a night only made his beatitude more poignant.

Clasping Nancy as straitly as bronze is embraced by the mold, he murmured into her ear:

“Don’t you love me now? I can’t help loving you. Don’t you love me—now?”

She laughed a most enamored laugh, but she said:

“Now—yes. I’d love anybody that danced to this music without losing time.”

“Me, I mean,” he pleaded. “Don’t you love just only me for forever?”

“No!” she answered, with absolute conviction, but with a more maddening surrender.

It seemed strange that such perversity could exist, and

Larrick was frantic that a verbal denial should be her only denial.

The music stopped just in time to restore him to sanity and harsh reality. He was atrociously hot. The collars of the most fashionable men were a ridiculous mess of limp starch and linen.

The whitest women were scarlet and streaming with sweat—not with perspiration, but with more or less “honest sweat.” They came back to their tables gasping, mopping, fanning themselves with handkerchiefs that they wrung out and stared at ashamed—ashamed of handkerchiefs and so little else!

Nancy, like the cat she was, struck the earth on her feet, but Larrick came down from the clouds in a maze.

She was already swearing at so paltry a thing as the weather. She was glad she was leaving New York on the morrow.

Larrick was afraid to look at her or anybody else in that community, suddenly changed from linked angels to humid citizens. But Nancy said:

“There’s the girl—Coykendall’s pet—at the third table—just burying her nose in a loganberry highball. Coykendall is not with her. That’s not even his kind of a crowd.”

It did not matter much now. Larrick would have enjoyed murdering somebody. But he said, for politeness:

“Maybe she’s got tired of him and chucked him.”

“What’s more probable is he’s chucked her. Roy couldn’t be true to one correspondent long enough to get her name in the affidavits.”

Larrick began to lose interest in this man. There would be mighty little comfort in going to the chair for mashing up a humming-bird (that “germ of alibi,” as Emily Dickinson called it).

Your noble crime demands a noble victim. To slay a dragon, kill a Goliath with a pastoral nigger shooter, puncture a tyrant or macerate him with a bomb, to strike down what is technically known as “the despoiler of a home,” or to intervene with the lightning from a pistol’s muzzle in

revenge of a woman's honor—yes, that would be to collect enough glory in advance to pay for any fate.

But to chase this dragon fly (a "snake feeder" was what Larrick called a dragon fly) through the marsh, from one cattail to another—no, thank you! well, hardly, just as much obliged, but none o' that in mine if it's all the same to you!

Worse yet, just as the next dance started and the saxophone gurgled a particularly cynical invitation to lay all scruple aside and just as Larrick and Nancy had come to a perfect understanding, some one stopped them and insisted on cutting in.

Larrick had not been subjected to this Sabine atrocity before and he felt instinctively for his empty hip pocket. He hit somebody's else hip and was knocked aside by a dancing couple who glared at him for impeding the traffic.

By the time he had dodged to the side lines Nancy was lost in the *mêlée*. He waited till she came round to cut back or commit murder, but when he caught sight of her lost in an interplanetary space, and twin-starring to the music of the spheres with as apparent an abandonment as she had revealed in his arms, he cursed the dance with the horror of a Methody parson, and vowed that he would never take Nancy seriously again.

He was not yet ready for the community of property, the polyandry and polygamy and polywoggery of the dance world.

He went to his table and outsulked Achilles. Nancy drifted by him and appealed to him with silent cries of, "Help! help!" for the man who had cut in was an irregular bounder. But Larrick let her drown.

When she came back at last and thanked the cavalier ever so much, and so dismissed him, she saw how deeply Larrick was hurt by her desertion, and it pleased her to the depths of her soul. He was jealous of her! jealous of one little dance! Could it be that he really loved her with the real love she had been searching for?—searching like Isaac Newton picking up one shell after another and dropping it for the next.

The possibility was so fairy-story-like that she could not believe it. At least she must experiment some more.

That was her mistake—one of her numberless mistakes in life. Larrick was not one of those who could be won by the hot-and-cold treatment, the now-you've-got-me and now-you've-not method.

Her next trial of his emotion was particularly unfortunate. She reached out into the passing current and seized a woman by the arm and said:

"Connie, I want to dance with your beautiful husband and I want you to dance with Mr. Larrick."

Connie was willing and so was her husband. Larrick was frightened to a panic. The music broke loose. He rose and Mrs. Connie Whoevershe was clamped herself to him with a vim, vigor, and swooning intimacy that terrified Larrick out of his wits and off his feet.

He had always said that if a vampire ever appeared in real life every man who saw her would run. But he could not run. He could not dance. Neither could Connie. She substituted a democratic cordiality for a sense of rhythm.

Larrick was swept into one of those appalling jams that turn a corner of a dance into the imitation of a packed Subway express car scooting round a curve. In this human jelly Larrick could not tell whose legs he was dancing on. He knew only that they were not his own.

Connie did not care. She loved to be suffocated and would have cooed to a boa constrictor a discouraging encouragement. Eventually Larrick and his Portuguese lady-of-war floated out of the congested district into a little freer space, but Larrick could not come to a working agreement, either with the music's syncopation or with Connie's syncope.

As he joggled and raged he saw Nancy twirling by in the arms of Connie's husband. The man, instead of looking bullets at Larrick, looked away. Nancy, who had caught sight of Larrick, suppressed her laughter at his plight, and put on, for his peculiar torment, a look of shameless contentment, closed her eyes, set her chin on her partner's shoulder, and pretended to be a lost soul.

Larrick voted her one as far as he was concerned, and whipsawed Connie to the table where she found him. He told her:

"I got no right dancin' with an artist like you are. I only had two lessons."

Connie was for teaching him, but he thought he had learned more from her already than anybody but her husband ought to know.

Her husband had led Nancy as bad a dance as she deserved. He and his wife were as wicked as they could be, technically or domestically.

When Nancy limped back to the table and froze out Connie and her mate she said:

"I deserved that. That beast has the grace and efficiency of a caterpillar tractor."

Larrick did not mention his clever intuition that she was slandering the man to hide the delight in him she had plainly felt when Larrick saw her with her eyes shut. He simply put in for himself a disclaimer of similar enjoyment.

"What's that wife of his in the daytime—a massooze? I tell you if I'd 'a' had any rheumatism anywheres—well, I wouldn't have it now."

Nancy rejoiced in the audacity of this. "Aren't we getting well acquainted?" she said, and rose for the next dance.

But Larrick had lost his first fine, careless rapture. The crowd had increased. He had to plan his steps in advance, and every time he planned a step somebody stood on his foot till he lost the beat, or hooked it and carried it past the point of return. He had lost confidence in Nancy as well as himself. There was nothing very sublime about sweeping her into a delirium that he had seen her share with two other men. He was not expert enough to dance without inspiration or to dominate his companion. The bout was a total failure, and he ordered much food as an excuse for not venturing out again.

Nancy was keen enough to see that she had tried the wrong experiment with this simple soul. She saw that he was genuinely, pitifully wounded by her apparent promis-

cuity. She had not stimulated him to jealousy, but only alienated him by cheapening herself.

That was the kind of love from the kind of man she wanted. She was satisfied that Larrick might be the very being she had despaired of finding.

This enthralled her, confused her. She became a little girl again with illusions and romantic notions. But it was one thing to be convinced and another to convince her man that she was his woman.

She could hardly throw her arms about his neck and cry: "We have found each other. I am not what you think me. I am a sweet young innocent who knows nothing of the world or of passion, and wishes to know only what you wish me to know."

She could say none of that, for it was not true. She knew about all there was to know, and could not pretend to a hypocritical ignorance. She would despise a husband who would expect to get a wife with a mind like a sheet of blank paper. But she did want a decent husband who wanted a decent-intentioned wife, and she liked Larrick better than any man she knew. She loved him for his bewildered reaction to her acid test.

But how was she to explain herself? She had not found the way by the time they had poked their supper to bits. When he implied a reluctance to dance any more she was glad, because she thought that they could be alone in the taxicab. Perhaps he would propose a long excursion through Central Park's deep gardens and out along the moony grandeurs of Riverside Drive.

But he did not propose such an excursion. His arm even made no excursion about her yearning shoulder, and when they reached her house he handed her out as if she were his grandmother—very carefully, lest she break in two, but not at all reluctantly.

At the door his sad eyes found hers inexplicably sad. His hand found hers strangely strong as they clenched. He felt an impulse to seize her, but the moonlight was brilliant on the doorway, and the taxicab driver did not know enough to pretend not to watch.

"Good night?" she said, with a kind of inquiring inflection.

"Good night!" he groaned, thinking of might-have-beens with all regret.

She shrugged her shoulders and made a bitter *move* at fate and closed the door on him as on another dream from which she had wakened at midnight with a long night still ahead of her.

He dashed down the steps and into the cab, damning those modern dances and the ruin they make of these modern women.

Book IV

CLELIA

CHAPTER I

AS Larrick found a luxury in the most commonplace features of New York life, such as rain and wealth and throngs, so he found commonplaces many of the things that excite the natives.

One of these latter was the alleged "hot wave" that broke over the town the next morning and filled the citizens with dread.

The winter of 1919-20 had been extraordinary for length and bitterness. Storm after storm had added ice upon ice in the streets. Labor to remove it was difficult to secure, and appallingly high priced (common workmen were notoriously wearing silk shirts at twenty dollars apiece, while the aristocracy were returning to madras at five).

The police department had to arm itself with pick and shovel to clean certain main highways and the street-car companies turned their motormen and conductors into street cleaners in an almost vain effort to clear the track and the third-rail slots, which had become solid marble with frozen water.

Narrow passages between ridges of jagged snow were cut along Fifth Avenue and Broadway, but the side streets were almost impassable. The flame throwers used in the war were called into play against masses that knocked a pick aside, and dismal bonfires were built everywhere in a poor effort to melt what could not be chopped.

Rich people were forced to walk to the shops and even to the opera. New York became pedestrian for the nonce. Those who rode the mountain trails were knocked about in their limousines and taxicabs till they were black and blue. Broken springs and wheels sent motors of every sort in myriads to the overcrowded repair shops.

The protracted winter was followed by a long wet spring and a belated summer.

But the weather by matching extremes maintains a rough average and the deferred hot spell came down with a vengeance when at length it came.

This heat that won front-page attention in the newspapers and set the populace into a panic of flight to the beaches, the hills, and the mountains was so trifling to Larrick that he was amused and amazed.

He had fought bronchos and roped steers in a shadeless, waterless realm where the thermometers recorded 135 degrees. It astounded him to find New Yorkers terrified at a mark of 90. For the streets were cañons of deep shadow, the Subway was a cool tunnel, and electric fans whirred in almost every interior. At every corner there was a hydrant whence the street cleaners shot gushing floods along the pavements. At night gangs washed down the streets with torrents of water. Certain streets this year were not only put aside for playgrounds for children, but were adorned with shower baths, where multitudes of human sparrows splashed and squealed in a next-to-nothing of clothes.

The saloons that had marked nearly every corner in the business districts had almost completely disappeared, but the soda fountains had multiplied and men who had been wont to dally over their beers and gin rickeys humbled themselves to crowd in with the women and girls along the marble counters and to shock their gullets with chilled sweet stuffs of infinite variety.

Frewin asked Larrick to have luncheon with him at a club.

He ordered a hot-weather meal—a “cocktail” of chilled grapefruit, a soup of chicken okra frozen to a jelly, a platter of cold, sliced meats, a cold salad, iced coffee, and an ice. It was a substantial meal, but it entered cold.

Frewin was not a believer in prohibition. Neither was anybody else that Larrick met. The most that he heard in its favor was that the disappearance of the saloon was a good thing. It was bitterly proclaimed that beers and

light wines ought to be permitted, though nearly everybody that pleaded for beer and light wines was possessed of a stock of whisky and gin.

Yet in spite of the national grumbling, nobody in power dared to advocate the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Neither of the presidential candidates could be forced into an advocacy of such a step, though it was whispered that both were in favor of it.

The clubs, like the hotels, had been forced to a change of life. Relying hitherto for their profits on the receipts from their bars, they had to look elsewhere for their funds. At first the clubs had installed lockers and the members had loaded them with provisions against the long drought. But the lockers had been declared illegal and ousted. The desperate members were left with no recourse but the pocket flask, itself outlawed.

Many of the clubs set apart a secret inner chamber where members might mix their own drinks. In some a servant furnished such ingredients as were nonalcoholic. But the ceremonies were as mystic and as solemn as the rites of a forbidden religion, and the man who gave another a sip from his flask was counted as Samaritan as Sir Philip Sidney offering his canteen to a wounded soldier.

Larrick's luncheon with Frewin was preceded by an invitation into such an occult sanctum. The toast was a bitter, "And they call this a free country!"

At the table Frewin was in a torment of heat, for which he never blamed his liquor.

"Pack up your things and come out of this hell hole," said Frewin. "There won't be a soul in town by to-morrow."

Larrick was innocent enough to take this literally. What did he know of the habits of these peculiar people?

Frewin modified his phrase:

"Of course millions of poor devils will have to stay here, but nobody will that can get away."

Larrick thought of Miss Fleet and her yachting flight. Now that she was gone, New York was an empty town to him. He might as well kill a week with Frewin, until he could make for Newport and meet her there.

Thinking of loneliness of his heart without its flame, he was reminded of Frewin's love troubles.

He was rash enough to ask about Clelia.

"How about that Miss Blakeney of yours? Have you made up with her yet?"

Frewin winced and blushed:

"No, she won't see me. She won't talk to me on the telephone. I sent the little rat a note and she returned it unopened. She had the nerve to write on the envelope: 'This was evidently meant for the other lady. I haven't dared to peek in. I'm far too young, tee-hee!' She's gone up to the country. Her father's country place isn't far from ours. I've got to show dad a little attention, as I'm broke again. So I'm off to the farm, and you're coming along. Mother told me not to fail to bring you. Clelia will probably think I'm on her trail, but I'm not. I'm off that young lady for keeps."

Beneath the gray ashes of this scorn Larrick was sure that there was a smoldering and a burning that fed on the very pride that would have extinguished it.

In the enforced idleness of his own heart, divorced for a time from the Nancy Fleet, he felt a keen curiosity to see and know this peculiar Clelia, who could torment so insufferably so sophisticated, so resourceful a man as Frewin, whom Larrick thought of rather as a natural-born "lady killer" than as a love-lorn swain whimpering at the heels of a mocking girl.

Clelia had run into him in the dark and fled past him laughing, but almost undescried. He could not foresee that she would play will-o'-the-wisp to him, too, and entangle him in a bog of remorse, of desire and despair.

CHAPTER II

FREWIN sent Larrick back to his hotel to pack his trunk and his suit cases under instructions to meet him at the Grand Central. He cautioned him about the hour. The railroads were run on sun-time, which those who make a religion of everything that is long enough established persisted in calling God's time. But during the summer the city advanced the clocks an hour so that the offices and shops would set their flocks free for that much more of daylight recreation. Even this was a concession to custom, for it would have been as impossible to persuade town folk to get up and go to work an hour earlier without changing the clock as it was impossible to persuade the farmers that the daylight-saving fashion was not an attack on their sacred rights.

Larrick found the Grand Central an enormous hive in full swarm, bustling, darting, clustering for the flight.

Frewin met him at the circle of the information bureau, where amazing scholars in train mathematics answered questions of every sort with incredible calm and rapidity. In the chair car Frewin found a cluster of men and women friends. Next to the onslaught of the heat, the favorite topic was politics. The women had won the national vote at last and would cast their first ballot for President in the coming November.

An entire sex had just come of age after a hundred and forty-four years of existence in a Republic founded on universal equality and after, perhaps, a million years of life on a planet where it had held at least equal sway with man in almost every activity.

Some of the gayest and prettiest of the women had been famous stump speakers and were entering political politics with all the zest they had shown for every other sort of politics.

A few men were still afraid that women would let their emotions rule them instead of their reason! Which is one of the stupidest jokes mankind has ever unwittingly committed—as if males had ever ruled their world reasonably; as if they were not now hopelessly divided on every national and international question.

The next election would differ from the others in no respect except that the number of voters would be about doubled, and that women would add their prejudices, whims, taboos, fads, and emotions to those of the equally, if differently, foolish men. Chaos would be added to chaos without making it perceptibly more confused,

But at least one ugly atrocity, one sublime asininity would be removed from the Republic's life, and malekind would cease to deny the privilege of the polls to the mothers, wives, and daughters whose love, whose loyalty, whose beauty, charm, wisdom, and welfare were vital to the dignity, prosperity, and worthwhileness of the nation.

And this world-rocking revolution had been managed with no visible change in the face of things. Women were more womanly than ever, freed of the corral. Girls had more to live for, and the word "home," losing all hint of harem or cage, became a dearer and a sweeter word.

The train made few stops till it had passed White Plains. At every station thereafter a mob of motors waited. At every station there was a scurry of sallies from the train and onsets from the platform, hilarity, kisses, hugs. It was Larrick's first glimpse of the country life of the New Yorkers.

He was dazed by its lack of affectation or pomposity. There were beauty, wealth, grace, sophistication, but there were also welcome, the glad reunion of families, the warm ingathering of guests. All the languor, boredom, indifference of the rich that he had heard of were dramatically absent. He could see no difference between the greetings of these swells and the shabby poor at the Southern depots, except that the wives and children here were better dressed and the habit of beauty had increased their comeliness.

Larrick was rapidly being contaminated by contact with

wealth to the appalling belief that wealth has its good qualities, the qualities of its very defects. There are certain priceless things it cannot buy, but countless things worth having that it can.

It came to Larrick as a startling discovery that this wealth thing so much denounced would not have remained an eternal goal of human ambition if it conferred no benefits on those who joined it. He realized that many men had won a noble wealth nobly while many men had earned an ignoble poverty by ignobly disguising their lazinesses as honesties.

Frewin was met at his station by a family car. It ran through the village shops and a cluster of modest homes out across the hills to the large estates. The roads were fine, the walls well mended, the entrance gates grandiose, but hospitable. Glimpses of houses and barns showed them to be stately beyond the usual reach of farmstead life, but everywhere the one predominant desire was plain: to keep Nature herself—at her best, indeed, without the scars and horrors of the battlegrounds of plant and tree wars, but always Nature. These rich folk came into the country to get the country and to be at ease. Yet Larrick had always read the contrary.

He began to realize that even the fiction writers lie.

He fell timid suddenly as the car turned from the highroad into a private drive between two massive gates. They warned him that he was about to confront splendor. The road was walled with a green-velvet masonry of trees and shrubs, with flashes of sward in broken places, and gleams of flower patches, a tumbling stream, a great swimming pool, a house like a mountain, a delectable mountain; then a further dash through a green-and-white grove of shapely and shimmering birches.

The car drew up with a sharp stop at a woman's cry. Larrick was thrown forward. As he readjusted himself he saw a large woman in a great hat waving from a thicket of tall roses. She brandished a pair of huge shears and she might have been one of the Fates, but Frewin said:

"There's mother now."

He jumped out, motioned Larrick to follow, and sent the car on to the house with the baggage.

In spite of Frewin's statements of how eager his father and mother were to meet the savior of their prodigal son, something had always prevented their entertaining Larrick till now.

It was Larrick's fortune, therefore, to encounter the magnate and the *grande dame*, not in a palace, but on a farm. It was as unlike the bleak ranch in Brewster as anything could be, but he found that the Frewins, father and mother, had not lost their hearts or their simplicity in the depths of their luxury. They reminded him of Pa and Ma Milman and they greeted him with as warm a hospitality.

Mrs. Frewin was caught in her garden, snipping off dead roses, whisking amorous rose bugs from the petals, in coupled scores, and quarreling with an equally opinionated old gardener.

After embracing and scolding her son, she tore off her gloves and pressed Larrick's hand, stared at him, then thrust her arm about his neck, drew his head down, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"You blessed boy!" she cooed. "If it hadn't been for you, what would life have been worth to me? It must have been my prayers that brought you your good luck, for we could never find you. How proud your mother must be of you. Oh!" She caught a look in Larrick's eyes, a gulp in his throat. "Forgive me, you poor child! Was it long ago?"

Larrick nodded gloomily. She wrung his arm with her soft hand and sighed:

"Then I shall adopt you for mine, and this place shall be your home, if you'll accept it. Will you?"

Larrick could only grin and swallow and feel deliciously uncomfortable—all of which pleased her more than the readiest rhetoric of a courtier could have done.

She turned to her own lad:

"Your father will want to see his new son. You'll find him in the barn looking over his latest purchases at the

auction. Go get him away from there. Tell him we have an early dinner. It's the servants' night at the movies and if we delay them they'll leave in a body. Sixteen of them abandoned Mr. Warrenden last Thursday because he wouldn't send them two nights a week, and he had a big house party on. Run along, and"—she patted Larrick—"you know all about cattle; show my husband how little he knows."

Frewin led Larrick through a maze of gardens to the distant stable yard. It was an estate in itself, a walled city.

They found the senior Frewin gloating over the enormous bulk of a placid Ayreshire bull. A farmer held him by a long pole and a nose ring, but he was in a mood of peace. A vast structure of creamy skin, with patches of russet, his eyes amiable, and no sign of life except the grinding of his cud.

Frewin introduced Larrick to his father and the two men wrung hands. After a confession of gratitude as sweet as his wife's, but not so flattering to the young cub of a son, Mr. Frewin asked Larrick his opinion of the monarch of the pasture.

"I snapped him up at a bargain. I got that beauty for only fourteen thousand dollars. Is he worth it? I'll say he's worth twice as much."

Larrick tottered at the price. He had nothing at all to say. Frewin justified himself as a business man and a man by adding:

"My wife says I am a greenhorn, but I say a thing is worth as much as you can sell it for or as much as you want to sell it for. I had an offer of twenty thousand for that pale-faced gentleman before we got him out of the ring, so I call him a buy."

Larrick reckoned he was, and young Frewin told old Frewin that if he did not come to dinner soon there would be no servants.

That fetched him.

Life on the Frewin farm was heaven to Larrick. He had a father, a mother, and a brother, and all of them removed

from the clamor and the difficulties of city existence. He needed the repose and the friendliness, for his heart was raw and weary. The servants felt something of the nearness to nature. They were simple, friendly, cordial. The gardeners, the farmers, the cattlemen, the chauffeurs, were all at ease. Larrick was one of a big, handsome family.

But he was unwittingly resting himself up for a new ordeal—the ordeal of suddenly meeting Clelia Blakeney.

She came to him in a beauty that had something of the supernatural about it. Her entrance into his life was as unearthly as her exit from it. But between the two extremes there was earthliness enough and beyond enough.

She upset his every ideal, knotted his motives into an inextricable tangle, filled him not only with the very worship of beauty in its purest essence, but with distrust of himself and of everyone else; with enmity toward himself and all the world. She kept him in a frenzy of anxieties and of contradictory remorse.

For the love of beauty is the root of all ugliness.

CHAPTER III

UNEXPECTED guests turned up at the Frewin home that evening in such excitement that the dinner was late, after all, and the servants missed the moving pictures—but without regret.

The house was a great U-shaped mansion and Larrick's room looked down into the front court. As he dressed hastily by a window he saw a big limousine roll up to the stately entrance.

The chauffeur's clothes were burned in spots and his face was sooty. Out of the limousine piled a remarkable group of men, women, and children, all of them smudged of feature and scorched of raiment.

Larrick's curiosity gave him speed and he thrust into his clothes with the velocity of a rural volunteer fireman. He walked down the hall and descended the steps in a pretense of leisureliness, belied only by the fact that he had forgotten to knot his black tie.

He found the great entrance chamber clamorous with the Frewins and their strange guests, all of them talking at once. Mrs. Frewin had flung on a light wrap and her husband and Norry were in bathrobes. The visitors looked like beggars and they called themselves by that name, but they were relatives of the Frewins and of equal opulence.

Larrick held aloof, unnoticed, and soon learned that their house had been burning all afternoon and that the fire was an almost complete success. Practically nothing was left but a mound of singed furniture on the lawn and a few gouged paintings, scorched rugs, and ripped tapestries snatched out by the excited neighbors and the belated firemen. Each of the family had fought hard for some one thing personally precious.

Mrs. Squair had brought away her jewels at the cost of a blistered wrist. She half sobbed and half laughed:

"It was hard to remember the combination of that damned wall safe, with the flames darting at me like snakes."

Miss Clarice Squair had rescued the love letters of her fiancé who was flying in the Kosciuszko Squadron in Poland, giving the Bolsheviki such literal blowings up as Mr. Squair gave them verbally whenever he referred to them—and "Bolshevik" was his new epithet for everything he loathed.

The eight-year-old girl had broken free of her governess and darted up the stairs for her pet Maltese poodle, which was somewhat smoked, but still exceedingly indignant and piercingly shrill in giving his version of the fire in sharp yips.

John Squair, the father, alone had failed to save his most prized possession, and he was quite unmanned by the loss. He leaned heavily on the elder and the younger Frewin as he explained:

"I had just put in twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of liquor—beautiful stuff, too, oh, beautiful! I had built in a burglar-proof safe, with a trick signal system and everything. The whole damned roof fell in on it and cracked it open and the fire did the rest. I had a lot of extra stuff behind secret panels, in various places, and—oh, Lord, that's gone! And only last week I was laughing at Jim Haven; you remember a gang of burglars made an excavation through his cellar walls, backed up motor trucks, and left it drier than William Jennings Bryan's soul. And now mine's gone and nobody will get the benefit of it."

Frewin was solemn, but philosophical.

"Well, you must be brave."

"But, as the seasick Scotchman said, 'But, mon, that was whusky!' There was only so much good liquor left in the world and I had counted on growing old along with that stock."

The mourners were helped up the stairs to the guest rooms, of which there were enough to house a small tribe.

As they crowded past, Mrs. Frewin presented Larrick to them. They were all beyond vanity and made a joke of it, though their laughter was a trifle hysterical.

They were provided with much-needed baths and with such under and over clothes as the house afforded. By the time they came down again they were calm and clean and unrecognizable in their manifestly borrowed clothing.

The dinner was an hour late, but the kitchen crew did not mutiny, for they had had the chauffeur to listen to, and stories of storms at sea are no more absorbing to sailors safe ashore than tales of country-house fires to people whose country houses have not burned down—yet.

At the table there were the usual inevitable anecdotes of the stupid mistakes that provide the same humors for all fires. But behind the nervous gayety there was a grave suffering, for the blaze had rendered them paupers in all the collections they had been making in all their lives. A few furtive tears escaped Mrs. Squair and sudden gulps as she remembered irreplaceable souvenirs of her young love, her children, dead or grown up, portraits of her mother and father, and unique trinkets of her past.

Mr. Squair had similar griefs of his own, but he could not forget that his cellar was full of melted glass from which the volatile spirits had escaped. The elder Frewin proved himself a Samaritan, indeed, for he proffered Squair enough from his own savings against a dry old age to keep him going until he could smuggle in from somewhere a new supply.

The question of liquor was occupying a vast amount of the nation's attention, now that prohibition had settled down as an established state of affairs and the prospect of relief had been ended by the terror both political parties had shown of even considering an amendment of the Eighteenth Amendment. The number of arrests for drunkenness, after falling off remarkably upon the first success of prohibition, had tripled lately in places, and the violence of the inebriation was said to be greater. But nobody seriously prophesied a removal of the ban. People were settling down to it and smuggling was replacing baseball as the national sport (especially when a stupefied public learned that several of the revered baseball heroes had been quietly selling out the biggest games to the gamblers). Clubs were getting into trouble with the liquor spies. The

homes of a few millionaires had been raided. Every day trucks, loaded with tens of thousands of dollars' worth of booze, were captured in the city streets and the country roads and confiscated. Homes were going up in flames as private distilleries exploded. There was a vast exchange of recipes and much pathetic effort to concoct a palatable home brew, and "hootch" was a new word on everybody's lips. Things were going back to the good old Puritan days when every family brewed its own liquor, though the little children were not now encouraged to take it with their meals as then.

Norry Frewin was startled when young Tom Squair told him that their friend Evert Schuyler had been arrested in a hotel dining room and taken to jail with his woman companion because a woman of the police force had caught the glint of his silver flask as he "spiked" two glasses of mineral water.

This put a new terror into daily existence and Norry took out his own hip flagon and petted it anxiously. Everybody knew that flasks were illegal, but nobody expected such rich people to be arrested. Jails were for the poor and dirty.

Clarice Squair, however, had a lighter note to contribute to the gloom:

"There's good in everything," she said. "It looks as if prohibition would cut down divorce more than all the sermons ever preached. Jane Pearsall told me that she and her husband had agreed for the first time in their lives. It was about their divorce, and they had everything beautifully arranged, when up came the question of the division of the hootch. That beast of a husband of hers didn't want to give her any. He said that nice women did not drink. She said that that was a lie in the first place, but, anyway, a grass widow had to have something to save her callers from dying of thirst. She claimed a dowry right to one third of the cellar and swears she won't be turned out into the night without a drop of nose paint for a dry day, and he can buy it better than she can. Then they fought over how much cash her share of the liquor should represent as liquidated alimony—or alcoholimony. Jane is a bit close

herself, you know, and she only offered him the price he paid for it. Of course it costs from three to ten times as much now, and he went up in the air over that.

"Then there's the question of moving. Whichever one keeps the house, the other has to move part of the liquor, and that is not only illegal, but, worse, dreadfully dangerous. He is afraid to stir and so is she. So I shouldn't be surprised if they finally settled down and resigned themselves to a ripe old age together, and that means one less scandal for the newspapers. So cheer up, dad."

But her father groaned:

"Prohibition may have dealt a blow to divorce, but it has added a new terror to death. My old friend Sturtevant figured up his expectancy of life and his capacity for liquor and laid up a hundred thousand dollars' worth of the stuff. Then he jumped out of the way of one automobile into the way of another. Well, his widow has just married a much younger man that old Sturtevant was always jealous of, and the young hootch hound is now drowning himself in the old man's wine."

Then they all drank with pious ceremony, though none of them wasted a drop on libations.

Mrs. Frewin had told the Squairs all about Larrick's unparalleled heroism and he was panic-stricken when Catherine toasted him with swimming eyes across the beaded brim of her champagne shell, "Here's to you, my cowboy hero."

That "my" sounded dangerous.

Catherine was a spinster and a large one. It seemed strange, somehow, to Larrick to find that there could be very rich old maids. Catherine was apparently not one from choice, but from character.

She was always wooing the men and putting their hearts to flight. She went for Larrick at once. She deluged him with rhapsodies on the glory of the Western life. She denounced the evils of wealth and luxury with the fervor usually restricted to those who have never enjoyed them.

She had been on ranches, had broken a wild broncho or two, and had taken part in a rodeo. After dinner she

hunted up a late copy of the *Spur* and showed Larrick a photograph of herself setting a horse to a high gate in a jumping contest. She was dressed in a shirt and breeches and she was waving a big felt hat in a wild abandonment to the joys of aviation on a hippoplane.

She sighed to relate that all her snapshots of herself on a Montana ranch roughing it with the cowboys had been consumed in the fire. She would sooner have lost her eye teeth, she said, and she declared that she was going to marry the first rancher that she could ride out of the herd.

The timid Larrick would probably have felt it incumbent to offer himself at once with fatal chivalry if he had not been thinking of something else. It was not till he got to his room long after that he realized with abrupt cold sweat that he had absent-mindedly allowed a lady to offer him her hand and had not even answered with an evasion.

He had been thinking with surprise of the adaptability of the rich. He had always supposed that wealth rendered them soft and lazy and helpless. Yet all the rich he had met were athletic, full of zest, and ready for any hardship or any change of condition.

The poor and the roughly bred were awkward and lost when confronted with a change of environment. Among luxurious surroundings they were scared and crude and inelastic. But the wealthy took to harsh conditions with joy when they chose it, and with philosophy when it was forced on them.

Larrick's first well-served meals even in a dining car had filled him with terror of the cutlery and the menu and the other passengers. But a Roosevelt could eat from gold plate with a king and have a good time and then go out and have a better time wrestling the grub at a wagon end on a round-up.

The women, too, could suit their mood to the occasion, and make a joke of a fire, a financial wreck, or a cataclysm. In a social wreck, too, they could usually carry themselves with a high head, and where a poor girl caught in a scandal would slink away to disgrace in the dark, a rich girl would face the world with unflinching pride.

He thought of Nancy Fleet and her fearlessness of nearly everything. She was not even afraid of beauty. He began to be lonely for her, and to think of making a dash into Newport. The thought of riding into that famous citadel of high life filled him with a craven fear that confirmed his poor opinion of the poor and humble.

He was really lonely, not so much for Nancy as for a woman who would keep his emotions busy. And she was hurrying toward him unbeknownst to either of them.

Clelia would exercise his emotions—all of them, including emotions that he had not known he had in him.

CHAPTER IV

FOR a few days Larrick reveled in the more innocent, the pastoral phases of wealthy existence. He was awakened by the hoarse voices of peacocks for whom Nature thought she had done enough at the farther end.

He threw on a bathing suit and a bathrobe and ran through a cloister to a little temple opening on a swimming pool. This was as unlike as possible to any water he had ever known. He had crept down the muddy banks and swum in the brown soup of the Rio Grande, and he had considered almost any patch of moisture beautiful.

But here was a pellucid fluid in which every goldfish hung like a breathing ruby and the concrete floor was clear at the greatest depth. He plunged in and swam about with the hilarity of a merman.

And sometimes there were mermaids. The Squair girls were apt to take their morning tubs there *al fresco* and with little more clothing than in their own bathrooms. And, as Norry said to Larrick with early-morning crudity, "Those girls are Squair in name only."

Their costumes were so minimized that when they first scampered from the house and paused on the brink like Diana's nymphs seeing Actæon, Larrick turned his face away till they should be in the water. The nymphs did not seem to mind; it was Actæon that turned pale, though no horns formed on his head. The water was like a magnifying glass, and when they were in they were not sheltered from his helpless eyes.

Catherine made herself quite at home with him, shot water into his eyes with ungrateful comedy, and insisted on diving from his shoulders. She was almost more than he could bear. He was confused to imbecility as she scrambled ruthlessly about him and pressed his blushing head into the

water with her sole. Her hilarity distressed him; it was somehow the more unamusing in effect for being so earnestly intended for amusement.

Catherine was one of those who are doomed to have their witticisms serve as wet blankets. An evil fairy curses their mirth and glee with a funereal influence, but their good fairy makes them incapable of seeing how saddening they are.

Larrick's generous soul was doubly harrowed by the paralysis of his risibles and of his chivalry. He simply could not accept Catherine's awkward challenges to flirtation.

It would have been easy enough to philander with Clarice, who was appallingly tempting in the dazzling candor of her glowing flesh. When she climbed the cornice of the bathhouse and split the blue water with a javelin slash, then rolled slowly and as if sleepily to the surface in the smother of the froth she had made, she might have been Aphrodite the foam-born. Her bathing suit was hardly more than a colored varnish about her torso, and even Larrick felt the need of sculpture to record the superb contours of her one cheek, one shoulder, one breast, one hip and thigh as they detached themselves in high relief from the plane of the water.

But Clarice would not play at love. She was true to her far-off aviator in thoughts, and she made one envy him the possession of the living statue she was—"and didn't care who knew it," as Larrick mumbled to Norry.

The old standards of sex relation were undergoing a fearful test of their tensile strength. Men could not forget the ancient heritage of the ideals of decency in a season or two. Women were coming very close to the old Japanese custom of bathing nude with the men. Men had bathed, naked, together from time immemorial, and if the custom established itself it might be that before long women would join them in the same state. As it was, almost nothing at all was left to the imagination.

The nicest women seemed to carry off the new clotheslessness calmly, though no man could know their real feelings. But it was a strain on the men.

The father of the Squairs came to the pool once or twice

in his globular bathing suit. He suffered as much from the sight of his shameless children as a fat hen having hysterics over a brood of ducklings. He raged at the breakfast table afterward, but his daughters only laughed. And one morning Clarice goaded him into special fury. She said:

"I suppose you prefer the English custom of separate bathing, from bathing wagons?"

"I do, indeed!" old Squair sputtered. "People are conservative over there and nice women wear stockings and real clothes; they go into their wagons and come out of them into the water and keep the men at a distance."

Having lured him to her trap, Clarice snapped it:

"It's easy to see that you haven't been over for some time, daddy, my love. I've just had a love letter from Towny Bayliss. He doesn't know I'm engaged, and I think he's trying to make me jealous. This is what he says of your grand old British conservatism. He's visiting Lady What-you-may-call-'em at her castle. See, there's the name of the castle embossed on the letter paper. I'll skip the sugary beginning, and come down to the study of social customs.

"The system of swimming caused some wonderment on my part, I can tell you. Lady Anne sent Miss Stuart and me off to the beach the first afternoon for a swim. We each carried a suit along. On arriving at the aforementioned beach, Miss Stuart casually informed me that we would each select a rock behind which to undress—'not the same rock,' she naively added.

"After looking carefully in all directions, I discovered that the largest rock was not much bigger than a teacup. 'Ah,' thought I, 'she will have her little joke,' but whilst I was reflecting on the situation in general and mine own in particular the young lady drew somewhat apart and began in all maidenly modesty to remove her garments.

"Not knowing what was expected of me, I only stood and admired *and* admired *and* admired. As I said, this young person took off her clothes with an *élan* and an entire lack of self-consciousness which in my long and varied career I have scarcely seen equaled.

"After she donned a costume and ran down to the sand I recovered from my astonishment—and did likewise. Oh, these English!!! they do the most unexpected things!

"Every afternoon since, we have gone bathing together and exactly the same ceremony takes place in the same inexplicable manner. I shall be here perhaps a month. I manage to do a great deal of reading every day, besides the golf, tennis, and swimming. I miss you terribly . . .

"And so on."

Clarice looked up at her father. He was snow-white with horror.

The elder Frewin was amused. He had no daughters to raise and be afraid for, and of. He roared with laughter at Squair's mute terror of such a world. Then he referred to his paper:

"It's got to be one extreme or another, I guess. Here's what the senatorial wit of Georgia, Mr. Glenn, proposes. It seems that State-Senator Wilkinson of Georgia put forward a bill prohibiting males and females from bathing together at any public or private pool, pond, lake, river, or ocean, and fixing the limits of the bathing suits. State-Senator Glenn proposes a substitute that ought to satisfy you, old man. Listen."

He read from his paper:

"The Glenn substitute attempts to make effective the segregation of the sexes contemplated in the Wilkinson bill by requiring that men shall bathe in the Pacific Ocean, women in the Atlantic, and children in the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico.

"Senator Wilkinson would merely require all bathers, both men and women, to be covered from armpit to knee. Senator Glenn is shocked at the amount of epidermis this would leave uncovered and his substitute requires a fringe of lace to be attached to both top and bottom of all bathing suits. Furthermore, beach loungers or sand lizards must wear aprons covering them to the toes.

"But gather round and harken to the regulations of tub bathing. Briefly they are:

"1. Tub baths at any time except on Saturday nights are declared unlawful, except for newly born infants.

"2. Baths must be taken in a cave, cavern, tunnel, or deeply darkened room; bathers must always be partially clothed, and

any person who exposes himself or herself entirely in the nude to his or her own gaze shall be considered guilty of a misdemeanor.

"3. No person may take more than one bath on a given Saturday night except by purchase of a proxy . . .

"Senator Glenn announces officially in his substitute that he will have fifty-one proxies for sale the first year that the act shall be in effect."

This seemed to be the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of the efforts to enforce modesty, but Father Squair could not see any humor in it. He was not quite up to the standard of the early Christian fathers who accounted all bathing as pagan lust of the flesh or of the Christian mothers who made their children wear clothes in their tubs, but he was far from the 1920 liberality.

Indeed, the world-old struggle to embattle virtue in clothes and other fortresses is tragic enough for everybody concerned; for the parents who long to keep clean hearts in young bosoms and for the young who are proud of their bosoms. If experience had ever indicated a successful program the rest would be easy, but morals have never been fouler than where clothes have been most numerous and they have never been cleaner than where clothes were absent.

Yet it cannot be easy for parents to realize this. Squair *père* was still glum when the family left the table. Norry Frewin tried to help him over the rough place. He went to the long table and picked up a book, thumbing its pages till he found his place.

"They arrested a magazine editor last year for reproducing a painting of a nude figure, but the missionary books are packed with them—and the travel books, too. I was reading Stewart Edward White's *The Rediscovered Country* yesterday and he tells about coming to the Kavirondo country and meeting a young black flapper. He says somewhere—here it is—

"She had a string of beads about her neck, armllets, a leather string about her waist, and three mosquitoes. However, that did not seem to bother her. One would naturally imagine that a totally naked people would be far down in the human scale and

would exhibit the lowest type of savagery. This is not the case. . . . Those who know these people well tell me that they are the most chaste of all the tribes."

Still the father of the Squairs was neither convinced nor consoled. The very discussion of the subject was unendurable, and he left the room with a gesture of despair.

Larrick rather sympathized with him. But his days were not much occupied with discussing the inveterate topic of young women's morals. He saw little of the Squire girls except in the morning (when he saw almost all) and at meals.

He wandered about the cattle yards, learning of cows and bulls as individuals of aristocracy and fame. He had thought of cattle in the herds, valuable according to weight and number, and individual only when he met a particularly fractious or elusive member of the drove. Now he found that some of them had their portraits published about the world and were auctioned at prices Circassian beauties had never brought.

He studied the horses and learned gradually to ride a trotter with pleasure and good form. One of the grooms began to teach him to ride a hunter and to jump him by steadily increasing the height of the bar and shrieking to him at the take-off, "Keep your own 'ead, sir, and leave the mare 'ers." But once over, he must throw himself back and be ready to pull up in case of a stumble.

The trouble was that when he had learned to sail with one horse, the next had a method of his own. One rushed the panel, one topped it, one took it in the stride like a hurdler.

But in time the man from the barbed-wire country was able to negotiate the stone walls and flat fences of Westchester with a fair precision. He fell often, but his bones did not break.

Then there were the dogs, of all sorts, the famous Frewin Airedales, in their palatial kennels, the big and little, shaggy, wiry, and silken-coated, infinitely various members of the canine family, each with his or her own soul and pride and code of honor and anger.

Leaving the stables and the kennels, Larrick would stumble about the plowed fields, marveling at the richness

of the loam in comparison with the sterile sand, though it was poor against the waxy ooze of the more favored Texas soil.

He would lose himself in a forest of old, old trees, aspiring and aloof from the dense younger generations. He listened to strange birds, alert and ecstatic on the thronged branches. He followed butterflies and considered strange beetles. He stood for long while harkening the mystic chortle of brooks, delving and deliberating in their unhurried loiter along their winding trails.

He drifted through the formal and the informal gardens, dazed by the symphonic scents, the color festivals, the multitudinous fascinations of petal and leaf and stem.

The ambition of this magnate Frewin seemed to be to regain within his walls an Eden of safety and delight where he and his Eve and every bird and beast and flower and tree might be at ease, well nurtured and admired, cajoled, but not coerced.

The human beings hereabouts seemed to be as happy as anyone had a right to expect to be. He often happened upon old Frewin and his wife standing with their arms about each other's broad waist to revel over a plant or a tree and debate its welfare as if it were a child. He had not been warned that rich couples could be lovers as well as poor.

He caught the old butler fretting because an old poodle had lost her appetite. He saw the maids selecting roses for the table and the rooms and reveling in the sunshine. The gardeners and the stablemen and the plowmen and the cattle tenders were all serenely busy, proud of their high achievements.

He wondered why everybody was not perfectly content, and sighed as he wondered. And heard as an echo Norry Frewin breathing deeply of impatience. Their very youth that was their chief riches was aching to be spent.

Sara Teasdale's lines expressed their surprise at their own restlessness and its cause:

Oh, beauty, are you not enough?
Why must I go crying after love?

CHAPTER V

ONE evening when dinner was again brought forward from eight to six-thirty Mrs. Frewin said:

"To-night, you remember, we go over to the Shakespeare fête at the Lowries'."

Norry Frewin protested, but his mother insisted:

"It's for charity, and everybody within ten miles has worked hard; it's little enough to ask you to make an audience. Besides, you'll enjoy it. It's the same beautiful playlet of Jim Metcalfe's that was given two years ago, but with a different cast this time. You had the same excuse then and stayed away, but you've got to go to-night, and that's final!"

Norry groaned to Larrick:

"We're in for it! These amateur affairs are ghastly, but She Who Must Be Obeyed has spoken."

And so at eight a limousine-load set out from the house. The passengers were garrulous, and Catherine, who was squeezed in close to Larrick, was apparently willing to be flirted with in the flying dark, but he was afraid she would take any caress as a betrothal promise, and pretended to be obtuse.

Besides, the poetry of the retreating scene bound him in a spell. The car seemed to stand fast, rocking like an anchored ship, while the panorama ran backward in review—woods with their primitive air upon them still as when the Indians soft-footedly threaded them, miles of stone walls, the horizontal monuments of how many backaches for pioneers who heaped up all these rocks and found their fields as flinty as ever; hills and smooth pastures, abandoned spooky farmhouses with their frames rotted to lace; sudden palaces with formal approaches and stately gateways; then wilderness again. And all the foliage and every trunk of every

tree had in the glare the thinness and flatness of stage scenery.

At length they shot up a long slope to the ivy-smothered Lowrie castle. Scores of cars preceded and followed them, and village policeman stood out in the glare of lights, ordering the traffic. The Frewins drew up to the radiant entrance and climbed out. At the door they were met by money changers and ticket takers.

It seemed strange to pay admission to such a residence, but in the name of charity anybody with five dollars was a welcome guest. The rich and the poor had endured for years such unheard-of drains upon their generosity that worn-out Charity slept unless she were promised amusement. If vanity and jealousy had some little share in the appeals, it was all for a worthy end, and they might have been more busy at less helpful activities.

As Larrick entered he gaped at the grandeur of the Lowrie great doors and vestibule and the vistas they deployed. It was ostentatious, ornate, and horribly expensive, but this did not displease Larrick's taste. He was far from being so sated with splendor as to have come round to a yearning only for simplicity, subtlety, restraint, severity, and other more or less dyspeptic ideals. If foreign masters of flattery had managed to make Mr. and Mrs. Lowrie's portraits look like the ancestors they ought to have had and had not, all the better. The more humbly they had made their money, the more loftily they should spend it.

The moment Larrick emerged into the gardens at the back, however, he felt that boastfulness had ended and submission to beauty was complete. Poetry was everywhere. Nature had been invited to make herself at home, tempted with luxuries and urged to put on her best bib and tucker, indeed, but she was all the more mistress of all she surveyed.

The gardens at the side were, perhaps, a little too imperial for a private home; they were sunken in descending marble terraces, and their columnar majesty would have sufficed for an assembly of temples. But they were beautiful, and there was ravishment in the broken lights and mellow shadows upon the shafts, the intricate capitals, and the fine,

keen lines of the architraves. There was a music, too, of cascades tumbling from basin to basin, and a wizardry of electric lamps flowering in unexpected places like some new and angelic rose that breathed radiance instead of fragrance.

The lawn at the back of the house was the triumph of all, for it was just a plain of grass outspread to a brink where the hill went swiftly down into the valley. Dimly seen across the valley were other rounded hills, and long ridges suavely modeled in the best traditions of the Westchester school of landscape.

The lawn was broken only by a small marble pool in the center of it. On its farther flank a high forest rose in a precipice of shadow against the dull sky.

The players had hoped that the moon would assist at this celebration of that Shakespeare who had always spoken so well of her.

But clouds cut her off and gave just enough threat of rain to add a dramatic suspense both to the fate of the ceremonial and to the fate of the costume of every woman who dreaded a gout of water in her finery.

The audience was seated on chairs and rented campstools ranged along the rear balconies and the walks. A misted light sifting through the lace at the curtained windows gave enough illumination to enable people to find their places and recognize their neighbors.

The crowd was more numerous than the chairs; and late comers, or young people whose duty it was to surrender their places to the older, spread overcoats and mantles on the grass and reclined or sprawled.

Larrick stared at a few of these in wonder. They were so young, yet so forward. The twilight encouraged them to informalities and some of the girls sneaked puffs at their escort's cigarettes and some of them smoked quite frankly. Their language and their advanced flirtatiousness startled Larrick—and others of the spectators.

Young people have always behaved and misbehaved and made their own experiments in fire with about the same precocity, but many people were watching them with a new terror, since certain stories and a very exciting novel, by a

very brilliant, very young man, Master F. Scott Fitzgerald, had just stirred the country, vividly producing the ardent thoughts, deeds, and language of boys and girls at an earlier age than had hitherto been allowed to burn so hot in American fiction.

Nothing is more startling (perhaps because few things are rarer) than to find a work of fiction making use of facts that are familiar to everybody. Things that people regard in the flesh without especial horror hurt their reading eyes amazingly.

That very wise editor and philosopher E. W. Howe has said something along this line:

A man writes, "A doctor dare not tell the truth about families." But we know the truth about families; also about doctors. The assumption that a great many things are hidden from us isn't true. Many disreputable things go on, but we know about them. And there are many good deeds to offset the bad ones, and we know about them. We know, also, that the average is very fair.

The things that authors are forbidden to write and arrested for writing are familiar experiences and universal facts about one or two emotions that practically everybody goes through in one way or another. That is why Havelock Ellis's most important books could not be published in his native England at all and were published here under stringent restrictions.

So now it seemed appalling to find it recorded in the precocious pages of Mr. Fitzgerald that boys of prep-school age and girls in their wee sma' teens had discovered what kisses taste like, had learned to hug one another in odd nooks, and were already having love affairs with all the attendant pomp and circumstance of jealousy, perfidy, desperation, indiscretion, and worse. None were so shocked as their mothers and grandmothers who were having trouble with their own young. Many of the parents had already been married and had had these very children by the time they reached the age they wanted to consider innocent in 1921.

People forgot that Juliet, who certainly knew a thing or

two about amorous passion, was only thirteen when her mother told her it was time to marry, and told her, "Younger than thou here in Verona, ladies of esteem, are already mothers."

It is still within the law in five of our Southern states for a girl to wed with her parents' consent at the age of twelve; in one state a girl of twelve may marry without parental consent. And in two Northern and two Southern states a boy may marry if he secures parental approval at fourteen; in twelve states there is no age limit specified at all.

In 1920 a sixteen-year-old wife applied for divorce after having been married for three years. Havelock Ellis tells of a girl who was a mother at the age of eight. Yet in New York a man was tried for kidnapping because he married a sixteen-year-old girl.

We are frightened when the young begin the preliminaries of the mating season and reveal the passions we would delay until their twenties. Most of us lay the blame for these morning serenades on the moving pictures or the modern dances or the modern fiction. Always that word "modern" has been used as the synonym for "improper." As if there had ever been a time when the old were denied the bliss of horror at "modern" wickednesses or when children failed to be disrespectful.

Back in the prim days of 1675 in the Puritan citadel of the Plymouth colony the General Court of Massachusetts proclaimed that the bloody war with the Indian King Philip was God's judgment on the sins of those very modern times, and specified as causes of the war, "excess in apparel, naked breasts and arms, profane cursing and swearing, tipping, want of respect for parents, and the riding from town to town of unmarried men and women under pretense of attending lectures—a sinful custom tending to lewdness."

Change "lectures" to "dances" or "movies," add cigarettes (women smoked only pipes then), and interpolate automobiles, and the words would serve for any one of ten thousand recent sermons and satires on the unprecedented wickedness of 1921.

And when we marvel at the freedoms and familiarities of

the courtship customs of this horrifying generation let us not forget the grand old American device of "bundling." The more modest homes were bitter cold in those steamless days and the old folk went to bed early to sleep. The youngsters, to whom courtship was a vitally important industry, could not sit up and freeze, so the nice young girls and their nice young callers crept into bed also. Of course they were fully clothed and in their right minds, seeing that the right mind for youth is toward love. But there and thus the courtship proceeded according to the individual and combined inclination. Compared to this, as Adelaide says, the fox-trot is rather formal.

Nature seems determined to keep many emotions alive, and two of them that will not die are the thrill of shocking and the thrill of being shocked. They are as old and as perennially new as love itself. The same spirit that bewailed "not only incontinencie betweene persons unmarried, but some married persons allso" in Puritanical 1642 is still as fresh and as freshly astonished, lo these two hundred and seventy-nine years since. The devil has many aliases, but he is the same old boy.

It was inevitable then that Larrick should be smitten with wonder at the prematurity of the lads and lasses who flirted surreptitiously before him, and that he discredited it somewhat to the laxity of wealth, as if Cupid were any respecter of classes and as if the poor and the remote were denied the sweet, sharp practices of love, wickedness, and temptation.

Larrick had time enough for much unprofitable debate until the performance began. Then the murk of the dull sky was withdrawn before a sudden moonlight that flooded the lawn.

On the roof, automobile lamps filtered through a blue screen supplied what the weather refused. The artificial moon lurched a trifle at first, then settled down for a steady glimmer of dreamy azure. A searchlight began to run across the forest, with a suggestion of actual search. Music from somewhere made the air murmurous, like an audible moonlight.

And now the searchlight found what it hunted. Abruptly on the stone wall, as if by a magic, stood a slim youth in an old-time costume, leaped from the past, in slashed and tasseled doublet, trunks, and hose, and a cap adorned with one high feather and long silken ears. It was Will Shakespeare's Puck.

Larrick heard Norry Frewin gasp:

"Good Lord!"

Then Larrick winced as Norry gripped his arm and whispered:

"That's Clelia! That's the Miss Blakeney I've told you about. If I'd known she was to be in this I'd never have come."

Larrick recalled the brief moment of Clelia's flight past him in the dark corridor of Norry's apartment house. Now she was before him in a mystic illumination. The boyish costume made her more girlish than ever; but she was very young still, her frame hardly more than the scant armature on which the full sculpture of her womanhood was to be built.

For a long moment she stood statuesque as one of the ephedoi of Praxiteles, lithe and motionless as his Lizard-Slayer. Then the statue spoke, still motionless, except for her lips.

Clelia's voice was high and young and a trifle piping in its treble as she recited the evocation which was to bring out of the dark the well-remembered people of Shakespeare.

There was a pleasant anachronism in the poem that Shakespeare would have practiced himself—he who so loved his own town and time that he could not even write of Julius Cæsar's Rome without fetching in quips that only London could understand.

"While now the foxy lawyer dreams of fees,
The Wall Street man of low finance,
And revelers eat and drink at ease,
While others to queer rag-time dance;
Now half-waked mothers still their crying babes,
And fathers snore in selfish sleep,
While countless Ikes and Sols and Abes
Are riding home in taxis cheap;

While coppers steal a doorway nap,
 And milk carts just begin to clatter,
 When yowling cats have ceased to scrap,
 And all the town is free from chatter,
 We fairy folk, and others in our train,
 Are gathered here in precincts still,
 All children of that mighty brain
 That lived and died with Stratford's Will."

After the first few lines Puck dropped from the wall to the ground and came forward chanting and dancing, weaving an intricate and willful path across the lawn, bending and whirling her arms and hands and her body and her pretty legs in a rhapsody of grace.

Up to the pool's rim she came, and the pool repeated her inverted image like a doll cut out of a folded paper and brought to life.

Larrick was bewitched by her and always remembered her as having something unhuman about her in her most human moods, as if she could not have been born of woman and compelled to grow. As Minerva was struck full armed and wise from one of Jupiter's headaches, so Clelia seemed to have stepped into the moonlight from the painless travail of some poet's heartache.

She was not finished. She was not very wise. She was not full armed or full bosomed, but she was ferociously alive.

(And as she came into the world in her slim crescent moonhood, so she went out of it, never knowing marriage or motherhood or age, missing all the more terrible raptures, but missing also the grisly woes. She sipped only the bouquet and the bubbles at the rim of the chalice, and never tasted the body of the wine of life, nor gagged at the dregs. There was pity and there was repentance, too, in the thought.)

The memory of his first sight of Clelia struck through Larrick's sleep like a lightning thrust.

He woke with a startle of fright from the dreamful sleep or the lethargy of reverie that had absorbed him. He leaped from his chair and leaned against the window, panting hard as he stared at the big block of ice outside that imprisoned the



SURELY THE DEAD GIRL HAD COME TO LIFE! SURELY SHE WAS
STRUGGLING AGAINST HER CRYSTAL COFFIN



form of Clelia. It fitted her as closely as diaphanous silk; yet it was as firm as steel.

Surely the dead girl had come to life! Surely she was struggling against her crystal coffin, writhing to throw off the smothering cerement as if it were a suffocating nightmare!

Larrick hung on the window frame, breathing in great gulps like an overdriven fugitive. He could not move to open the door and run out to help her, though he felt the same frenzy to seize an ax and beat away the ice that Michelangelo used to feel when he saw in a shapeless bulk of marble some heroic figure and assaulted the stone to release and reveal the vision it encumbered.

The very thought of Clelia alive again after the agony of her loss was a frightful bliss, a staggering ecstasy. Such a miracle of resurrection made him faint. An angel must be at work out there and he dreaded to interfere, lest it take flight.

For a few vague long moments he clung to the casement, watching for the completion of the marvel and reveling in the thought of the girl's restoration to the world she had blessed.

Then the cruelty of realism that annuls so much of fancy's poetry brought him down to fact again. He gathered his courage together and, opening the door as quietly as he could, went out on the porch. The cold of the night flung round him a mantle of chill. Shuddering, he went to the pillar of ice and stared into it and saw that Clelia did not move. That maddening, breathless, pulseless fixity still prevailed.

His eyes went up in a throe of deluded hope and beheld ragged clouds, driven by a high wind in the upper regions, racing across the moon. The moon seemed to be running swiftly and whitely through them in a panic. The air close to the earth was still frozen and freezing. But the cloud rush aloft caused a quivering shuttle from light to dark and half dark that played upon the ice and gave it the illusion of motion.

The miracle was denied. Death was still absolute and relentless. Larrick bowed his head and, dropping down to his knees, wept, sobbing into the crook of his arm and yielding to the weakness he had resisted as a cowardice.

He had seen Nancy Fleet weep over Clelia, and had watched Mrs. Roantree in the despair of age, and the maid, Berthe, in

the passionate resentment of youth, but he had not wept, though he had envied them their clamor.

He had withstood the rack of sorrow, but the gush of joy, the false smile of hope, had tricked him and broken him. He cried as he had never cried in his earliest boyhood. He took pains to muffle his woe in his arms and no one heard him. If he could have been glad of anything he would have been glad of that.

The aftermath of his tears was an exhaustion of spiritual and bodily strength. He could hardly lift himself to his feet. He wanted to be dead, but he felt that he owed it to Clelia to avenge her; and he heaved himself up and stumbled to the door.

He paused for a backward glance at Clelia. The flutter of light so renewed the hallucination of life that, knowing it a cheat, he could hardly disbelieve.

The beauty of the might-be overcame him again and he whimpered as he closed the door like a coffin lid and tottered to the fireplace. When he knelt to stir up the dulling embers he was hardly strong enough to raise a log and lay it on the coals.

Then he crouched in the attitude that prairie wanderers find natural, his feet atiptoe and his haunches on his heels. And he stared into the wakening flames, seeing the past pass by again in crimson pictures. After a time he dragged his weary feet back to his chair by the window and went on with his reverie.

CHAPTER VI

IT was a strange way for a girl to appear first to a man—in such garb, with such a lyric, in so unreal a light. Larrick was moonstruck with her. Fate took an unfair advantage of him. Realist as he was, he had a feeling that could only be expressed with an Irishism, "It was the fairies was in it."

If Norry Frewin had not said several times that Clelia would have nothing to do with him, if he had not just now said that he would not have come if he had known that Clelia was to be there, Larrick might have looked upon Clelia as another man's claim, to be coveted inevitably, but not to be expected or sought after.

As it was, she came to him in utter detachment from such commonplace conditions as being engaged to some fellow or having a lover's spat with him. She came to him for him, made for him out of mist and shadow and grace and delight.

He worshiped and accepted her as a Greek shepherd might have accepted a dryad that leaned out of a tree to him, or a nymph that smiled up from a brook, and wooed him with strange speech and beckoning arms.

He forgot Frewin's pre-emption of her and Nancy Fleet's pre-emption of him. He sat starting and clutching at his chair to keep from dashing forward to seize her and carry her away as his very own.

When her prologue was finished she ran to the woods and called forth other beings from another world, and across the wall swarmed a covey of a dozen or more young girls, dressed as young Grecian maidens in more or less light chiffon that left their arms and legs quite bare.

And this little platoon, ranging from six to sixteen in years, came bounding, leaping, and romping forward in a dance of

lifted arms and flying knees and bare feet and flaunting draperies.

They charged to the rhomboid of the pool and were echoed upside down as they flung themselves into the air with an awkwardness prettier than a better schooled grace.

Soon they capered away to the wall again, and then the people of Shakespeare came up over the brow of the hill from nowhere, each with a couplet of verse, describing his soul or hers, and leaving the spectators to guess the name. It was a tribute indeed to a small-town writer dead these three centuries to have so many of his creatures so promptly recognized by a people who had carried the worship of him overseas.

The Melancholy Dane stalked in first; then Romeo and Juliet in fatal embrace; the tomboy Beatrice; the green-eyed Moor; the Shrew; Mark Antony; the hunchbacked Gloster; the fool, the motley fool; Rosalind in long hose; the Jew of Venice; the cross-gartered Puritan, and others, including a band of crowned ghosts and a mob of lesser personages.

They aligned themselves along the wall above the sunken gardens.

Then Puck came forward again, and the avaricious Larrick discovered her with eye and ear as she gave warning of the dawn:

“Now sounds the early note
 Of the bird who wakes the other birds;
 Its echo sounds from trees remote,
 While growing blue th’ horizon girds . . .
 And generations yet unborn shall see
 Us playing still to nations yet unmade . . .
 So glide we now on our eternal way. . . .”

There was a final roundelay in chorus, with Puck dancing among the throng as it melted away below the hill. Then Puck vaulted to the wall and, with a farewell gesture, leaped back into the gloom.

Larrick felt nothing ominous in this brief passage across his life of this bright transient in a too beautiful world. He was too glad to have seen her. He was splitting open

with questions to ask about her and demands to meet her, but Norry was grumbling, the audience was breaking up into groups chattering about the excellence of the performance. He dared not confess his infatuation.

Nearly everybody there had a son, daughter, brother, or sister or cousin among the players, and congratulations were swapped wholesale.

Norry Frewin told Larrick that he was going home before he ran into Clelia. He told his mother that he had a headache and she excused him reluctantly, but she insisted on keeping Larrick with her. She mumbled to him:

"I want you to meet everybody. They're such nice people, some of them, and you might find the very girl you want. If you do and I like her, I'll get her for you."

Larrick wanted to cry: "I've found her. Go get her!" but he was afraid even to ask a question about Clelia. Mrs. Frewin presented him to numberless girls, and many of the characters in the play came into the house in their costumes. But whatever Larrick might have thought of any of them under other auspices, now he saw them all darkly as through the glass of Clelia's enchantment.

Mrs. Frewin confused him by telling one or two of the women what a hero he had been, but Larrick begged her to keep silent. This story was becoming as tiresome to him as a serious composer's one popular song. He sickened of it as Schumann did of "The Two Grenadiers" and as Grant did of "Lo, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

Eventually he heard just back of him and a little beneath his head a voice that sent a thrill along his spine. It said only, "Hello, Mrs. Frewin!" but it sounded like some greeting that only Shakespeare could have worded from plain humanity into exquisite poetry.

Mrs. Frewin turned to say:

"Why, hello, Clelia! You were wonderful! Really quite wonderful! Wasn't she, Mr. Larrick? Oh, haven't you met? You must! Clelia—Miss Blakeney—or Mr. Puck Blakeney—this is Mr. Larrick."

Larrick put out his hand, but she did not see it. She gave a careless nod and said:

"How d'do?"

She was not quite his Clelia now. She had doffed her Puck costume and put on the costume of the Juliets of 1921—something that left her throat and shoulders and arms fully exposed in a sketchy and timid modeling that promised ever so much; the rest was silk or taffeta or some exquisite and crinkly material that clung about her affectionately and admiringly, almost boastful of the grace that it advertised with all the artful devices of concealment.

Clelia had lost something of the poetry of the far away, but she had gained the potency of real flesh and blood and immediate proximity.

Mrs. Frewin said:

"Be nice to Mr. Larrick. He saved Norry's life in Texas. Get him to tell you all about it. I must go tell dear Mr. Metcalfe how perfectly splendid his little play was."

She was gone and Larrick felt alone, alone, all, all alone, alone on a wide, wide sea, with a siren who hung across the edge of his boat. The crowds that knocked them about were mere waves blundering past.

Larrick was tongue-tied with a rush of Shakespearian emotions and no Shakespearian vocabulary. Clelia spoke first, and with as Puckish impudence.

"I'm not especially obliged to you for saving Norry's worthless life, but how did you come to do it?"

"Oh, he was down in Texas and he got in a little scrape, and—"

"He would—always did—always will. What was this particular lady's name—Juanita, or something?"

"No, this wasn't a lady. It wasn't a gentleman, either—just a drunken, shootin' fool, and that made three of us, and the rest was easy."

"Oh, that makes it all perfectly clear. I can just see it!"

Larrick loved to be ridiculed by her, somehow, and, though he writhed, it was a tickled torment. His unspeakable comfort in her presence was ended abruptly by some tall, handsome, hatefully handsome fellow who pushed by and said:

"Come along, Clele; this is our dance."

"But I thought—"

"No, you didn't. You were simply glorious to-night. I was crazier about you than ever."

He was dragging her through the crowd and his words trailed after them as they vanished. Larrick followed to the door of the ballroom, where dancing was already brisk. A handsome girl offered him the privilege of the floor for a dollar, and when he gave her a wadded five she thanked him and fastened in his buttonhole a circular card appropriately resembling a ticket of admission to a paddock.

He watched the dancing current with harpooning eyes, stabbing after Clelia as she bobbed in and out of sight in the swirl. He wanted to leap in and tear her from the arms of the masterful stranger who kidnapped her. But though he saw many other men cutting in, he did not feel enough at home for any such adventure. Other men took Clelia away from her first abductor, and from one another, and she went like a slave from this bosom to that without protest. Finally her first captor regained her and kept her till the jazz was over, the encores were exhausted, and the dancers dispersed.

Larrick wondered how to get her back and wished that he had brought North with him a little of that careless deviltry with the women and dare-deviltry with the men that had carried him so high at Texas dances. But he could not be brave here.

Suddenly he felt a hand on his arm and, as if his unspoken prayers had been overheard by a special guardian angel, a kind of valet angel, he found Clelia looking up at him and saying:

"You're such a life saver you must have a cigarette?"

"I cert'ny have," he said, diving his hands into his pockets.

"Come on out in the dark, then, and tell me the story of your young life."

He felt that such impudence should be met with kindred audacities, but he could not even think of an audacity to reject. He hobbled at her heels while she found chairs, placed hers to suit her, shoved his chair around, sat down, and put her feet up on the stone coping with a flare of long,

slim stockings that Larrick dared not quite observe, but could not keep his mind from.

She put out her little hand and said, "Gimme!"

He proffered his cigarette case and was glad that he had spent so much money on it that she paused to say:

"Umm! Pretty snappy, that!"

She took a cigarette and put out her hand again for the match he held aflame. As she puffed, the blaze waxed and faded, throwing now into relief and now into shadow the rounded lowered eyelids, the tiny Ionic curves of her nostrils, the kiss-inviting fruitiness of her pursed lips, the sworl of her chin, the pitifully pretty throat, her dimpled shoulders, and the little ivory ravine that ran between the just imagined remembrancers that she was meant for motherhood some day. The light of the match slid in swift strokes along her fingers and arms and flashed on the edged wrinkles of her gown.

When she passed the match to Larrick his eyes fell as hers opened, lest she see the fierceness in his gaze.

"Now tell me all about you and Texas," Clelia commanded.

"You're an awful bad man, I hope—with lots of notches on your gun—every notch a life—and can you draw and shoot as quick as one of Zane Grey's darling desperadoes? Got your gun on you now?"

When Larrick snickered and shook his head she said, "Aren't you afraid you'll take cold without it, get sciatica or something?"

He felt like a fool, but a blissful one. After a little further chatter a last gasp of conscience or precaution led him to say:

"Norry Frewin—"

She cut him short: "I'm off Norry for keeps. I know you're a friend of his and it's mighty white of you to stick to him, but— Oh, he's a nice boy, but he never will grow up, and his taste is entirely too—too—do I mean catholic? It sounds pretty religious for Norry. But, anyway, I like him, but I'm not going to play with him any more. I hate crowds—except at dances. Do you dance?"

"Well, I can't, but I do."

"I suppose out West there you make the tenderfeet dance by shooting at their feet. Do you?"

"I've seen where it said so in books, so it must be so; but I never met up with it."

"You're awfully stupid for a cowboy. Come on in and dance."

She flicked the cigarette across the coping, and Larrick followed suit. She led him to the ballroom, and then, turning suddenly, placed her arms about him and accepted his embrace.

This sudden possession of her stunned him. He lost himself for a moment of wonder at this most familiar and inexplicable of phenomena that a man may be introduced to a strange girl at a dance and immediately clench her to his breast and whirl her as he will.

Dancing with Clelia was as unlike dancing with Nancy as could be. Nancy was full blown, burning to the touch, passionate, experienced, somber, voluptuous, round, and responsive. One's imagination concerned itself with just how much experience made up her past. Clelia was the bud, dewy, cold, thorned, impudent, but not daring; imaginative and knowing, perhaps, but so indifferent to the live coals of passion that she rather despised than dreaded them. One's imagination concerned itself with what she might become when finally she bloomed and learned.

Nancy was almost as tall as Larrick. In the dance their cheeks met often by intentional accident in the whirls, her hair fell like a veil against his face, and their embrace was almost marital. But Clelia was only as high as his heart; he looked down into her hair save when her face was upturned. One of her arms climbed to his shoulder; her cheek was against his breast. She seemed frail, but she was muscular and tireless, and the dance was like a game, a romp to music. She did not tempt him as Nancy did, nor challenge his prowess. She challenged his protection. He felt a solemn desire to keep her good—happy, hilarious even, but good. He feared that her recklessness might lead her into dangers and inspire other admirers with evil plans.

Her wildness was like a thoroughbred colt's, a lovable fractiousness, with a promise of a spirited docility when broken to the bit. The nearest he came to desire was an

eager insanity to marry her at once, to make sure of her, for her own sake as much as his. Larrick was mad about her.

He thanked the Lord that Norry Frewin had no claim on her. He liked Norry as a man likes another, without regard to his morals, but he realized that Norry was not fit to be Clelia's lover. He felt that he, himself, had been no better than Norry, but he resolved to be, for Clelia's sake. He was glad that he had gone no farther with Nancy Fleet, and he vowed that he would break with her at once. Already Clelia had reformed him more than a preacher could have done, and had reformed him by appearing in tights, then in décolleté, and dancing with him to jazz music!

He was so nearly betrothed to her in his mind that when the too handsome man who had danced with her first suddenly came across their bows and tried to cut in, Larrick greeted his confident "May I?" with a sharp "You may not!" and swept Clelia out of his reach.

He felt toward the interloper as cordially as toward a wooer who might look in at his window and ask for his wife.

Clelia laughed into his shirt-front and looked up smiling to say, "Bully for you, Mr. Lochinvar."

"My name's Larrick," said Larrick, anxious that there should be no mistake.

Clelia laughed again, and he was glad that his name gave her pleasure.

Once or twice more the cutter-in made a step in Larrick's direction, but Larrick felt that, as he had not cut in, he would not be cut in on. Clelia mockingly waved to the fellow and called:

"The next dance is yours, Roy." She said to Larrick, "The poor fellow, he's had an awfully unhappy life."

"He'll have a worse one if he tries to rustle my heifer," Larrick growled.

"Oh, Lord! So I'm your heifer!" Clelia cried. "That's a new one on me."

The music stopped and would not be applauded to another repetition. Then a dazzlingly beautiful woman came up and seized Clelia, saying:

"You're coming home with me at once, my dear."

Clelia's childhood revealed itself in a pout.

"Just two more dances, mother!"

"Not one!"

"But I promised the next one to Roy Coykendall."

"All the more reason for your coming home now," her mother insisted, a little grimly. "You're worn out with the rehearsals and the excitement."

This suggestion had its effect. Suddenly Clelia looked tired and glad to be ordered home. She did not introduce Larrick to her mother, but put out her hand to him and said:

"Come on over and see me soon—to-morrow. Why not? I've got some nice horses and dogs. Good night."

Her hand slipped from his clasp and she was gone, with the pathos and beauty of a child being dragged not unwillingly up to bed.

Larrick was still shaken with the realization that the man who had danced with her and had tried to take her from him had been Roy Coykendall. What was that wolf doing in this fold? What right had he sniffing about the sacred Clelia?

And Clelia, the innocent, the débutante at the sill of life, had spoken fondly of Coykendall, had clung to him and endured his infamous embrace.

There was a sudden blaze in his heart now of that killing fervor Larrick had not been quite able to feel under any of what Frank Colby calls "the imaginary obligations" to avenge Mrs. Coykendall and her ruined home.

Forgetting where he was, he set out upon a search for Coykendall. If he had found him he would probably have been insane enough to start a fight with him. But he met Catherine Squair and she took him prisoner. She said, "Thanks, I will dance this with you," and she had him backing and filling about the room before he could explain that he was looking for a man to "get" him. Catherine was all knees and bust, and she made the most disconcerting love to Larrick with signals that he would not answer.

When the band stopped she applauded, still clinging to

his arm, and the band seemed to be inexhaustibly good-natured. Before it had tired of dealing out encores, Mrs. Frewin appeared at the ballroom door and motioned to them and said:

"We're going home now, if you don't mind."

So Larrick went out with Catherine on his arm. Luckily for Coykendall, he did not cross Larrick's path to the car.

Larrick's thoughts were as black as the inside of the limousine and he took no pleasure in the return. The roads were as beautiful and the side shows the same, but now he was being dragged away from action to respectability.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day Larrick was left to his own devices by good luck—or so it seemed that day, for luck is Janus-faced and often looks peace and prosperity as you approach and war and regret as you look back.

Norry Frewin was called to New York by some mysterious telephone message that left him white and red and distraught. He apologized to Larrick for leaving him alone, and, jumping into his low, rakish racer, dashed for the city. His parting word to Larrick was to help himself to a horse or any car and chauffeur in the garage and go to any of the country clubs with anybody or nobody he wanted to.

Larrick called after him, "Don't worry about me, and don't let her buffalo you!"

Norry threw back a startled glance at the word "her" and ran his car across a flower bed and a stone urn before he could whip it back into the roadway. So long as his engine was not checked he did not mind, and his car and its chatter dwindled out of sight and hearing.

Larrick managed to evade Catherine Squair and get to the garage, where he found two or three chauffeurs polishing the cars. He said, with transparent ingenuousness, "I reckon you-all are too busy to take me out for a little buggy ride?"

Three chauffeurs insisted that they were at his orders. He chose the first one on the right. When they passed the house Larrick pretended to be deaf and blind as Catherine Squair waved to him wildly and volunteered to come along.

The chauffeur, who was a person of superior intellect, guessed that if Larrick wanted to stop for her he would say so, and he was also deaf, dumb, and blind till they were out of the gates. Then he asked if there were any particular place Mr. Larrick would like to drive. Larrick answered: "Oh, all the roads are right good. I don't reckon you know

the way to—er—the—er—where the Blakeney's live at, do you?"

The chauffeur laughed respectfully. "Lord, sir, this car knows the way there. If I was to leave go of the wheel I wouldn't be surprised if she went by herself. Mr. Norry always uses this car when his racer is busted, as it usually is."

"I see," said Larrick. "Well, you might give the car her head. I met Mrs. Blakeney last night and—er—I was invited to come over to-day, so—er—well—"

"Yessir," said the chauffeur. The very back of his ears announced his realization that Mrs. Blakeney was not the object of the call. Chauffeurs inherit the terrible knowledge and cynicism of the ancient line of coachmen.

The road ran past the Lowries'. It was the same road that Larrick had traversed the night before. He had found it fair then, though it was taking him to strange people. Now he saw it in the sun and in a mood of trepidation. He was riding to his choice of womankind and he must protect her from the threat of Coykendall, that strange man whom women loved desperately.

There was an anxiety in the beauty of the scene as in Larrick's heart. Summer was in full glory everywhere, but there were already warnings that summer was not eternal. Here and there a green tree had hung out a red flag to indicate that a great bankrupt auction sale would be held here before long. All this riotous extravagance, this mad revelry, with every tree, every sapling, every weed, dressed in carnival color—it could not last, it could end only in red ruin and then dun penury and a winter of misery.

The people of the world were going the same way. The war had ended like the harsh winter and luxury seemed a necessity. People had denied themselves so much so long that they had to be glad. Prices stayed up; little was produced; common laborers uncommonly laboring dressed in silk shirts and silk hose and put rings on their tarry fingers. But there were hints of financial autumn now. The gorgeous reveler, Ponzi, who took in millions and gave back millions for bait, had broken and taken several banks with him. Factories began to shut down and to solve the strikes for higher

wages by paying none at all. The automobile factories had caught up with the demand all of a sudden; they jammed on the brakes. Prices of cars, of clothes, of shoes, began to fall, like leaves, and workmen began to find themselves out of jobs and out of demand. When they applied for a vacancy they found a crowd waiting. Soon it would again be possible to buy things cheaply if only one had any money at all.

Larrick was like the rest of the world. He had stumbled upon good luck. Good luck had bitten him like a tarantula and he had begun to dance the mad tarantella.

The cowboy, the forlorn cowboy of the desert, was lolling here in a millionaire's limousine and feeling that he must buy a better one for himself. He was on his way to woo a millionaire's daughter and he would try to dazzle her with his fortune. He had not had time to invest what was left of his principal. He had not put aside the appalling income tax the government would exact of him relentlessly.

He was running with the swells, and it was only their hospitality that kept him from outspending them. They were too lazy or too indifferent to permit him to requite their hospitality. But the time would come when almost unconsciously they would expect to get back what they had invested in him. For the rich, being the prey of sponges, hate a sponge above all other animals and vegetables. Reciprocity is their religion.

Larrick was not thinking of prudence or of a rainy day. He was remembering a thing that Clelia had said to him as they talked:

"I love the West so much better than the East," she had said.

"You been West, then? When?"

"Never. But I've read a lot about it. The men out there are so—so clean limbed and oh—clean lified! They don't have the weak, milksoppy ways of the Eastern men."

Larrick realized that she must, indeed, have read a lot. He knew so many Western men who were only as clean limbed as their sweat kept them—and a sweat of heat, not

of toil. As for clean lives, he knew men and women who led them, but he knew enough who did not. As far as he could see, people were people regardless of climate or geography. Every Eastern vice and virtue flourished in the West in equal measure.

But one thing the West he knew lacked utterly—not the West of California or the big cities, but the heroic wilderness life. It lacked art and artificial beauty.

It was all very well to glorify horses and cattle and horsemen and cattlemen. They and the pioneers who leveled the sierras and redeemed the deserts and cowed the savages deserved all the reverence they received and more. But their work was a means to an end, not the end.

The glory of the prospector and the miner was not in the bitter work of the pick and the fierce life of the pine-shack towns, but in the things the gold would buy. The beauty of the tent was that it led to the building of palaces. The greatness of the trapper and the Indian slayer was that they cleared the way for the railroad and the parlor car.

Out there in the life he had known the women wore rough things and lived in a brave simplicity. There were no palaces, no symphonic orchestras, no art galleries, no cathedrals, no skyscrapers, no paintings, plays, statuary, no fashion plates, no formal gardens, no marble pools, no libraries, no tapestries, jewels, no splendor at all.

As Larrick saw it, the splendor of life that preachers denounced and novelists traduced was something well worth working for. He loved the superb towers, the gleaming shop windows, the glistening Fifth Avenue, the ladies with the dukes' ransoms on and off their backs, the people who had traveled and seen masterpieces of man's work and nature's, the rich food in restaurants of high prices and high delights.

Larrick had dwelt all too close with Nature. He had slept in her bosom and fought for the bitter milk in her dugs, and had found her as mean a mother as a she-wolf. He liked the things made with men's hands and with the gentle, clever hands of women.

Yet he was afraid of these wealthy people and things;

their amusements were as laborious to him as jokes in a foreign tongue.

He wondered what he would have to learn to keep the pace with Clelia. He had taken up dancing for Nancy's sake and found it mighty handy with Clelia. But suppose she proposed a game of tennis? He had never held a racquet in his hand. Or golf! He did not know a putter from a bogie. He had heard that the swells were always playing bridge. And he did not know bridge. She might as well ask him to play the pianna. Poker, of course. But poker was for cheap saloons and for the bunk house. As well expect to be asked to shoot craps!

He was in so great a fright that he would have cravenly told the chauffeur to drive on past the Blakeney's if the car had not suddenly swerved into a gateway and up to a palace of still a third kind, entirely different from the Frewins' and the Lowries' homes. It was funny how many ways there were of being magnificent.

Larrick could not have told what school of architecture the Blakeney mansion belonged to, or if it belonged to any. If its periods were mixed, so were his—if he had any.

He was so afraid of the house that he would still have told the chauffeur to make a dash for it, but a butler or something ran out and opened the door of the car and hoisted his elbow out to the platform, or whatever it was, of the house—which suggested a big, immense railroad station to Larrick.

The usher, who evidently knew the chauffeur, robbed Larrick of his last chance of escape by saying:

“Mr. Larrick?”

Larrick stared a yes, and the man led him into the wide-open door and said:

“Miss Blakeney was expecting you, sir. This way, if you please.”

He pried Larrick's hat and stick from his hands, paused at the entrance to a room that seemed to be part of an art gallery a mile long, and said to nobody in particular:

“Mr. Larrick.”

Larrick was impelled into the room and paused, seeing nobody, and trying to remember how you shake hands with

swells and what you said first. He heard odd sounds and a voice he could not believe saying words he could not have expected there.

"Come on, you seven! Where is you at?"

"Dog-on you li'l' Joe, come a-runnin' to yo' mammy!"

This was the language of the crap shooters who knelt in back alleys and rolled the bones with one eye hung over their shoulders for the cops.

Larrick wondered if some of the stablemen had sneaked into the parlor to gamble. As he wondered, he heard Puck speak from nowhere once more:

"Hello! Come on over here, why don't you?"

He moved cautiously round an enormous prier table and descried Clelia. He felt bewitched again. For there she was sitting on the floor among a knot of young men and women, all frantically excited over the next fall of the dice she was shaking in her exquisite clenched hand. She was too much excited to look up. She shook the dice, blew on them, whispered to them, and said:

"Now's the time, little Joe. Don't keep me waitin'. We gotta buy the baby a new shirt. Jump for me, Josie!"

One of the young men sprawled at her side repeated his malediction, trembling with earnestness.

"Seven she is this time for sho'."

A gorgeously beautiful girl in the attitude of a witch over a caldron groaned:

"Go on and shoot. I need the money."

Larrick noted piles of bills like green leaves on the autumnal rug. Finally Clelia spilled the dice, bent to glare at them, then shrieked and rocked with triumph as she pointed to the two deuces she had called for:

"Read 'em and weep! Little Joe is workin' for his lady love!"

Then her greedy hands ran along the piles of money and gathered them in, leaving a stake for the next throw.

Now she paused to look up and put up her left hand to Larrick. He hurried to it, to lift her. But she did not rise. She dragged him to his knees. He was scarlet with confusion. She said:

"Mighty nice of you to come. Do you shoot craps?"

"Well, I—well, I used to a good deal."

"Great! I need a lot of money this month, and they tell me you're rich. So set in. Move over, Jake, and make room for Mr. Larrick—of Texas, a partic'lar pal of mine. Shake hands with me lady friend, Miss —, Miss —, Miss —, and Mr. — and Mr. —"

She gave them names and they gave him their hands, but he did not catch a single name. The two young men wrung his fingers warmly and warned him to hang on to his watch, as Clelia had such a run of luck they were sure the dice were loaded.

CHAPTER VIII

LARRICK was stupefied at finding himself squatting on a palace floor, shooting craps with a bunch of princesses. He need not have been surprised, for dice are as old as man. Mark Antony shot craps with Cleopatra and Helen of Troy probably played with the kuboï, shrieking, "Come, Aphrodite!" or, "Come, dog!" according to whether she or her adversary spun the cubes as lustily as Clelia called for "the eighter" or the "box cars" and hated the dirty little "craps." Roman emperors cheated and the favorites of French kings knew the frenzy of the blundering tumbler.

But the sudden passion for dice that swept American society in 1920 was not derived from classic or romantic times. It came from the negroes.

Since we have taken from the slaves and their descendants the folk songs, the banjo, the ragtime, the jazz, and any number of dances, it was logical that the gambling devices should be also appropriated.

And since gambling is a sin inextinguishable, after ages of denunciation, it can matter little whether the mania makes use of the devil's visiting cards, or the horse race, the *petits chevaux*, the pill that dances upon the wheel, the faro box, or the stock market.

It mattered to Larrick, however, and he was so shocked at such goings-on in a respectable, or at least a wealthy, home that he could not feel at ease, though here at last he was on familiar ground.

Clelia kept the dice for a long time and won everybody's cash while it lasted. Then she lent money to the girls who were broke and won it back again. She played with a fiendish zest, pounding the floor in ecstasy as the number she called for obeyed her incantation.

Her voice was shrill for "Sixty days!" or "Ninety days!"

for "Big Dick!" or the "Eighter." She shrieked for the Seven when its arrival would bring luck and howled at it when it came at the wrong time. When she lost the dice at last she had a little mountain of bills and silver and copper at her side.

Larrick was seven dollars to the bad when the dice fell to him, and by this time he had lost some of his chill. Also two of the girls and one of the young men had been cleaned out and had run into debt so deeply that they complained that their feet had gone to sleep and deserted the game.

Larrick felt an ambition to drive the others away, too, and he played with an eagerness remembered from many a contest with cowboys or greasers. He snapped his fingers and summoned the numbers he wanted with Texan oburgations that were new to Clelia, who rejoiced in a new cuss word as much as in a new Paris hat.

Clelia was insatiable. When only she and Larrick were left she still insisted on playing and they had a duel to the death. Her luck held for a while and it made him happy to lose to her. But the time came when in spite of himself he took Clelia's cash from her. This was intensely embarrassing, and if he could have cheated himself he would have been glad to. She suspected once or twice that he was not playing his best (though it might seem that skill had no part here) and she flared up with such unsuspected fury that he felt he was compelled in all gallantry to reduce her to poverty.

Being human, she did not really enjoy the delapsing of her winnings. There is always a certain pride in a streak of good luck and a certain humiliation and injustice in a streak of bad.

She was a good sport, but her hilarity did not continue. She grew frenzied in her cries for the number she needed. She tossed the dice this way and that, shot them interminably, pleaded with them to be good. But nothing availed to save her money from Larrick. And yet she seemed to respect him increasingly as he destroyed her prosperity.

The others had left them entirely alone. One couple was in the music room at the piano; another was on the lawn,

practicing putts with an old golf ball, and two were shrieking on the tennis court.

Only Clelia and Larrick crouched alone on the floor and bandied negroid phrases. He felt that it was a wicked waste of opportunity and no way at all to entertain or be entertained by so fair a girl. But she would not stop till her last bill was lost, her final silver had trickled away, and her ultimate copper had gone into his clutch.

She was game to the last and practiced everything but caution. That was a word left out of her lexicon.

She wanted to borrow money of Larrick and offered her I. O. U., but he told her he would not trust her. She said she could get money from the butler, but Larrick begged off. He pointed to his loot and said:

“What can I buy with all this?”

She smiled with unexpected winsomeness and sighed:

“How sweetly old fashioned! But you can't buy me anything with the money I've lost. What kind of a gambler do you think I am? You might help me up, though.”

He lifted her to her feet, but they were so numb that she could hardly stand on them. She clung to him while she stamped her tingling heels back to life.

Suddenly she gave a little cry, forgetting her own torment.

A little brown Pekingese came running into the room, searching frantically here and there, and looking about with eyes of tragic inquiry.

Clelia dropped to her knees and called, “Empress, you poor angel, come to your mother!”

The dog ran to her and consented to be taken in her arms for a moment. She gazed into Clelia's gaze with the steady earnestness of Pekingese and moaned and whimpered. She could not find comfort in Clelia's sympathy, and, growing restless, squirmed and struggled to be free, her big eyes wet and somber. She began her search anew and hurried from great room to great room.

“The poor soul! She's almost mad with grief,” Clelia explained. “You see, she's too small to have any puppies—they call her a sleeve dog—but she got away at the wrong time and— Well, we were terribly anxious, for we adore her.”

We had the best vets to watch her, but when the time came—I was alone with her—she suffered horribly. But I'm quite an expert in helping poor bitches in their hour of need, and I did everything that could be done.

“In place of the litter of little mice these Pokes usually have, she had just one. And I had a battle for that. It was too big. I was twenty minutes with it and then it was born dead. So of course I had it taken away. By the time the little Empress was strong enough to look for it it was gone. She can't understand, and I can't tell her. Her little heart is breaking with motherhood and she has hunted the farm over for days. She can hear her child crying for her, I suppose, and she's aching to comfort it. But it's dead. What a terrible thing to be dead—even for a puppy dog. At night I keep the Empress in my room, but she runs round all the time, searching and whining all night long.

“Strange! She never had a baby. Nobody told her anything. She only knows that she wants her child and she can't have it. It's dead. 'Dead' is a terrible word, don't you think—when even little animals like that go about for days with their eyes full of tears and their hearts full of pain?”

She fell silent a long while and Larrick did not know what to say. He loved her more in this helpless grief than in any other mood. But it hurt him bitterly not to be able to help her.

His arms and hands wanted to go to her rescue and gather her in, but his mind was wiser than they. He could clasp her close to dance with her, but he must not put a finger on her when she suffered.

The butler came in upon his quandary to throw him into a fiercer distress. He said:

“Excuse me, Miss Clelia, Mr. Coykendall is on the phone. Shall I switch him on here?”

Clelia nodded and went to a telephone in a corner, and Larrick had to endure the sound of her sympathy for another dog. He heard her say:

“Hello, Roy! . . . Yes, this is me. Where are you? . . .

Why don't you come over? . . . Oh, that's too bad! I expected you. . . . Oh, fine! . . . Oh, that's wonderful! . . . You poor boy, what a relief it will be! Call me up as soon as you know. Good-by!"

She hung up the receiver and turned to Larrick. Her eyes were tenderer than before, but he didn't like the look in them now.

"You haven't met Roy Coykendall, have you?"

Larrick shook his head.

"He's awfully nice but terribly unlucky. He's always falling in love with the wrong women. Some people say he's a cad and a fool. But if he is, how can he help that? It isn't his fault, is it?"

"Well, his wife— I don't know what's the matter with her, but she doesn't make him happy and he's unutterably wretched. He has no home life. Some people say he's a rotten hound, and maybe he is, but if he is, how can he help that, either?"

"The poor little Empress there can't help being a dog, and she can't help being heartbroken over a poor little dead pup. So why should people be blamed for being unhappy just because their unhappiness seems foolish to other people? Everybody is always blaming everybody else for what they can't help. It seems to me more foolish to go blaming people and being stingy with your sympathy than it is to suffer foolishly.

"Well, Roy has been trying to persuade his wife to give him his freedom and take her own. She didn't want to for the longest time. And that seems funny, too. Seems to me if I had a dozen husbands and they all said, 'I don't love you any more, please let me go,' I'd break my neck showing them the door. But Mrs. Coykendall was the clinging kind.

"I don't know all the particulars, but, anyway, Roy has just telephoned me that she has consented to divorce him quietly. He is willing to take all the blame and give her a big alimony and all that, and I think it's mighty white of him.

"But most people loathe him. That's why I like him.

The minute I find everybody running anybody down I begin to feel kindly toward him. Don't you? And when people object to my running with Roy Coykendall and tell me what a rotter he is, I always say, 'Everything you say against him makes me like him all the better.' I don't know, but it seems to me that that's the only decent way to feel. Doesn't it seem so to you?"

Larrick was in an excruciation of discomfort. If he told Clelia what he knew of Coykendall, he would endear the beast still more to her. If he kept silent, she would go on liking him.

There was something fiendish about the situation, yet there seemed something divine in Clelia's quality of far-seeing mercy.

He was so distraught that he made an excuse for going back to the Frewins'. All the way he raged against Coykendall for his double-dealing and his insolence in paying court to Clelia. When he reached the house he found a letter awaiting him, forwarded from his New York hotel.

It was from Nancy Fleet, and Larrick felt guilt added to his other miseries. Who was he to be accusing another man of disloyalty?

CHAPTER IX

IN those days there was still fierce complaint of the Postmaster-General of the United States, as if Postmasters-General were expected to carry all letters in person.

But however promptly a letter may be conveyed, it often arrives an era too late. People's souls change overnight, like milk in a thunderstorm, and though they wear the same names they are quite other people.

So the letter that Nancy Fleet wrote from Newport to Gad Larrick in Westchester found him with a new heart, though his face and form were unchanged. If she had telegraphed him, her message would have reached the man she left and found him lonely for her.

But in the few days of her absence he had succumbed to the influence of Clelia. In the thunderstorm of her beauty, the milk of his kindness was changed to a clabber of remorse and confusion.

The warmth of Nancy's love would have flattered and fascinated him two days ago. Now he hated himself without loving Nancy the more for his sense of shame.

He took the letter to his room and opened it guiltily.

DEAR GAD LARRICK,—Newport seems to need you as much as you need Newport. I can't help looking at the old town and the old ocean through your eyes. You have talked to me so much about the waste of misplaced rain water in the world that I should like to hear your comments on the Atlantic. I believe you told me you had never seen it except from Coney Island. From Bailey's Beach it is quite different. The warships would interest you, too.

But I am consumed with an ambition to see you shoot up the Casino and lasso the swell mavericks—or do I mean mavericks?

Anyway, the fact is that I take no comfort in the familiar follies of this place since I have fallen under your spell. I spend my time vainly trying to roll cigarettes with my left hand. I need your masterly help. I am pining away for you, and my friends are

worried. Telegraph me when you arrive. My mother and father offer you the freedom of this big house. From your room in the tower you can look out for miles across a desert of water that would remind you of your own dear Brewster County by its difference. Do come soon.

Yours, I don't know how far,
NANCY FLEET.

By the way, don't stop to kill Roy Coykendall. Poor Louise has decided to accept the beast's magnanimous offer to suppress his alleged "evidence," take all the blame, give her evidence against himself, and let her divorce him. The affair will be pulled off quietly in a little country town. This is strictly *entre nous*.

Larrick wondered what *entre nous* meant, but did not dare to ask. He assumed that it was something peculiarly atrocious, since it had to be put in Latin.

Nancy had released him from the duty of obliterating Coykendall for Mrs. Coykendall's sake. Yet now he felt the impulse seething in him to remove the man, not as punishment, but as a precaution on his own behalf. For now the venomous Coykendall, having stung his wife to death, was coiled in the path of Clelia.

Nothing helps us through an ordeal of self-contempt so well as a grievance against somebody else. That is why an outburst of anger is often the most sincere expression of a deep, an intolerable, contrition.

Poor Nancy with her postscript had proffered Larrick a remedy, or at least a diversion, that helped him to forget her and to turn his passion of chivalry toward her rival.

It was characteristic of the familiar influence of love that the impropriety of caring for Clelia made her all the more important to his miserable soul.

Norry Frewin did not come home that night, nor all the next day. His mother fretted for him at the table, where his place waited.

It surprised Larrick to find a wealthy mother grieving like a poor mother. Mrs. Frewin came dangerously near to chanting the gospel hymn, "Oh, where is my wandering boy to-night?" Like most other fiction readers, Larrick had

somehow absorbed the notion that wealth substitutes a new set of emotions for the set allotted to plain people.

Mr. Frewin tried to comfort his wife by a ridiculing reference to experience.

"Good Lord! honey, you ought to be used to the cub's absences by now. He's spent the least possible time at home ever since he was big enough to toddle away."

"But to leave his friend and his guest alone here to the mercies of two old frumps like us!" Mrs. Frewin moaned. "He would never do that if he weren't in serious trouble."

She had the butler call up his apartment and all of his clubs that she knew of, but he was not to be found. At length, however, a telegram came in by telephone apologizing for his unavoidable detention in town on important business, hoping that his mother would not worry, and that Larrick would amuse himself as best he could.

Mrs. Frewin was relieved of a mountain of anxiety. Mr. Frewin growled:

"I wonder what her important name is."

His wife gave him a round scolding for his cynicism, but Larrick was convinced that there was a bit of fatherly intuition in the old man's remark.

Larrick thought of the girl that Clelia had surprised in Norry's apartment on the day of her untimely and indiscreet ascent upon him. Inside his soul, Larrick offered to bet himself any amount that the girl was making trouble for Norry.

When the truth transpired, his guess was proved correct. But for the moment it served mainly to allay the fever of his self-disrespect. Assuming that Norry was involved with another girl, then Norry's claim on Clelia was practically nil; therefore Larrick was not treacherous to his friend in loving Clelia. His treachery to Nancy remained, but it was something to have cut his villainies down by fifty per cent. He was sorely in need of that diminution.

He could smile a little more honestly now while Mrs. Frewin talked on and on about her son, pouring out anecdotes of him from his babyhood, all of them vastly to his credit. When she had gone round the rosary of her love she was

relieved enough to face sleep with calm, kissed Larrick and her husband good night, and went upstairs to bed.

Larrick could just remember the taste of his own mother's good-night kisses and the sight of her slow and heavy climb to her reward of sleep after toil.

His mother had been a pioneer; her clothes were calico, her hands rough from cooking and suds, and from the needles that filled the workbasket every night with a dark fruit of mended things. The stairs in that old home were of wood and the carpet missing, and Larrick remembered her pityingly now as he contrasted what she had been with this other mother who had never known hardship or the want of luxury. Yet there was a kinship between her and this sad Mrs. Frewin in the silken dinner gown, who mounted the velveteed treads heavily and dragged along the mahogany rail an old hand that twinkled with diamonds. Diamonds, after all, seemed only tears that do not dry away and vanish—the gleaming, lasting monuments of tears.

Larrick turned to surprise in Mr. Frewin's eyes a look of tender sorrow. He had bought his wife everything he could; but unruffled bliss has never been put on sale. As if to escape from what he could not help to what he could, Mr. Frewin turned and asked Larrick to sit and talk awhile. He fetched from a cabinet a box of his best cigars, long cylinders of a dusty russet. Mr. Frewin had them tailored to fit his taste in Havana from selected, seasoned leaves, and even Larrick's illiterate nostril could perceive the delicate nurture of their flavor.

When the two censers were fuming, Frewin broached with some hesitation a subject he plainly felt to be difficult.

“My boy, I hope you won't think me impertinent, but—”

“Good Lord! sir, you couldn't be impertinent to me.”

“Thanks. I don't want to be, but—well—as I've said before—I can never repay what we owe you for saving Norry. You have heard enough about him to-night from his mother to realize that if you hadn't saved him from that desperado there would have been one pitifully broken soul mourning for him here—two, in fact, for Norry is everything to me, my legacy to the world, my—well, everything

He's a bit wild, but he's all right; a glutton for mischief, a fool with the girls and the women, but the real thing in the long run.

"You gave him back to us. We've adopted you into our hearts as a kind of a son—with all the rights of a son, but none of the obligations. We were disappointed to find that we couldn't pay you Norry's ransom in cash. You've got such a lot of it.

"And that's what I'm getting to. Your money — what about it? Money costs money, makes money, loses money. It's a very expensive thing if it's not handled just right. You don't show any signs of being a miser. I don't know how much of a spendthrift you are. The main thing is, how much of a financier are you?"

"As a financier," Larrick stammered, "I'm as wise as a locoed steer."

Mr. Frewin nodded and went on:

"Don't hesitate to tell me to mind my own business if I offend you, but all sorts of people, some of them very wealthy, come to me for financial advice and— Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what you plan to do with your good fortune—unless that's a secret."

Larrick flushed and grinned.

"It's a secret from me, sir. I've been wanting to have a good time first for a while. You see, I got kind of baked out and starved lean down there in the alkali, and the money came so easy I thought I'd see a little of the world and rest my eyes on handsome things awhile. When it's gone I can always go back."

"But if you manage it carefully you won't have to go back. Your money will work for you if you'll let it, and make a lot more. Money breeds money when it gets a chance. The capital-and-labor problem resolves itself down to that in the end. Some people are good money farmers and some are poor. The toilers, as they are called, have a hard time, and sorrow and deprivation enough, God knows; but God also knows that the rich have hard times and heartbreaks and deprivations not easy to bear. Nothing mankind can do will ever provide happiness, and when your

labor unions and Socialist ideals and Bolshevisms have said and done all they can, you'll always come back to this: some people must work for money and get little of it, and some will make money work for them and get a lot of it. Now you've got a big start; that's what most people never have; poor fellows with big muscles and small brains and a bad start. They haven't much chance, God help 'em! But you have had a bit of luck. You ought to take thought of the future. That's why I speak. I doubt if you've even laid aside your income tax. Have you?"

"No, sir. I never have had any call to worry about taxes. They tell me Uncle Sam is likely to jump me for right smart of my cash; I been thinking of figuring it out, but I—well, I been too busy looking for a good time."

"You'd better not delay too long. The government is very exacting and you can't escape. It might be rather embarrassing to find that you had spent that tax. I could give you a fair idea of the amount if you care to take me into your confidence."

Larrick welcomed his good offices with something of the dour gratitude one feels toward a famous surgeon.

"They gave me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for my claim it didn't cost me anything to find. It hopped out and bit at me. And I didn't have much expense working it. I brought most of my cash to New York in a draft and it's deposited in a bank downtown."

Mr. Frewin got a paper and a pencil and wrote out the answers Larrick gave to his questions. He compiled every item that could be charged as a legitimate deduction, realizing that these deductions would have to be submitted to internal-revenue collectors with the eyes of lynxes and their tender mercies.

Then he made a few computations and sighed:

"I'm afraid, my boy, that you will have to pay an income tax of not less than—perhaps more than—a hundred thousand dollars."

"My God!"

"Quite so!"

"Why, that's nearly half of my whole pile!"

"Yes, and if you'd got more for your mine your tax would have been far greater. The rate mounts by leaps and bounds. Last year I made a little side deal in a stock that cleaned me a million dollars. It cost me next to nothing and I had to pay nine hundred thousand dollars of that to the government as a tax."

Larrick was stunned. He mumbled:

"I've always been some patriotic, but I reckon I'll just light out for Europe and go to Monte Carlo where I got a gamblin' chance with my money."

Frewin smiled sadly. "But you can't sail. You can't get a passport till you show a receipt for your income tax. You see, we had a little war back in nineteen seventeen and nineteen eighteen. That's two years ago, but the Senate and the President couldn't get together over the treaty, so we're still at war with Germany. We were the last to go in and we're the only ones that can't get out. There's the piper to pay—and the devil. If your money hadn't come so easily you could claim a lot of exemptions and depreciations. But good luck is bad nowadays. You'd better let me send you to my tax expert and find out just how much you'll be mulcted. Then you'd better set that amount aside in a special fund at a good rate of interest. As for the remainder, I wish you'd lend it to me."

This was still more startling. His millionaire host wanted to borrow what the vampire government left! Frewin explained:

"When Mr. Carnegie died it was found that he owed several hundred thousand dollars to the widows of friends. He had taken their money, given his note for it, and invested it so that their incomes were far greater than they could ever have made for themselves. I'm doing a bit of that myself for orphans and widows of men I have loved.

"I'd like to do the same for you. It's about the only way I can see to pay you anything on account. I'll guarantee you against loss and give you everything I can make for you."

Larrick understood and was deeply touched. "That's mighty white of you, sir. But it's not fair."

Frewin laughed. "You're afraid of my security?"

"Oh no, but I couldn't allow you to take all that risk. You'd gamble and guarantee both."

"It would be a comfort to me."

Larrick had never been in such a quandary of exquisite subtleties. If he handed his dwindling fortune over to this plutocrat he would be like a child on an allowance and he would also be playing the part of a bad sport in accepting a guaranty against loss while enjoying the profits of a great financier's genius. If he refused, he would seem to distrust a venerable friend and would deny him a petition.

Before he could find a way out, Mr. Frewin had risen, squeezed his shoulder, and said:

"Think it over, my boy. It's your money. Don't let me take it away from you if you want to keep it, but see that you keep it. Good night!" And he was gone up to bed.

Larrick, feeling lonelier than ever he had felt in the desert solitudes, went up to his own room. He was lost in a wilderness of perplexities, financial now as well as amorous. Nancy's letter lay on his dressing table like a mortgage on his soul, and on the window panes the moon beat with silver fingers, reminding him of Clelia, who had come to him like a mystic spouse born of lunar glow.

He loved her so well that it seemed as if his flirtation with Nancy were rather a perfidy in advance against Clelia than his infatuation for Clelia an injustice to Nancy.

CHAPTER X

AFTER a night of pitching and tossing in and out of fitful slumbers Larrick slept till ten. When he went down to his breakfast Mr. Frewin had long since gone to town and Mrs. Frewin was deep in her garden tasks.

In the hope of walking off his troubles, he set out for a stroll. Two or three dogs hailed the idea as an excellent one, and diverted his mind from his own thoughts by their wild behavior, their foot races, sham battles, real quarrels, their demands that he throw sticks for them to fetch, their burrowings for moles, their tree-climbing efforts after chipmunks and squirrels. They could not understand his calm or his absorption in pursuits as frantic and perhaps as foolish.

He found himself at length near an ancient ivied stone wall under an oak of enormous bole and canopy. As he paused a moment in the patterned shadow he heard the muffled gallopade of a horse along the soft old lane outside.

He was too deep in his vagaries to turn and see who came on so furiously. Suddenly there was a shortening of the hoof rhythm, the great grunt of a horse launching itself into space at the sharp, glad cry of a girl, a crash of branches, and a resounding thump.

Larrick threw himself back in amazement as a big thoroughbred plunged to earth almost on his toes, stumbled, recovered, and trotted away a little and halted with bridle dangling and saddle empty.

Larrick stared and wondered if he were bewitched. Then he heard a laugh of mingled pain, shame, and self-ridicule from overhead somewhere. He whirled and stood aghast.

He had seen a lynching or two in his time, and now he beheld the legs and body of a young man pendent and kicking from the boughs above him.

He ran forward a few steps and saw that the young man

was a young woman. It was Clelia Blakeney in riding clothes. She was shaken with laughter, but the tears were streaming out of her eyes from the anguish of her hair.

She was caught like Absalom, but there was no murder in the heart of her discoverer.

Larrick was stunned dumb by the sight and the plight of her. But she shrilled: "Yes, it's me. How long are you going to stand there staring? Get me down from here, can't you?"

He stepped forward and caught her by the ankles to pluck her away, but she yowled with torment and kicked at him.

"Are you trying to scalp me? Climb the tree, or do something, quick."

A tardy inspiration came to him at length, and, taking her by the ankles again, he placed her feet on his shoulders and put his arms up along her flanks to steady her while she raised her hands and with much difficulty disentangled the long braids of her hair from the stout limb that had scooped them as her horse rose to the wall.

Larrick felt a shamefast thrill at the feel of the fine steel muscles of her thighs as he upheld her. But only for a moment. When her hair was released there was some difficulty about getting her to earth.

When finally she had sliddered down him and reached the ground he waited like a yokel while she got several bits of bark out of her hair and a few little damns out of her temper.

Then she began to laugh at herself. Her horse came back and she leaned against him, shouting while he whinnied, and nudged her with his muzzle, and threatened the leaping dogs with his heels.

She explained the miracle of her apparition simply:

"I saw you mooning along as I came up and I thought I'd give you a surprise. I bent over to duck under that infernal bough, but my fool hair had to fly up and catch and rake me out of the saddle. Lucky thing my hair stayed on. I'm too young to be bald. Lucky my feet came out of the stirrups or I'd have broken my fool neck. Well, aren't you glad to see me?"

"Tickled 'most to death."

"I came over for a swim. So go get your bathing suit on. The Squair girls say you are a regular goldfish. You see, the swimming pool on our place vanished the other day. The concrete cracked and we haven't been able to get it fixed yet. I happened to meet Cathy Squair out riding and she said Norry was in town, so I thought I'd take a chance. I rode back home for my suit, and here we are."

She pointed to a little roll fastened to the saddle hooks. Larrick blushed at the scantiness of the trifle so ruddily that Clelia frowned.

"Of course, if you're going to be shocked, you're excused."

"I reckon you'd have a hard time shockin' me," said Larrick, with chivalry of the latest school.

They turned and walked to the house along the pathway, Clelia leading the horse, the dogs ranging wildly, and Larrick's heart stumbling in his breast in a stupid bliss.

Clelia fastened the horse to a tree near the pool, where the Squair girls were already floundering, and ran with her suit to a dressing room.

Larrick went to another, and when he was ready to come out he saw that Clelia had beaten him to the water. She was kicking up a shower of spray and crying out in a rhapsody of energy. Her abundant hair was tucked under a red cap, and her blue jersey was vague in the waves she made.

But when she emerged and ran like a cat up the side of the bathhouse to the roof he saw her so completely that he flinched.

Her nimbleness amazed him. When she reached the ridge she drew herself up to her full height and stood a moment in tinted statuary, a little Venus atop her tiny temple. Then with a reckless grace that terrified him she launched straight out into the air as she would fly, her arms dispread wingwise, her head flung back like the red crest of a bird, her body curved deeply at the waist, her hips and legs drawn back in a wonder of grace. They called it the swan dive.

Far out she sailed, then turned, flung her head down, brought her palms together, and shot into the pool with a harpoon slash. Her length followed as if slowly, until she was all engulfed. The little crater she had raised in the

water was level again before she reappeared far away in a long, slow arc to her waist. Then slipping back again, she swam with all speed, making for the wall with swift overhand strokes. When she had gained it she sprang to the ledge and was sitting there, smiling demurely and panting with shy triumph, almost before Larrick had recovered from the first fright of her adventure.

So cool and wet and elate and immature she was that her almost nakedness gave him none of the sweet shame of desire. She was not siren or woman, like the voluptuous Clarice Squair who homed in the water with a lotus languor. Clelia was simply youth without sex; she was the spirit of velocity, the index of all postures, perfection to a beatitude.

As she rested, her eyes were not observing the observation of Larrick or estimating the influence of her charms. She was vexed because her gifts were denied the career they merited.

"I'm simply furious," she complained, "at dad because he wouldn't let me go to the Olympic games at Antwerp this year. A whole pack of girls went over. Ethelda Bleibtrey and Helen Wainwright, Irene Guest, and even little Aileen Riggen. She is only thirteen years old and weighs only eighty-five pounds, but she won the first prize in high diving and the King of Belgium pinned the championship medal on her little chest and Mayor Hylan is going to pin another one on.

"I can do all those stunts—the jackknife dives and the twists and even the two-and-a-half backward somersault. But would dad let me go? Not for a minute! And mother said she'd have my sanity looked into if I suggested it again."

Clelia's mother and father were simply clinging to the last tatters of old conventionalities in forbidding their young daughter to take part in such a conspicuous affair. They had not objected to her appearing in tights as Puck before several hundred spectators in a public performance at a private home. They were not quite ready to have her cross the ocean and compete, almost completely nude, before the mob. And this struck Clelia as unreasonable.

In the long, slow history of the emancipation of women

1920 marks the crest where women were granted the vote for all American offices. But perhaps there was an even more profound revolution indicated by the fact that the United States sent overseas to the Olympic games a team of eighty mighty athletes and included a group of young women with a chaperon, and that, on their return, they marched on Fifth Avenue and were decorated by the Mayor of New York. There was something more than Athenian in it all, and it was certainly far from the ways of the days of the Puritans.

Larrick was almost as much astonished as Miles Standish would have been if he could have been revived for the occasion.

That this daughter of the American peerage should grieve at being kept at home from such an experience—well, it proved at least that morals do move and that there is no keeping up with discontent.

In the struggle for happiness there is something of the gymnast's quenchless unrest. Every record he breaks serves merely as a new beginning for a new ambition.

Clelia, with perhaps a little eagerness to show off, gave demonstrations of her amazing agilities. From the spring-board and from various heights she made a dozen kinds of dive, calling their names, like an Annette Kellerman in vaudeville, the back jackknife somersault, the half-gainer standing, the full-gainer standing, the Oslander with the take-off on one foot, the one-and-a-half somersault forward running—a whole catalogue of an art with a technic and a terminology of its own.

She was interested like any other artist in the finesse of her performance. Only another craftsman of her guild could understand her high achievements. As there are poet's poets and painter's painters, Clelia was a diver's diver.

Her lingo and her accomplishments were a foreign language to Larrick. But she stirred him as a singer of an Italian aria might; the words nothing and the music not needing them. The intricate fleetness of her cadenzas gave him joy beyond comprehension and almost beyond endur-

ance. The beauty of posture and of lithe transition, the wild glory of having a body of such genius, and of improvising poems of such indescribable ecstasy filled him with a kind of religious awe. It seemed a cruelty that no moving camera, no fleet-brushed painter, no quick-fingered sculptor was there to make a throng of images of this divinity exercising her ambrosial limbs in a revelry, a tumult of super-human symmetries.

He longed for a hundred statuettes of her or a hundred cameos of her as she carved herself against the blue field of the sky, against the fluent lapis lazuli of the water leaping to embrace her.

Larrick's heart cried out in his breast for Heaven to send him the skill of a recording artist. He had never wanted to be an artist before, had hardly realized what art means, what precious things it redeems from the inconceivable floods of beauty pouring like a glittering Niagara past the eyes of man, making a thunder and a terror of the very multitude of crystals and laces and mists that flee too fast even to be beheld.

The pity of beauty and its laughing rush from oblivion to oblivion broke him like a tragedy. Here was but one young girl, and there were millions of young girls alive, and trillions dead and gone unseen, unsung, unpictured. And this one girl was material for galleries of art and libraries of poetry and prose. Yet she was supposed to be born for the comfort of one man and for the making of more young girls to overwhelm and disconcert all the arts that mankind has devised for its own torment.

Larrick's own thoughts were hardly more articulate or intelligent in their turmoil than the surface of the pool that Clelia kept in a perplexity of eddies and swirls, bubbles and foam and little tidal waves from the bombardment of the incessant flaming, twisted, tiny thunderbolts her capricious soul made of her responsive flesh.

Clelia had worn herself almost out in her transports. Larrick, exhausted with wonder, begged her to spare herself, but she must take one more plunge from the hot noon air to the night chill of the water before she transformed

herself from a sleek white dolphin to a respectable young lady jailed in clothes and good manners.

She scaled the wall of the bathhouse and took her post against the sky, the sun upon her so glaring that she seemed to be enaureoled in radiance. As she leaped she tried to check herself.

From her height she had seen Norry Frewin coming forward on the run. His presence startled her; the enamored admiration in his eyes offended her.

She fought against the air in vain, turning awkwardly, and came hurtling down like a broken-winged cygnet, striking the water in a heap.

She was bruised and stung, but she was angered more.

For the first time she felt unclothed, and she would not leave the concealment of the water till the humiliated Norry had gone away in obedience to her commands.

She had fallen from divinity to humanity with a crash. And Larrick was brought down with her. He was no longer a shepherd on Mount Ida choosing among goddesses. He was a false friend making eyes at another fellow's sweetheart.

CHAPTER XI

THE party broke up and Larrick and the rest slunk back into their everyday raiment as the banished Norry slunk back to the house.

Clelia came out in her riding clothes. They had seemed very daring before; now they were cumbrous; a high stock, a coat with long tails, flaring breeches pinched at the knee, and spurred boots hiding her little feet.

She was furious at herself for being caught sneaking over to steal a swim in Norry Frewin's pool. She was quite the petulant young girl, a nymph no more, Cinderella with the coach in broken pumpkin shards.

Larrick followed her to where her horse was tied. She was still fuming when she set her heel in Larrick's palm and let him hoist her to the saddle.

But the height seemed to restore her to graciousness. Like a queen, she was ill at ease and haughty except aloft.

She apologized at once for her temper.

"I'm horribly ashamed of myself. You can tell Norry so—if it's any comfort to him. Will you forgive me? Please! I won't bother you again for a while. I'm going to the mountains day after to-morrow for two or three months. I do hope I'll see you again when I get back. Good-by!"

The horse sprang forward and she departed in a flutter of braids and coat tails and a drum ruffle of hoofs.

Her last words struck Larrick backward as if the horse had kicked him in the breast.

Clelia was going!—was gone! for months! forever! She had been as casual about it as if she were running upstairs to dress for dinner. The adoration he had poured upon her from his eyes like an ointment of worship, a sacrificial spikenard, had meant nothing to her.

She had poised before him as a humming bird might stay

its iridescence a quivering moment before an ungainly hollyhock, stabbing its needle beak into its heart, and then flashing away without a thought of regret.

He was only one among the mobs who stared at her, loved her, and wanted her. The humming bird was bored with too many flowers. There were always flowers waiting to be pierced and forsaken. Humming birds never seem to rest or to sleep. Stories are told of their nests, but they are probably false. It is the nature of the humming bird to be always elsewhere or on the way there. Clelia had the soul of a humming bird.

Before Larrick had regained his balance Clelia on the big horse was a child on a pony, a moth, a nothing. She had not even told him where she had gone. He must find out. He must follow her, make her love him, or take her anyway. The mountains would be a good place for such a captive.

CHAPTER XII

LARRICK was so doleful over the loss of Clelia that he felt neither remorse for his claims upon Norry's beloved nor interest in Norry's own problems.

And he found Norry in such a state of excitement that he paid no heed to Larrick's mood. He went to Larrick's room, closed the door, and spoke hurriedly.

"Pack up your things, old man; we're going on a long journey. It was a rotten trick to leave you in the lurch without warning, but I see you weren't entirely neglected, with Clelia pulling off stunts and clothes and everything for your special entertainment. The little fiend! Did you hear her light into me? But there's a surprise in store for her.

"If you don't mind I won't tell you the whole story of my recent life just now. I hope you won't read it in the papers. It's nothing to boast of, and I've been a damner fool than usual. The main thing is I'm going to disappear for a while—for the benefit of my health. If you'll disappear with me I'll promise you a good time.

"While I was in town I learned from Burnley—the big painter—that he's going up to Mrs. Roantree's camp in the Adirondacks right away. You remember Mrs. Roantree? Clelia is going, too, and a big crowd.

"I was to have been invited, but Clelia cut my name off the list, the little beast! An uncle of mine, though, has a camp up there right near the Roantree place. He isn't there, but I'm always welcome. So we'll go in my car. It's a bully ride, and it will be a little less conspicuous for me than going by train. And it will show you a bit of life that's different from anything else you've seen.

"Do you mind? If you don't want to go, say so. If you think you can stand it, I'll promise you hunting, fishing,

boating, swimming, dancing, and plenty of handsome women. You may meet your fate up there. How about it?"

Had he been in less imperious haste he might have seen that Larrick was smothering his eagerness. Larrick felt that he had never been quite so ugly a hypocrite as when he mumbled that he would be right glad to go if Norry was sure he wanted him along. Norry was unfeignedly delighted. He ran on:

"Clelia will be mad as a wet hen when she sees me, but if I can get her alone in the Adirondacks where she can't escape I may be able to make her listen to reason. So, you see, all things work together for those that love the Lord."

"Now and then the devil and his children have their run of luck, too," said Larrick, thinking of the unmerited answer to his own unspoken prayers.

Norry took this to mean that Larrick was calling him a devil. There is always a bit of flattery in this term. And few men would be pleased to be considered devoid of deviltry. But Norry was a sick devil; he was going to be a saint. He shook his head.

"I've been in hell all right for the last day or two and I'm tired of brimstone. From now on, if I get out of this scrape, I run straight.

"Throw your things in your suit cases. You'll need evening clothes and everything. We'll get off as soon after lunch as possible. Now I've got to go and tell poor mother a pack of pretty lies about wanting to get away from people and back to nature and a lot of rot."

How much of his story his mother believed it would be hard to tell. Parents usually learn that it does not pay to investigate everything. The society lie is no more necessary a convenience than the family lie and the pretense of credulity.

At about three o'clock Norry threw in the clutch of his racing car and set off with a load of baggage in the back. Larrick was so encouraged by the prospect of a renewed communion with Clelia, and so convinced of the hopelessness of Norry's courtship, that he gave himself up to the heavenly

privilege of that chariot *de luxe*. He banqueted upon landscape. In the long, long flight of nearly four hundred miles there was no repetition of vista, no monotony of contour or hue.

The roads had suffered a little from the neglect enforced by the war, but to Larrick they were black marble in their solid smoothness.

First, Norry struck through the Croton chain of lakes that New York City built out of brooks and little rivers for the quenching of its gigantic thirst. Though many a home and farmstead and even many a village had been razed and submerged, the sheets of beauty seemed now to have been established there by the craft of time, and the huge fortifications of the dams with their broad roadways across and their glittering cascades in the spillways seemed but to ratify the will of God, the Landscape Gardener.

Norry Frewin told how his grandfather had been one of the great neglected geniuses who foresaw the need of these reservoirs and helped to guarantee their titanic gracefulness. He felt a sorrow at the injustice which gives immortality to the petty twister of a sonnet or a half-hour story or a novel to read oneself to sleep with, and denies it to the poets who build these epics of engineering, these infinite solaces for humanity, fetching cups of water to the lips of billions and establishing ceaseless fountains in every tenement.

Even Larrick, with his little taste for scenery, exclaimed at the charm of the linked waters, the sinuous restlessness of the ever-curving road hurrying from idyll to idyll. He felt the magnificent poetry Norry's grandfather had written with lakes and hills.

Over steep and into valley, round knob and betwixt meadows, through covert and village, past old church and old tavern, school and mansion, they sped. When they reached the heights of Peekskill they beheld the vast level of the Hudson, a gleaming highway among mountains aligned. The car dropped down the steep streets of the city and ran out of it again along the Albany Post Road, now inclosed in cleft mountains, now darting back eagerly for a glimpse of the river. There was such grace in the curves

up and down and in and out that the road itself seemed to rejoice and meander like a dawdling stream.

By and by Larrick's unschooled appetite for natural beauty was sated and he took heed of Norry's almost heedless velocity. His heart seemed to swing over to his right ribs as the car swirled around the sharp shin of a hill or evaded another wild racer by the width of an eyelash. Norry seemed to fear nothing except a rural constable in disguise or in ambush. But Larrick feared death.

He was at home on a man-eating, bone-breaking broncho that would have frightened Norry out of his wits, but Norry alone laughed at these escapes from disaster where the slip of a tire or the delayed inspiration of another driver meant a crash and hideous torment in an overturned and blazing machine.

Larrick suggested caution; urged it; pleaded for it; and finally, in all the panic of a man whose courage is being riddled by unfamiliar tests, demanded it.

He had read this very morning that the deaths from automobile accidents in the United States had now reached the rate of one every thirty-one minutes, three times as many as from all the accidents from railroads, boats, and every dangerous industry. He protested to Norry:

"There's a sucker born every minute and a sucker 'kills somebody every half hour. This looks so much like my half hour I wish you'd either slow down or let me out."

Norry flung a glance of disdainful amusement at Larrick's ashen features and laughed:

"And I thought you were a brave man!"

"You never heard me say so," Larrick growled. "Anyway, I'm scared stiff now, and I'd be much obliged if you'd—"

Norry chuckled, "You'll get used to it," and stepped on the accelerator. Speed was voluptuous to him and he tasted the seraphic pride of riding a comet. Larrick was growing speed-sick.

He had no pistol with him, but he carried a large jack-knife and he took it out, opened it, and set the point in Norry's ribs. He shouted above the roar of the unmuffled engine:

"Boy, you're goin' to slow up or you're goin' to die."

Norry stared at him, unbelieving, but there was desperation in the gaze that met his. He slowed up.

"I'm sorry," he said, with honest regret. "I didn't realize that you were really worried."

"My object in comin' along was to get where we were goin'," Larrick mumbled. "I know six mo' useful ways of dyin' than bein' smeared all over this nice road. If you want to commit suicide, you just drop me at the nearest depot and go your way."

"I'll be good," said Norry. And thereafter he ran at what he considered a funeral pace, averaging only thirty miles an hour.

When they reached Albany the sunset was aflare in all the sky and they stopped for dinner at the Ten Eyck Hotel. Afterward they exercised their legs a little and climbed to take a glimpse of the state Capitol set like a hill upon a hill.

Then they set forth again for a dash across the forty miles to Saratoga, following the leaping searchlight through the night-laden roads that had once been thronged with Southern aristocracy bringing their race horses and their slaves along to the spa.

The olden splendors of Saratoga were being refurbished after a sleep of years, but the racing season was not on and the hotels were not thronged.

After a night in the Grand Union and an early-morning visit to the now well-groomed springs where centuries ago the ailing Indians came to drink, they rushed north again, hurdling the tumbling Hudson on a concrete arc at Glens Falls and entering the realm of French and British wars and Indian massacre.

But Norry and Larrick were innocent of Colonial history and fed up on scenery. The increasing grandeur of the mountains won their decreasing approval, for the steeps held them back. Youth clamors for the goal; age, glad for its postponement, rejoices in the wayside obstacles.

Lake George did not win a halt nor a detour except for gasoline. They ran along its border for twenty-five miles to Ticonderoga, a name that thrills every American school-

boy; but these youths would not digress southward even to see the old fort where Ethan Allen surprised the British commander in his shirt tail.

They pushed on till they reached Lake Champlain, skirted it to Westport, left it, and turned off to Elizabethtown, where they rested for luncheon.

Here they were overtaken by the Sunday papers of New York and they spent half an hour burrowing among them. In one of the supplements Larrick was startled to find a picture of Clelia as Puck. She sprang at him from among the portraits of crowned heads, presidential candidates, social stars, theatrical and movie beauties, and a group of Polish women soldiers who had helped defeat the Bolsheviks.

Larrick noted that Norry was lost in his own paper, and he tore out the portrait of Clelia stealthily. He folded it and cached it in his pocketbook. It gave him comfort like a secret keepsake and warmed him to new resolve.

When he had skimmed the multifarious newses that interest the newspaper devourer—the political, police, social, sporting, theatrical, and other chronicles—Norry flung away the heap and returned to the car.

They were in the Adirondacks now and everything was mountains, mountains, mountains of verdure and comfort, hospitable mountains with lakes and trout streams, hotels and mansions and tents where people pretended to be roughing it in a most polite ruggedness, and air of such nourishment that the weak grew strong and the dying revived. It was different indeed from the melancholy and sterile churlishness of the mountains Larrick had known in Brewster County.

He breathed deep of balm and exaltation, leaving Norry to find his way among the precipices and crags.

There was a Sabbath presence in the air and he felt vaguely religious.

It was deep twilight in the cañons when Norry reached his uncle's lodge and found only ashes and charred timbers. The camp had burned down the day before.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME heedless wanderer had forgotten to put out a fire or had tossed a match into a pile of dry leaves, and left other people to pay the penalty of a wound in the green forest and a heap of charred timbers where a home had been.

A few servants, searching the ashes for salvage, recognized Norry and described the appearance of the flames as they charged down a hill like an army with banners. The wind had brought the fire forward; the lake had ended it. It went where fires go when they go out. It left dismal ruin as love does when a careless match starts it and it burns itself up.

Larrick was kindly enough to feel sorry even for a rich man who had lost a treasure. But Norry Frewin found consolation in the adversity of his absent uncle. He chuckled:

"Now Mrs. Roantree will have to take us in, and, once we're in, she'll never put me out till I've made up with Clelia. Come on, or we'll be late to dinner."

Larrick felt appallingly out of place as a doubly uninvited guest of Mrs. Roantree, who had impressed him as a woman not to be imposed upon easily, and dreadful in her capabilities for snubbery. But Norry was not afraid of her. He could wrap her round his little finger. After a short dash through the pines he turned into the park that Larrick was to know so well. They drew up at the door of the Big House, and when they were shown into the presence of Mrs. Roantree Norry told a pitiful story in the best manner of a prince overtaken by bad fortune and oncoming night.

Mrs. Roantree welcomed him royally and put Larrick at his ease with her hospitality.

She explained that a crowd of house guests would arrive on the morrow.

Norry pretended complete surprise on hearing that Clelia was to be one of them, and Mrs. Roantree failed to inform him that Clelia had refused to come if he did.

She assigned Larrick and Norry to rooms in the Bachelor's House, and after dinner and a game of cards they went early to bed.

Larrick slept profoundly in the pine-soothed air, and when the dawn woke him he gazed from his window across a lake like a sea, gleaming blindingly with the level sun.

In the late forenoon a troop of motors rolled into the camp; men and women clambered out and the lonely place was now a swarming hive.

Norry kept himself and Larrick in the background till Clelia should be settled and then they strolled over to the Big House to welcome her.

Norry was childishly amused at the success of his trick. Larrick felt himself an Iago of duplicity. But both of them were exultant with their plots against Clelia.

And both of them were more taken aback than she was when they met. For at her elbow marched Roy Coykendall, plainly infatuated and apparently infatuating.

Clelia gave Norry a scorching glare through narrowed eyelids. Then she smiled as she declared war:

"So that's your little game, eh? All right, old dear! I'll just sit in with you and I'll make you sweat."

She greeted Larrick effusively, partly for Norry's annoyance, partly because she found him as exotic as he found her.

Seeing from their constraint that Coykendall and Larrick had not met, she made the introduction, and now Larrick was compelled to shake hands and be amiable to the man he had wanted to kill. Coykendall was innocent of having offended Larrick; ignorant, indeed, of his very existence.

He was so curt in his manner that Larrick was spared the task of pretending cordiality.

But he felt as helpless as one who has partaken of his enemy's salt. Coykendall was protected from destruction by all the sacred laws of hospitality, and protected even from criticism by the warning Clelia had unwittingly given Larrick that attacks on Coykendall only endeared him to her.

There was something of elfin malice in the serene smile that flickered about Clelia's young mouth as she regarded the three big men hating one another bitterly for her sweet sake.

Larrick admitted his defeat to himself in advance. He was so disheartened that he went to his room and, more for company than for courtesy, wrote an answer to Nancy Fleet's neglected letter.

It was a labored composition, awkwardly explaining that he had planned to come to Newport, but that Norry Frewin had insisted in dragging him off to the mountains. He spoke vaguely of a crowd of people, most of whose names he could not remember. Of Coykendall he made a brief and acrid mention, and regretted that Nancy had withdrawn the permission to rid the earth of him.

As Larrick put the letter in the post box Clelia came up. He wished that she had not caught him, for he saw by the teasing lift of her eyebrows that she suspected him of writing to another woman.

He did not realize that in her then humor this would make him all the more interesting to Clelia. She was at the hour of a girl's life when captivating men and despoiling rivals become primal instinct. What we call "nature" has what we call "purpose" in it, and is usually quite ruthless. It makes for romance, the mother of misery and crime.

The guests at the camp took up familiar activities, as if they were an army moved into a new territory; but everything they did was curious to Larrick.

There was everything to do. Moods of utter simplicity and naturalness, landscape worship, mountain climbing, fishing, boating, swimming, and mere basking alternated with spasms of city gayety, flirtations, billiard games, dances in the camp, motor parties to other camps and to big hotels where orchestras jazzed and crowds spun.

Larrick was surprised to find himself not only accepted, but cultivated. Beautiful women cast languishing eyes upon him, sophisticated men asked his advice or encouraged him to talk. Even Clelia singled him out for her favor.

When he was in danger of a pride of success he would

fall into a grave humility. He would decide that the attentions paid to him were not due to his own merits, but to his oddities.

He felt that he was like one of the trout they fished for with such scholarship and patience in recondite pools. They were playing him, studying his habits, tickling him, enticing him with gorgeous artificial flies, trying to get him on the hook, just to see how game a fight he would make. The wilder he was, the better they liked him.

This feeling crushed him and drove him to long exiles. But Clelia's magnetism drew him back. Sometimes she mocked him openly; sometimes she seemed to like him sincerely; sometimes she seemed to use him only as a dummy for the vexation of Norry or Coykendall.

Larrick was glad to see Coykendall angry, but it hurt him to find Norry regarding him with bewilderment. The two men were in a predicament, indeed. Larrick had saved Norry's life, yet that did not seem to justify Larrick in stealing Norry's sweetheart. It did not seem quite right to compel Norry to give up his sweetheart. The mutual obligation was an exquisite anguish to both men.

Then Nancy Fleet added herself to the problem. A few days after Larrick mailed her his letter he received a telegram that puzzled him utterly. It simply said, "Who is she?"

While he was still marveling, as men do at the mysterious power of women to see through their clumsy subterfuges, Mrs. Roantree read aloud at dinner a day letter from Nancy Fleet:

"Caught bad cold in the surf and can't shake it off. Doctor recommends White Mountains, but I would much rather come to you, dear, if it is quite convenient and you are not crowded. Please be quite frank. Affectionate good wishes."

When the telegram was read everybody clamored for Nancy as a good old scout and great sport, and nobody glanced inquiringly at Larrick. Nobody dreamed that he had more than a casual acquaintance with the brilliant Miss Fleet.

Mrs. Roantree sent Nancy a hearty command to come at once. When she arrived she coughed once or twice and said:

"Of course the cough was only an excuse. Do you mind if I don't keep it up?"

Larrick had to confess to himself that she was lusciously beautiful, tremendously alive. He was dismayed to find a hint of melancholy and of humble terror in her attitude to him. An intuition that he promptly discarded, as men do their best instincts, told him that she loved him and had followed him and was afraid that some other woman was getting him away from her.

This was too ridiculous to be seriously considered, but he took pains to be attentive to her. He did not suspect that in his effort to be cordial the effort was the most conspicuous thing about his cordiality. He did not realize that even when he sat close to Nancy his eyes were incessantly pursuing Clelia. But Nancy could all too easily understand. She made no battle. She tried the effect of philandering with Randel, but that seemed to relieve Larrick. She was too fine a sportswoman or too clever to make any attack on Clelia. She rather praised her and threw Larrick into her company, giving Clelia every advantage that Coykendall and Norry permitted.

And so the days and the nights ran away at one another's heels, Nancy watching Larrick, who watched Norry and Coykendall, who watched each other and Clelia.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE night, after a brief piazza dance to music whanged out by an overworked phonograph, the spell of the moon upon the far reaches of the lake seemed to rebuke the flippancy of the crowd.

They stood by the railing or lounged upon it, gazing out into the spacious loveliness of the night.

The mountains and the thronged cedars made a vast black iron caldron wherein the moonlit waters simmered and worked and flashed as if all the quicksilver in the world were astir.

Clelia sniffed the air and the adventure like a cub she-wolf feeling the night calling her feet. She sighed:

"There'll not be many more such moons. I think I'll have to take a farewell spin in my canoe. Who'll come along?"

Frewin and Coykendall leaped to her side and offered themselves. Other men volunteered with less zest.

Larrick alone did not speak. He dared not vie with these others; besides, he was at the side of Nancy Fleet and still aglow from dancing with her. So Clelia said:

"I'll take the cowboy. Come along, you!"

Larrick glanced toward Nancy. She nodded carelessly with a reluctance he did not guess. He followed Clelia to the landing.

Larrick was afraid of a canoe. He placed it high among the things he dreaded. He found it far less steady than the most epileptic broncho.

But men are foolhardy when women challenge their courage, and he would rather have drowned than decline.

Clelia would not let him paddle, but made him seat himself on the floor with his back against the bow. She knelt before him like a worshiper making a strange dance of the arms for his pleasure.

She was flippant at first and called him her lazy Iroquois chief and herself his hard-working squaw. But by and by the glamour bemused her and solemnized her mood.

From the piazza the canoe was only a dark bough slowly adrift in the bright waters and soon it was concealed by the very radiance that enveloped it.

To Larrick in the canoe the camp with its lights was a village receding slowly. But Clelia's eyes were on the wilderness ahead. She was returning to the primeval, and her heart seemed to feel a deeper pagan piety than it had often known.

The wild, untamable Clelia was gone, left at home. She was as earnest as a night bird winging with long, slow pinion strokes across a lake.

There was a mystery in the very ceremony of dipping the paddle on this side and dipping it on that, again, again, again; letting the blade turn as she drew it against the boat, lifting it with its rill of silver beads rolling back to the lake, dipping it deep again.

After a long silent while they came to an outthrust headland and she turned the prow into the new bay it disclosed. She cast a farewell glance over shoulder at the faint lights of the camp. They twinkled out as the boat proceeded.

And now she and Larrick were alone, indeed, on the earth and upon the face of the waters, so alone that even a deer could not be expected to come down and drink and lift a muzzle dripping silver like the silver-dripping paddle.

The absence of every sign of a witness, human or animal, influenced the spirit of the adventure. There was a sense of exultant fear in the voyage. The water was very deep and one felt death to be crouching far below under the glittering mantle of the surface. And the opportunity was deeper still for any deep of evil or lawlessness that might urge itself upon either of them. They were suspended, as it were, in a center where there was no law, no gravity, therefore no evil and no good. Nothing was virtuous or vile or of fame or infamy. Since they were not beheld, they seemed not to be beholden. To be held is to be upheld, and, lacking

even the support of spies and eavesdroppers, they were curiously afraid.

They were in the fourth dimension morally, and utterly lost. Being lost to all the familiar landmarks of conduct, they were curiously awed without impulse in any direction.

"I'm glad you're along," said Clelia. "If you weren't, I'd be scared to death."

"What of?"

"Oh, I don't know—of the loneliness, I suppose."

"And you're not afraid of me?"

Elsewhere she would have laughed at this, but now she shook her head with a kind of wonder, and murmured:

"I haven't been. Ought I to be?"

"I hope not. I hope I hope not."

This was perilous with implications, and she made no comment.

Larrick was a bit terrified by what he had unintentionally hinted, and he said no more. He watched the long strokes of the paddle she managed with the grace of a scythe-swinging reaper, but in a different plane and rhythm.

Her arms and shoulders modulated from contour to contour of enthralling melodiousness.

She took up the paddle, swung it over, drove it into the gurgling moonlight, and pressed it home, then took it up again and swung it to the other side and dipped it in and took it up again.

Suddenly, when he had been so wrought upon by the reiterated grace that he could have cried out, she whispered, "I'm tired!" and rested, sitting back on her heels.

In spite of his fear of overturning the boat, Larrick could not resist the impulse to draw nearer to her. A kind of spiritual gravity drew them together here where there was nothing to check them. There was compulsion to companionship in that somber loneliness. Her eyes, vague and fatigued, wondered at him. She smiled, but wistfully.

With heart hammering as if he were entering battle, he put forth his hand and touched her fingers. She did not cast it away or retreat. She let him hold her little chilly palms in his. He made an excuse of chafing them warm.

He was emboldened enough now to kneel forward and try to draw her to him, but this was too much. She put him away, shaking her head without anger, but with earnestness.

"This night's too perfect to spoil it with silly spooning."

Spooning was still silly to her! It had never become beautiful or fearsome. Larrick made a sly insinuation, "Nobody can see us."

She took him up unexpectedly:

"God can. This place seems terribly full of God. And He is all eyes. And if He weren't, I'm in no mood. I hate love, anyway. I never could see the sense of it, or even the fun."

It was no place or time for argument or reason. The parley was in disaccord with the huge hush of the night.

She put the paddle back to its task.

The water tinkled like a serenading mandolin, but there was more music in Clelia's poses. The canoe glided slowly past a vast bulk of rock and shadow, then pushed into a narrows where the trees visited the edge of the water and paused as if about to wade.

Before they quite realized it Clelia and Larrick were bending to escape the low gesture of a long arm, its needles like a soft shawl depending from it.

And then they were aground with a vaulted arch of trees above them. Clelia shipped the paddle and rested. Larrick could just see her in a silhouette against deep shadow for a moment before she was absorbed by the fragrant gloom. Overhead there were flecks and shreds of light among the treetops, patches and plaques of silver on high leaves and branches. But none of the glimmer reached themselves. Where they were was blackness so deep that they could not see each other. They were not only without witnesses, they were not witnesses even of each other or of themselves.

Light, they say, is the enemy of love. Here, then, was darkness enough to befriend him utterly.

And now, strangely, with the eyes denied their offices, with the cynical, too-much seeing eyes not so much blindfolded as annulled, the rest of their senses claimed freedom, threw off restraint—like slaves on a Saturnalian holiday.

The flesh seemed to put forth antennæ. The hands groped, burning, daring. The nerves imagined and conspired.

Larrick felt for Clelia, and when he found her she seemed to be glad to be found. The canoe was so steadied by the ground it rested on that it did not rock as he rose to his knees. He drew Clelia into his arms and she made no protest.

She let him kiss her cheek very timidly, though she turned her lips from his.

When he whispered a prayer that she kiss him she shook her head, but only to be coaxed a little more. At last she kissed him—with so childish a stab of the lips that his heart ached for her and he abhorred the demands that were raging in him. He would not ask her for another kiss, though he could tell that she waited and was willing.

Then, as if she had tasted new wine for the first time, she returned to the cup. She pressed her lips to his with soft fire—moon fire. He was amazed by the unbelievable sweetness. He forgot mercy and clenched her to him, and she flung her arms about him. He felt how strong her arms were. She laughed, not with her usual laughter of ridicule or amusement, but with the cooing sob of an enamored dove.

And when he desperately crushed her close she fought him, but with no struggle of anger or escape—with rivalry in ardor. Only for a moment she vied with him, then her arms relaxed. She sank back exhausted, mazed, dizzied. Larrick was afraid she would swoon.

A fierce and untimely pity, an unwelcome pity, swept him.

He stared toward her in vain, trying to imagine the tormented beauty of her youth. She moaned and leaned against his shoulder, and now he merely tapped her arm with a brotherliness, as of consolation in grief.

He would have thought it sacrilege to believe her disappointed or baffled by his change of mood.

Perhaps she was. There is an instinct of surrender as old as womankind, and here among these vastly ancient mountains in this old night conscience was a parvenu, a meddler, a Puritan. But Larrick could not help it. The instinct of protecting one who was conquered was stronger, if younger,

than any savage impulse. He was as helpless to despoil as Clelia to defend. Perhaps if he had pressed her further she would have recoiled and revolted in horror of his profaning approach. But now she was his.

But he was very sorrowful in the victory of his better self over his wilder self.

Strange how every phase of temptation seems to have been emphasized except its pathos.

The fire and the fascination, the danger and the evil, have been incessantly described, but who has told of the pitifulness of two souls terrified by their own and each other's bodies, making an anguish of their rapture, trying to decide, to remember, to foresee, to be good, to be glad, to let their senses sing, to rejoice in ecstasy while ecstasy exists, and yet to cling to honesty and to save themselves and each the other from despair.

Between a bright heaven and a black hell they swing in agony. And their wretchedness is greater than their delight.

Larrick was unutterably miserable in his triumph. The girl that had mocked him was his victim, and he could not accept her. He held her in mute woe till at last she resumed the mastery of herself. Then, whether in anger at him or at herself, she threw his arm aside, caught up the paddle, and with some difficulty got the canoe off the bar and into the water again.

The prow moved slowly from the dark into the gleaming world again, into an almost high noon of radiance.

Clelia drove the canoe across the lake with fierce haste and with a wrath that Larrick dared not offend with words. The mountains and the forests made no comment, yet seemed to regret the wasted opportunity for wickedness, the unpardonable neglect to sin when the time was perfect.

Yet Clelia's anger could not last in that enchanted scene. And by and by her mood grew dreamier, her rhythm musical once more.

As they rounded the point that revealed the camp again and showed them that the world and its people waited for them, wondering and imagining, perhaps, Clelia mumbled very humbly:

"I'm terribly grateful."

"For what?" he barely whispered.

But she did not answer him.

She seemed to be so happy that she could face the eyes of inquisitors without guilt that she laughed with a redeemed girlishness and flicked a little glistening spray from the paddle over the solemn Larrick.

But he did not laugh. He was not sure how glad he was, if glad at all. Manlike, he was doomed to feel a certain shame for failing to play the satyr or at least the faun; for letting the nymph escape unscathed.

He had owned Clelia for a moment and had let her go—for the moment that was to be forever.

Perhaps he was the only man that ever gave her a glimpse of passion, that "sorrowful Paradise, that sweet hell."

The canoe glided on the sand at the landing place and Larrick, stepping out cautiously, offered his hand to Clelia, helped her ashore, and drew the canoe high and dry.

He turned to find Norry Frewin waiting.

Clelia walked past Norry with her familiar haughty indifference and her contempt for explanations. She went on up to the house, but Norry seized Larrick by the shoulders and in a frenzy shook him and snarled.

Larrick started up and stared. It was not Norry who shook him, but Randel, the sculptor. They were not standing by the lake's edge in the moonlight. Larrick was in a chair and Randel was bending over him, whispering:

"Wake up. Don't make a noise. But come along quietly."

Larrick dashed his hand across his eyes. He was in the living room of the Big House. At his elbow was a window patterned with a lace of frost, delicately pink with auroral light.

Outside, the snow was everywhere, but ruddy. The air was throbbing with the daybreak. In a shaft of ice stood Clelia, her hands at prayer, still at prayer. But a rosy glow quickened her flesh with the magic of young blood hastening, rejoicing.

Book V

THE ARTISTS AND THE LAW

THE ARTISTS AND THE LAW

CHAPTER I

STILL a little dizzy from the impetus of his dream, Larrick felt the earth swim beneath him as he set feet again on the solid ground.

During a night he had cruised about his whole past life with the speed and silence of the Flying Dutchman. And now he had crashed into the shore and he must walk the land upon sea legs giddily.

His body was tingling with the inaction of his long trance in the chair by the window. His mind was atingle, like "feet asleep," and thought was an anguish he could not shake off.

The shock was like a hammer smash. Randel had hurled him almost from the arms of Clelia, alive in memory, and as his eyes made out the world darkling in the slow sunrise he descried through the window Clelia dead and embalmed in crystal, still standing at prayer, all life arrested, stock-still as if a voice had cried, Halt!

Larrick stared at her as Lot might have stood marveling at his wife, one moment a woman who ran with reverted gaze, and the next moment a pillar of salt.

It had been Larrick's demand in the far ago of yesterday afternoon that the sculptor Randel and the painter Burnley should combine their arts in a monument of Clelia's graces. Between then and now Larrick had wandered so wide in reverie and dream that he had forgotten the day before in the fog of the weeks and months before.

Randel had to remind him of it all as he led him from the cold house where the fire had died into the terrifying cold of the outdoors where the winter was at full rigor.

Randel could speak here with less risk of waking the other members of the household, whose interference he wished to avoid. He muttered to Larrick, his breath like white smoke in the frosty air:

"Don't you remember? You wanted a statue or something made of poor little Clelia? Well, I've decided to make one and I need your help."

Larrick's teeth were chattering with the cold less than with the dread of Clelia's ice-sheeted ghost standing before him. Randel mumbled on:

"I'll do my best to preserve her memory—the memory of her body. If the people in there find it out they'll try to stop me. They'll sleep for some time yet, I hope. There's another reason for hurry. When the guide gets back he'll probably bring a sheriff or a coroner or some horrible meddler along to prevent us or to drive me mad with questions.

"For all I know, I may be committing some crime in doing this, but I'm going through with it if I have to spend the rest of my life in the penitentiary. If you are afraid to be involved, go on back."

"I don't know just what you're thinking of," said Larrick, "but I'm not afraid of anybody or anything except losing Clelia."

The sculptor explained:

"I'm going to take a cast of Clelia just as she is."

"How?"

"Help me and you'll see. You've heard of life masks and death masks."

"I've heard of 'em, but I've never seen one."

"Well, you'll see one now unlike anything else that ever was, I imagine. I'm going to make a death mask—you could almost say a life mask—of Clelia's whole body. I may not live long myself, but if I can bequeath this to the only child I'll ever have—posterity—what does anything else matter? We artists are like the insects that Fabre tells about; we have one supreme instinct—to sacrifice ourselves to the future. We are always committing what you might call productive suicide. But we mustn't waste time here. We've got to move this block of ice over to my studio hut, and it's not going to be easy."

In one of the many little cabins about the camp Randel had improvised an atelier. Planning to spend the winter

in the Adirondacks for his lungs' sake, he had arranged to keep busy for his soul's sake. He had shipped up the equipment of sculpture, tools for coercing clay, wax and marble and oiled clay, wax and a little marble to be coerced, materials for armatures and for molds, plaster of Paris and gelatine. He wanted to be able to make casts of his work for preservation and future use.

He studied the ice inclosing the statue he would release, as quarried marble envelops the occult form the sculptor divines within.

Randel mused aloud, professionally aloof from every consideration but the artistic:

"Somebody said that sculpture was an easy art because all you have to do is to take a block of marble and break off what you don't want. That's the case here, except that we've got to get rid of that ice very carefully. If we try to knock it or chop it off we may break away a piece so big that it might carry with it a fragment of our statue; for the poor child is ice herself now, and—"

Larrick did not need to cry, "Stop!" His whole frame quivered from an assault of intolerable imagination. Randel forbore to put words to the horror, and nodded to Larrick to lay hold of the burden.

Larrick was in all the anguish of the first dawn after a death—that fearful, ruthless awakening of gigantic beauty and industry carrying forward the wheel of the world that has flung off a beloved life. But any activity was welcome as an escape from taking his grief lying down.

The ice was hard to manage. It burned and stuck to the bare hands. When they put on gloves its weight taxed their skill.

But somehow, with awkward tugging and shoving, they lowered it to the horizontal, and pushed it from the porch, then slid it across the snow. It broke through the crust at times, and the lifting of it was a grievous toil.

It was hard for Larrick to master his own revulsion against such profanation. He felt like an uncouth baggageman mauling a casketed saint.

The ice was a huge prism; at every turn it flashed new

colors, quivered with tremulous liquors of strange tints that transformed Clelia eerily.

A troublesome obstacle intervened at the door of Randel's hut, a granite boulder set there for ornament. It was necessary now to hoist the shaft erect again and work it round from corner to corner. At the crucial moment Randel slipped and fell. He would have dragged the column down upon him if Larrick had not hugged it and flung himself back.

His feet slid, too, and the shaft lurched and toppled to one side against the sharp edges of the boulder. Larrick tried to break the fall with his own body, but great splinters of ice split and crackled, and a long mass fell from between his arms. When he caught hold anew he found that one of his hands embraced one of Clelia's shoulders.

Through his glove he could feel first the apple roundness, but then the awful unyieldingness and the hideous cold. He remembered again the terrible words he had read in Parkman's description of the frozen Indian, "with tooth and claw the famished wildcat strives in vain to pierce the frigid marble of his limbs."

Only a few nights ago he had felt that shoulder of Clelia's in his palm. He remembered now the mellowness of it, the warmth, the supple strength, the motion of the muscles gliding a little beneath the skin. And now—he clasped granite. He wavered and would have fallen if Randel had not scrambled to his feet and caught the shaft and steadied it, and Larrick with it, until Larrick could regain his balance and compel his soul to the repose it needed.

The sculptor's training, his experience, and his ideals had given him something of the apathy of a surgeon who can and must suppress sympathy and, with an academic loftiness, wield inhumanity for humanity's sake.

But Larrick was like the lover, the husband who sees his beloved going to the operating room and has no drug of habit to deaden his prophetic torment.

CHAPTER II

LARRICK was rather a hindrance than a help to Randel, but at length they brought the shaft inside the cabin and closed the door upon the mystery.

Now Larrick felt like a peasant in the laboratory of an alchemist, a wizard's den full of strange machineries for necromantic purposes.

Randel made a page of him, commanding him sharply to do this or that, fetch this or that, lend a hand or get out of the way.

He was revolted almost to flight or to forcible prevention by the grewsomeness of the work and the harrowing familiarity that Randel observed in taking the cast of every portion of Clelia's body, which was hardly so much covered as emphasized by the silken gown about it. The fact that he kept the figure standing enforced the thought that Clelia must somehow be aware of all that was done.

At times Larrick wanted to beat Randel down as a kind of ghoulish degenerate, a slave buyer fondling a shackled virgin and committing sacrilege upon her sacred flesh.

He was restrained by the counterhorror of burying away in the earth such beauty without a memorial of it. This seemed a more wanton deed. Randel was robbing the grave, indeed, but only of the beauty that it would not prize or preserve.

So Larrick attended the sculptor as his raw apprentice.

First, there was the ice to remove. This was done with small chisels, carefully directed by the dexterousness of a sculptor. Larrick carried the broken ice to the door and flung it away.

Randel released only the face and shoulders at first, till Clelia was like a bust of herself upon a pedestal. The hair that floated, as it were, in the ice was a problem, but Randel

freed only the front of it, brushing away the dust of ice with care.

In the meanwhile he had filled a box with plaster of Paris, wetted it down, and stirred it till it was like thick cream. He lifted out a double handful of this and, approaching Clelia, suddenly spread it, blotting her face from sight in a white blur.

Larrick cried out at this and his fist clenched to strike even as his knees gave way beneath him. Randel, walking back to the box for more plaster, growled:

"If you're going to be a sick fool, go on away and don't bother me."

He took pity on the uninitiated weakling and said, largely to lash his own reluctant faculties to their supreme opportunity:

"I've done this to living people and it didn't hurt them. I oiled their skin a little to save them pain when the plaster was taken off, and I put quills in their nostrils so that they could breathe. But I didn't hurt them, and I won't hurt Clelia."

When Larrick had forced back his qualms he said:

"But that scar in her forehead, the wound scar—what of that? You may change it so that the weapon that killed her can't be identified."

"The plaster will keep a perfect record," said Randel. "It is marvelous what it will do. If you should write on a piece of paper with the end of a match so that the eye could not read your words I could take a plaster cast of the writing and get a visible record of it. The fingerprints, the finest, tiniest wrinkles, will be caught by the plaster.

"I took a cast of a pair of clasped hands once, and you could see the little lift one muscle gave another in their pressure. It's marvelous! We could take this cast into court."

Under Randel's manipulation the exquisite features of Clelia were soon lost deep in a thick, white, flat rind. He glanced at his watch and said to Larrick:

"Make a note of the time. Remind me when fifteen minutes have passed. It will take that long for each bit to

set. I'm taking the face in a single mold, you see. Now I'll do the throat and then the shoulders and then the hair in front."

With Clelia's face masked, Larrick felt a little less repugnance, and by and by a fascination. Randel asked him if he had read Benvenuto Cellini's thrilling account of how he made the sectional molds for his statue of Perseus and poured into them the molten bronze.

Larrick shook his head.

"I'm doing just the opposite." Randel sighed. "Poor little Clelia was burning alive the other day. She was the molten bronze leaping and flaming, and now— Strange and pitiful! To think that if Clelia were a trout and had been frozen in the ice we could melt the ice and the fish would swim away, as alive as ever. But our precious Clelia can never be recalled again. Some day in the future the scientists may master the problem, but it will be too late for this little girl. O God! she was so alive, so glorious, but she's beyond us somewhere.

"All I'm taking is her outline—her thousand and one contours and planes and curves. All I shall have will be the shell of her, and not even that—just the figure of her—her displacement in the air or in the water that she loved so well.

"The equator is very real, yet it is only an imaginary line. Geometrically, a plane or a surface has only two dimensions, length and width, and no depth at all. So Clelia's form is only an invisible sheath. When she was alive it was an elastic sheath, finer than any satin. Yet that was what we knew her by.

"How could we know her in heaven if she lost that envelope? Yet, why should she have nostrils and lips and eyelids and hair and shoulders and breasts and loins and legs in heaven? She would have no air to breathe, no food to eat, no children to bear or to suckle, no errands to run, nothing earthly to do, would she?"

"I don't know," was Larrick's humble answer, and he humbled Randel with it.

"Neither do I," said Randel, "but it's a strange thing. A sculptor would swear that only a godlike sculptor could

have modeled the human form, yet science tells us that it was evolved in thousands of centuries, and we share all our elements with the animals in some degree.

"It takes so little to make a woman beautiful or to make her ugly, but, oh, the difference to me!—and to her!—and to history!"

As he wandered on, his mind purposeless and roving, his hands deft and positive, he made strange divisions in the soft plaster with one of his modeling tools, keeping one mold cleanly separated from another and making little nobs that he called keys.

After he had obliterated the visage, the throat, and the shoulders, and built up a white miter against Clelia's hair, he began to break the ice away, down to her waist. He exercised the utmost care not to disarrange the folds of the silken nightgown. He pondered aloud, talking to keep his rebellious emotions in discipline. His language was a little exalted, as always when he talked of art.

"What beautiful things folds and wrinkles are in drapery! Some of the fool Puritans think that nakedness is more wicked than concealment, but it's the imagination that furnishes the evil thought, not the revelation. Look at those silken ridges that cluster round her little breast. They are like the work of a skillful draftsman. They have a caressing touch. They are italics emphasizing the important words in a sentence.

"This statue of Clelia will be a miracle of drapery; it will be multitudinous with countless fine wrinkles, like the drapery of the little bas-reliefs of the young Victory girls on the temple of the Nike Apteros in Athens. You never saw them, I suppose. They're beyond all praise. But this will be beyond them. It will be beyond anything that was ever done, for beauty."

He shook tears of pity from his eyes and reminded himself of his official duty to beauty, his priestcraft. He built a thick breastplate of plaster along the girl's whole torse. Where her bosom was revealed by the open nightgown he laid on the plaster with a heavy hand. Where the silk intervened he first powdered the delicate surface with a

fine spray, flicking it from his fingers cautiously until the slightest elevations of the fabric were covered, then working more broadly.

With a sculptor's habit and lore his hands followed the curves of the muscles, whose names and offices he knew, sweeping down the varied planes of the chest, swathing the breasts with spherical gestures.

Larrick forgot to watch the hour, but Randel's schooled fingers told him when the plaster, still damp, but firm, was hardened enough to be removed.

Suddenly, to Larrick's astonishment, he lifted a white mass from Clelia's face, revealing her to them and them to her again, for, though her eyes were hidden under their arched lids, there seemed to be vision within. Larrick trembled, and the deeds that had fascinated him by their technic when her face was veiled became once more something frightful and shameless.

He recoiled from the first mold when Randel held it before him. It was a deep intaglio of a face, the very inversion of Clelia's exquisite mien, a confusion of hollows where her features had advanced.

Randel set this mold on the floor of the cabin in a corner and went back to his labor. He covered the praying hands that had protruded for a while from the blanket of plaster. He made three molds for the hands, and poured plaster down between the palms, then wrapped them as if in big mittens.

After a little study Randel broke the ice away from Clelia's entire back.

"I'll make only one mold here, I think," he said, and with great caution flicked the plaster again upon the wrinkles and covered them all from where the gown began across the shoulder blades down to the waist and the small of the back and the V at the base of the spine and the exquisite nether contours forming rounded eaves above the spring of the thighs.

Larrick neither watched nor listened. He was piling wood on the fire. Like one of Noah's better sons, he kept his eyes averted while Randel, who had the priestly franchise of the artist, completed this mold and, later, tore away the trans-

parent girdle of ice and girded the awesome fruitless loins of Clelia in plaster.

There were some fifteen molds in all to be built, and each as it was removed was laid in the corner. The molds of the hair alone failed to satisfy Randel. He made one of the back of the head and the hair above it. He pointed out to Larrick, or at least informed him, for he would not look, that each of the infinitesimal loose tendrils of hair was drawn free without difficulty, leaving a minute tube or twisted canal in the plaster. But he would have to work over the whole flame of her floating tresses, for, he explained, hair is one of the unconquerable problems of sculpture.

He knelt to make molds like greaves for the knees and shins. It was all miracle to Larrick, and when he could shake off the sense of immodesty, of sacrilege, and dread, he was glad to be the stoker who kept the plaster of Paris stirring, fetched and carried the tools, got sworn at or thanked, and toted the wood from the woodpile to the furnace in the chimney.

The wood was withindoors. Several days before the blizzard had come Randel had instructed Jeffers, the guide, to pile at least a cord of fuel against the side wall of the cabin. Randel had never foreseen his present unheard-of task, but he had wanted to be kept warm at his work and to be saved from carrying in snow-incrusted, frozen wood from the outside when the frenzy was on him. Nor when the frenzy was on him did he like to call in a servant or permit anyone to invade his presence. For an artist in the throes of creation is like a bridegroom, and what is holy in the embrace of the Muse becomes obscene before alien eyes.

Randel did not object to Larrick's presence now, for the man was like a child in his innocence of art. And his very horror of the procedure gave it an enthralling excitement, a wizardry.

The fire itself seemed to Larrick part of the diabolic magic, and it was gluttonous for the pine that bled resin and shrieked as it was bitten by the flames and sent up in crimson ribbons of beauty and terror.

Randel had kept the form of Clelia as far as possible

from the fire lest it melt the ice too quickly. Only his zeal could have held him to the task, only his consecration to the capture of fugitive grace and its imprisonment in a shelter from oblivion. He loved Clelia and loved her the more the more he persisted in this epithalamial intimacy. Again and again he had to wrestle down a ferocious impulse to slay himself or to run away from his deed. The occasion was unique and fleetingly brief. Once he yielded to a cowardice of chivalry the chance would be gone forever. Respect for Clelia's modesty would be a shameful indifference in him to the high respect for her angelic beauty. So he forced himself to sacrifice her to the everlastingness of her own grace.

But from time to time the sculptor, whose blood was thin and whose fingers turned to ice in their icy labor, had to borrow warmth for his livid hands and for his shuddering soul at the billows of warmth rolling invisibly from the flames that battered upon the logs, destroying the things that gave them birth, like devastating children eating up their own parents; like wastrels; like the world gone mad in the war and its aftermath still burning up its own hopes.

Once Randel said, as he held his hands out to the fire: "Is anything more beautiful or more shapely than a flame? Yet what is it? Oxygen combines with fuel, and flames result, but they come from nowhere and go nowhere and are nothing but a passing condition. Yet each flame, like a wave in the sea, seems to have an individuality. People go through the world like that. Their souls agitate a certain amount of matter as flames do wood, then the souls are no longer there, and the wood is ashes.

"How many beautiful women have set the world on fire! And where are they now? Where will those wonderful girls and great men go who are burning up the clay now in the world? If it were not for this statue we are making, Clelia would be as lost as that blaze leaping up there now. See how fierce and lithe and rapturous it is. But now where is it? Clelia was a flame, but she shall not altogether die."

This frenzy warmed him and he returned to his labor reassured. At length the last of the casts was made and Clelia's little feet were bared again from the plaster buskins

Randel had built about them with a more perfect fit than the most careful shoemaker ever achieved.

And now it was permitted that the girl should rest. She had stood erect so long that it seemed she must be tired, though she had lost the pleasant gift of weariness along with all the other earthly privileges.

It was fitting that the bride should rest who had waited so patiently for her white robes to be patterned and tried on. There was no bed, no divan in the studio. The only long, level place for her repose was the pile of wood.

Randel upheld her in shivering arms while Larrick flung across the logs a number of rugs and a few old tapestries Randel had brought along to hang upon the rough walls. Larrick spread a couch with them, lovingly as a father preparing a bed for his slain daughter. And there they lifted and laid her.

She looked a recumbent marble effigy on a catafalque. They worshiped her sorrowfully a moment, then drew the covers over her as if to keep her warm and let her sleep at peace.

CHAPTER III

AND so at last and at last the work was done. In the far corner of the cabin stood a huddle of plaster blocks, shapeless themselves, as if a pile of loose rubble had rolled from a hillside. Yet in them, strangely shredded and divided, was all the form of Clelia's beauty in its mystic integrity, as the world and the moons, the stars, the suns and the suns of suns, and many a cosmos made up of lesser cosmoi, and the universe combined of countless interlocking universes, were all contained in old Chaos, who fathered Time and Order.

Rubble fallen from a hillside could be heaped into a new hillside. The catastrophes of earthquakes and the cannonades of volcanoes and the slow squeeze of oceanic pressure had built up long sierras, billowy foothills, and peaks where the snows found an eternal home.

Distance and the blurred eyes of men called these accidents "landscapes" and admired them, revered them, loved and fought for them; imagining intentional form where there was only fortuity, seeing a god reclining on a crag, finding his hammer mark in a valley, exacting an awe of beauty from the spill of a broken river over a high ledge, discovering a sinuous nymph in a brook, a dryad in an oak.

Poetry grew up thence, and prayer, superstition and altars, sacrifice and self-sacrifice, patriotism and love of home, science and fabulous religions, encyclopedias and grammars, and the strange madresses we call the arts.

Randel stood looking at the disarray of casts and, with a restoring cigarette poised in his hand like an added lean and lighted finger, pointed to his work and mused upon it.

"Odd thing, Larrick. Our dear little girl's beauty is all there in that litter of ugly chunks. Her body is like a picture puzzle shuffled up, but the matrices are there. We

can put it together again. Her form is all turned inside out in the molds. Wherever there was convexity in her pretty body there is concavity in the mold. But the molds will give her back to us. They will give her back as endlessly as a mirror would give back her reflection. We could make a thousand statues of her. A colonnade of her statues, an army of caryatids supporting a long, long architrave—all those are there in that pile of rubbish."

Almost unconsciously they withdrew from the cabin and closed the door upon the deed that had exhausted them both, a revolting obligation performed faithfully, but with agony and remorse at its necessity.

The sun was up now, and its rays played upon them with a kindliness they needed. They felt hardly able to leave the cabin with no guard for Clelia, and they loitered at the door, irresolute.

To clear his heart of its sickness, Randel fell to shop talk, as any man will who seeks an escape from unbearable experience. Larrick stood and listened perforce for lack of strength to move away.

"Seeing those molds there," Randel said, "gave me an idea at least of what the Cubists were trying to do. I don't think they quite understood it themselves; and I never did till now. The first exhibition of theirs I saw made me vomit. I hurried home and was seasick—literally. But the poor fools had an idea. It wasn't the idea of us other poor fools, so we spewed on it, as usual. But they were groping, as we all are.

"We're all blind men groping round the elephant and finding different things and seeing different analogies and calling one another liars, as we all are and are not.

"I mean to say, those blocks in there contain Clelia's form all distorted. Maybe the Cubists were trying to go the other way to find beauty. Where we tried to express the curve, they tried to show the straight line that subtended it. Where we tried to represent a waving contour, they went right to the destination it meandered toward. Instead of blocking out the curves in squares in order to make sure of the curves, as we do, then rubbing out the

block lines, the Cubists used the curves to find the blocks and rubbed out the contour. They looked for the strong square that implies the dainty ripples, the big idea in the pretty.

"It's the details that choke art to death. The art of painting a forest is in omitting the leaves. In moving pictures they're using gauze screens and throwing things out of focus so as to hide the distracting, maddening details that are too many for us. The Cubists were trying to do that, too, maybe.

"Anyway, we have Clelia there. This is, indeed, a day's work."

Larrick was ashamed to be unable to grasp the foreign language Randel spoke. His life in the desert had been artless almost altogether. He had read little fiction, seen few plays, no paintings or architecture worth mentioning, no important music. He had patronized only one art, and that so new an art that most of the critics were still pluming themselves on despising it—the moving picture. He took thence a little weapon in self-defense against Randel's high superiority.

"There's a terrible trouble, though," he interrupted. "You have Clelia's form in there, you say; but it can't move. It's frozen fast. You've taken the ice from her poor body, but you can never take it from your statue.

"So it will never be Clelia, for Clelia was always on the move. Never was there anybody who was so restless and so limber and so— Why, she was like quicksilver!

"Your statue will show her in one position with her eyes shut and her hands praying to the beast that killed her. But nobody ever saw Clelia like that—except one man, the man we've got to find.

"Why don't you make a thousand statues of her—running, dancing, diving, swimming, riding a horse over a stone fence, laughing, shooting craps, poking fun at everybody, paddling a canoe? Why don't you make a statue that can move?—not a doll with hinges for joints, but like Clelia when she was Clelia. Why don't you do that? Then you'd have a real monument! Then you could say you really had saved Clelia's beauty, for half her beauty was her speed."

Randel smiled indulgently. "I'm not God, my boy, and I can't do the impossible."

"They said moving photographs were impossible once," Larrick persisted. "Why doesn't somebody invent statues that move?"

"Why not, indeed? It would be a noble invention. And it may come, who knows? But one thing is sure—if moving statuary is ever devised the first men who practice it will be treated by the critics as if they were the vilest scoundrels.

"The critics always receive the pioneer the way the Indians did. He comes to redeem the wilderness and make the desert bloom, and he gets arrows and tomahawks and scalping knives for his welcome. It was so with the first rhymed poems, then the blank verse, the free verse, the first novels, the first unrhymed plays, the first everything. Look at your moving pictures. The critics who had been tearing the painters and sculptors and playwrights and authors to pieces for various reasons all turned to rend the moving-picture makers for every reason, but really for the one reason that the art was new.

"Take that figure of Clelia that we have made. If it is ever exhibited it will be met with a storm of abuse. Nobody will give me any credit for it—or you, whose idea it was. And why not? First, because it is unexpected, therefore unpardonable. Next, because I didn't do the work free-handedly. What hopeless fools the critics are! Of course we are all critics and all fools. But what poor damned fools we all are, all of us trying to keep from admiring too many things.

"We all think that the less we like the wiser we are! The critic who despises the most of the works of God and man is the one who calls himself the most learned. As a matter of fact, of course, he is the least learned, the narrowest, self-denyingest, blind fool of the lot. How beautiful Clelia was!—is!—how beautiful she shall be forever—thanks to us. And yet they won't give her image the name of art. Art! What a word of abuse and misuse and insanity!"

He reverted to old quarrels with other artists and critics, and with the vanity of vanities, criticism in general. He

was indifferent to the fact that in criticizing criticism he was himself as vain and sympathetic as the critics he reviled.

But, as usual, it was the fervor of love that engendered hate. The fanatic of one school always hates the fanatic of another, and yet it is but a jealousy, a rivalry of lovers vaunting their beautiful mistresses. There are so many beautiful mistresses, but they fade and die and pass from knowledge or praise. The great thing is to save a few of the charms of a few of them from oblivion somehow. The big thing, the divine thing is the permanent record of some grace, no matter what the dialect, the form, the medium.

His talk meant little to Larrick, who was blissfully ignorant of the caldrons of vitriol that are always bubbling and squeaking in the various realms of art for the blistering of everybody; vitriol for the conservatives to throw at the radicals; vitriol for the radicals to throw back; vitriol for the realists and romanticists to exchange; vitriol for the new school that shall become old, to cast upon the old that once was new.

"The critics are always wrong, always were, always will be," Randel cried. "After all, why isn't this statue of Clelia art—a kind of original work? Most of the great sculptors have taken accurate and minute measurements of their models with tapes and calipers and merely transferred them to the clay. Some eminent men have been accused of taking just such casts of living models as I am doing now. They denied it, but why shouldn't they do it? The best of them hired living models to pose for them in the exact postures, and they had their first clay drafts pointed up into blocks of marble and brought close to completion by hired stonecutters. They put the last touches on them, of course, but what did that prove? Sculpture is the art of arts, yet a sculptor's studio is more like a factory than any other.

"Sometimes a sculptor amuses himself by carving a statue out of marble—or, rather, into the marble—with his own chisels; but the result isn't often of much value. Its like an improvisation by a pianist or a sketch by a draftsman or an after-dinner speech by an orator. It is only a byplay.

"What poppycock it is, anyway, to make so much fuss about how or where an artist gets his results. The results are what count. Shakespeare used old plays or best-seller novels for his immortal works. Dickens used people he saw in the street and phrases he overheard in the street. I was reading that Poe had half a dozen friends help him compile 'The Raven,' and that is poetry if ever there was poetry. Molière said, '*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve,*' and he certainly was an artist. The work's the thing; the process is nobody's business. Old prudes thought they had destroyed a man's claim to genius if they could hint that he had used a camera. Well, what if he did? The only crime is in letting the critics scare you out of getting the best result.

"The one great thing is that we have given to the world a perfect form in its perfection, truth in its truth. What does it matter whether they call us artists or molders or vandals? Then we must always remember that sculpture itself was once an accursed and forbidden art. The human form being in God's likeness was not to be made into images. For several hundred years it was against the Christian law.

"'Vandals' is the word a lot of good people will call us when they find out what we have done. Clelia's mother and father will want to kill me, probably, as an obscene monster.

"Perhaps it would be wiser not to tell anyone what we have done until the time is ripe. As I said before, it may be a prison offense. A thousand detectives, though, might look at those molds and never suspect what they contain. Still, for the present, I think we had best not mention the matter."

Larrick said: "If there's any trouble I'll take the blame. It was my idea."

Randel put his hand on Larrick's shoulder. "That's like you, to claim nothing but the penalty. But the blame must go with the glory. The demand was yours, but I supplied it. After all, what have we stolen but the impress of Clelia's form?

"And what is form? What is anything without it?

We have taken Clelia's form and left it with her. We have robbed nobody, yet we have enriched the world. I'd be glad to go to jail for such a divine crime. The judge could only sentence me to immortality, and what wouldn't I sacrifice for that? Still, we'd best keep our secret while we may."

The roving discourse had rested them somewhat from raw fact. They were exhausted with theory and were drawn irresistibly back to the cabin.

And now Clelia lay before them, no longer a splendor of grace in a shroud of glass, but a poor little girl that was no longer to be spoken to or listened to. She was there before them, yet she was inconceivably absent.

Larrick clutched at Randel's shoulder for support and cried:

"I can't have her dead, Randel. I won't have Clelia dead. I don't want to live in a world where so sweet a flower can be so—" As his grief throttled him the door opened and Nancy Fleet stepped in.

CHAPTER IV

LARRICK had been so absorbed in the thought of womanly form in ice or marble immobile eternally that his first surprise when Nancy Fleet appeared, quick, anxious, alert, was at the miracle of her being alive at all, being able to move, step, speak, lift her hand, her eyelids, be curious about anything human.

He had almost come to think in these few hours in this lonely, snow-smothered camp that womankind had ended with Clelia. Yet another woman stood on the threshold, as keen and beautiful and capable of joy and pain as if Clelia had never died. Life was going on, people were going about in spite of this tragedy that ought to have stopped the world.

Larrick had a flash of untimely memory: once when a great railroad official had died all the trains on his road stopped for one minute during the funeral ceremony. Larrick had been riding on one of the trains. He remembered the strange mood of that moment's pause because a successful magnate was dead. It seemed to him now that the people of all the world ought to pay at least a thought to the honor of the passing of a beautiful girl who had never been a wife or a mother, had never given origin to that innumerable posterity every woman holds enwombed within her. If she had lived she would have given life to far more souls than any magnate ever gave a livelihood to. But there would be few to know that she had gone, or to care.

Nancy Fleet, peering into the cabin, was a little blinded from the glitter of the snow outside, and saw only the two men standing together. She gasped, "Did you know that Clelia had vanished?"

"Yes," said Randel. "We brought her here."

"Thank God!" Nancy gasped, and, slipping into the cabin,

dropped to the first chair. "I slept like a log all night, I'm ashamed to say. When I woke up I felt a criminal. I dressed as fast as I could and hurried out. I almost fainted when I saw the ice shaft gone. I traced it here by the marks in the snow and I traced the footprints here, and— But where is it now?"

Her scurrying glance made out the disorder, the plaster dust, the bits of ice about the floor, the white streaks on Randel's boots and clothes. She caught the shadow of guilt in the manners of both men, and she leaped to her feet with an instinct of horror, gasping:

"What in God's name have you done with Clelia?"

Randel saw that the secret was already at the mercy of the first comer. He frowned and pointed to the figure shrouded on the wood.

Nancy took a step forward, then fell back and confronted Randel again:

"You've taken the ice from her! But how did you dare? And all this plaster, this—those things on the floor. They're molds, aren't they? Randel! You haven't— You didn't— You did— You would— You're merciless in your art. And Mr. Larrick helped you. Why did you drag him into this—this blasphemy?"

Randel wavered for a reply between shame and pride, but Larrick broke in:

"It was my idea, Nancy. Mr. Randel only carried it out."

There was a womanly, almost a motherly, fanaticism in Nancy's panic for Larrick's welfare.

"But what on earth were you thinking of? The risk you ran is frightful. The police will ask what you were trying to conceal. They are coming now. I saw from the porch on the mountain road Jeffers's sleigh and two or three others breaking their way through the snow. They'll be here in a few minutes, and they'll ask a thousand questions. Oh, why—oh, why couldn't you have let her alone?"

Larrick, marveling at Nancy's concern for him, felt it cruelly impossible to tell her that he had been infatuated with Clelia's beauty and that he preferred any profanation to its loss. He could not bludgeon her so.

And now Randel came to his rescue. He took Nancy's hands in his and said:

"Larrick's only share of the blame is this: he said yesterday that it seemed a pity there was no portrait of Clelia. She was like a statue, and he thought there ought to be a statue of her. I worried about it nearly all night, and this morning I woke him and asked him to help me take a cast of her pretty body. That is what we have done."

Nancy shuddered. "Oh, I can understand you. You would sacrifice anything to your sculpture. But you hadn't Clelia's consent, or her father's, or Mrs. Roantree's, or the law's consent. It would have been terrible enough if Clelia had simply died, but the poor child belongs to the police now. And what won't they imagine? And the newspapers, what won't they do with it? They'll make you famous at last, Randel!"

"Infamous," he groaned. "But art has its martyrs no less than religion, Nancy. Painters and sculptors and playwrights and novelists have been persecuted and jailed and covered with shame when they were simply letting their light shine in the dark world. It was always so, and I'll take my medicine, whatever it is. My heart is as pure as Savonarola's or Saint Cecilia's, and my religion as sincere. But at all costs we must not let the law rob us of this work of art. Clelia's body belongs to her parents and to the law and then to the grave, but her beauty belongs to the ages, and I thank God we've saved it. I count on you to help us."

Nancy nodded. "You're dragging me in as an accomplice. Oh, well, I always was a fool. I'll do what I can." She turned on Larrick a look of meek understanding and humility before Clelia's power over him. Then she set her wits to work on a conspiracy against the curiosity of the world. As she meditated fiercely Randel said:

"Perhaps we'd better take Clelia back to the house."

"No," said Nancy, "they'd trace the marks of the dragging of the ice here, and your footprints, as I did. Let's take the plaster molds and hide them somewhere—in the snow, perhaps."

Randel shook his head. "No, they're still wet; they'd freeze and crack and be distorted."

"Then take them to my room and cover them with blankets," Nancy said. "We must hurry before Mrs. Roantree comes out."

And this they did. Nancy's room was in a corner at a distance from Mrs. Roantree's. They carried the casts to her window and she lifted them in and piled them in a closet.

They had made the last of the journeys just before Jeffers and his convoy drove in, their faces and clothes snow matted by the long, plunging combat with the snow-filled roads.

In fact, Nancy had been inspired to set Berthe, the maid, to the task of preparing a great quantity of coffee. And she herself was buttering biscuits and preparing the best breakfast she could from such supplies as had been stored in the larder.

The invaders from the other side of the storm were so needful of coffee that they regarded the household with the kindest prejudice. And when Mrs. Roantree appeared like a belated queen to take command, and brought forth a supply of whisky, the sheriff and his company felt rather like waifs rescued than like avenging officers.

Besides, Jeffers and Kemp had told them enough to relieve anyone in the camp of suspicion. Jeffers had not meant to bring along so many outsiders. But, as he explained to Mrs. Roantree, the station agent, who took and sent the telegrams Mrs. Roantree had written to apprise Clelia's mother and father of the tragedy, had said that the sheriff must be told. The undertaker, whom Jeffers visited for the coffin, would not keep the secret.

Before Jeffers could get out of the village the sheriff had stopped him. And the local newspaper man, correspondent of a press bureau, had listened to all the sheriff's questions and Jeffers' answers. This man had hastened to send a long dispatch to the newspapers.

Clelia's name was now, no doubt, being set up in the biggest type in thousands of offices. Her story regarded in

every version was no doubt being sold to millions of eager shoppers for sensation.

Mrs. Roantree turned on the newspaper correspondent, Ira Madsen, in a fury of horror. The young man had hitherto been known to her as a village news-terrier, very grateful for any crumbs, or "society items," as he called them, that she would brush from her table about her distinguished visitors. But now he had a dignity of a new sort.

He answered her without homage. The reporter is the one autocrat left who fears no one and is feared by everyone. He spoke of his duty.

And indeed he had his own religion, the news. He was as sincere in it and as ruthless as the priest of any other cult. He put Mrs. Roantree in her place in a few words whose insolence stunned her.

Sheriff Brummit rebuked Madsen. The sheriff kept a store in the village and needed Mrs. Roantree's trade. Sheriff Brummit thundered with all his thunder: "Look-a-here, young feller, who d' you think you're talking to? I'd have you know—"

But the reporter was not even afraid of the police. The police fear the reporter nowadays above all powers of darkness, for every reporter feels himself *ex officio* a detective and has a horde of readers at his back. Madsen gave the sheriff thunder for thunder.

"I'd have you know that I represent the newspaper readers of America, and they've got a right to have the truth, no matter who it hurts. The bigger they are the harder they fall, and that goes for sheriffs and society leaders."

Mrs. Roantree's eyes flashed. She began, "Well, of all the imp—"

But Nancy Fleet led her aside, begging her not to waste her strength on such whippersnappers, and got her to her room. Then she returned and invited questions of every sort, melting Archimedes with such a smile that his terrible lever turned to a liquorice stick.

She answered questions before they could be asked, and in her own way. Larrick was amazed by her darting ingenuity. She parried a dangerous blow before it could be

started and diverted suspicion to a harmless byway before it could interest itself in any dangerous path.

Nancy told of Clelia's disappearance, the hunt for her, of her own return from the station (she fumbled her motives a little here), the wild anxiety of everyone. She told of Mr. Larrick's excursions into the blizzard, of how she herself had happened to save him when he was lost, of Mr. Larrick's final discovery of Clelia frozen in the lake, of the removal of the ice block, and of the dispatch of Jeffers to town with messages.

All this Jeffers and Kemp had already told. But they had also said that Clelia's body would be found in the ice.

The sheriff and the reporter were more interested in learning why it had been removed. While Randel and Larrick faltered, Nancy took refuge from wisdom in emotion:

"We just couldn't stand it! She was so sweet, so darling. It was unbearable that the pretty child should be left there any longer! So we took the ice from her."

"Where is she now?"

"In Mr. Randel's cabin."

"We'll go there," said the reporter before the sheriff could say it.

Randel explained, and the marks in the snow confirmed, the difficulty of carrying the ice, the fall, and the partial breaking, and the care with which he and Larrick had lifted the fragments away.

When they entered the cabin the still presence of the figure in the gay tapestries silenced them a moment. The reporter hurried forward to lift the shroud. The sheriff stopped him and flung him back.

"Just a minute, Mr. Madsen. This is my job, I guess."

He drew down the cloth grimly and fell back before the white face and the hands in prayer. He was a father himself and he winced at the scar in the girl's brow. He was a father and he felt no inclination to expose the girl to closer examination. But the reporter, on tiptoe, peering over the sheriff's shoulder, kept asking questions and trying to drag the covering off. Larrick would have knocked him down

if Nancy had not seized his hand and led him to the door, thrust him out, and begged him to keep away.

Sheriff Brummit ordered Madsen not to touch Clelia and threatened to arrest him if he did. So Madsen turned his attention to the cabin. He noted the blotches of plaster and asked about them.

Nancy was glib with explanation:

"Mr. Randel is a famous sculptor. This is his studio. He was working on some statuary. He brought—we brought—her here, because it seemed better than the house—a better place for Mr. Hingeley;" (Mr. Hingeley was the undertaker) "to prepare the poor child for—for— Mrs. Roantree is really at the breaking point."

"I understand, ma'am," said the sheriff, and Mr. Hingeley bowed ponderously.

The correspondent, however, interposed a barrier: "But nothing must be done before a careful examination of the—the—before a careful examination. There may have to be chemical and microscopic tests, and probably the poor young lady's father will insist on some of the great New York detectives studying the case for clews."

Nancy winced. She was hard put to it to keep from screaming what she murmured: "Speaking of clews, Mr. Sheriff, don't you think you ought to see where the body was found?"

"That's a good idea. I was thinking of that," said Mr. Brummit, and moved to the door.

Madsen was torn between a desire to be left alone with the "mystery" and a fear that the sheriff might find some clew at the lake's edge and not tell him of it. The jealousy between the two branches of modern government, the law and the newspaper, is increasingly bitter.

"We ought to leave somebody on guard here," said Madsen, and Brummit agreed with him for once.

"That's a good idea. I was just thinking of it. You stay, Hingeley."

The undertaker was willing. He was a man of heavy make and no fancier of slippery paths or cold weather. He was a practicer of a necessary and necessarily somber

art. When nobody died, he was idle and in business depression. When he was busy, there was sorrow all about him and he could not rejoice in his prosperity. His strange and lugubrious craft lacked all the rescuing elements that brighten the physician's career, and yet he found, perforce, a good deal of cheer in life. He filled his leisure with conviviality. He told a good story and he sang funny songs in a fat tenor voice. And his favorite reading was the comic supplements in which a number of famous characters suffered burlesque agonies day after day.

Brummit put him in charge and gave him the highly needless caution not to touch "anything." Hingeley murmured that he was "in no hurry." And before the others were out of the cabin he had pulled up a chair, fetched from his pockets a cigar and a match box and a bundle of comic supplements, and was smiling already through the flame of his match at the daily picture of Mr. and Mrs. Gump exchanging repartee across his lap.

Nancy, clutching her furs about her, clung to Larrick's arm and to Randel's, forcing them against their will to come along. Brummit and Madsen, Jeffers and the chauffeur, followed across the snow, under the pines and down a slope crusted with sparkling ice until all the world seemed to be covered with cake frosting. Burnley, the painter, who had only now come out, joined the company.

A light and humorous breeze scampered across the blizzard's battlefield and played top with a few dead leaves that it tore from the snow. Among the rusty spinners Larrick noted something bright and blue and crimson. It might be an orchid or a huge butterfly.

The breeze ran with it, checked and spun it, skirled it and whipped it along. Larrick ran forward and bent like a short-stop picking up a grounder. When he lifted his hand he found in it a little silken slipper, heelless, brilliant, soft in spite of the cold.

His heart rocked with pain. He was afraid to speak or to think. He brought it to Nancy, holding it out without speaking. She glanced at it and nodded, groaning:

"It's one of Clelia's bedroom slippers." And she explained

to the sheriff, "She had them on when she left her room, for this is the only one that has been found."

Madsen thrust out for it, but Larrick gave him the heel of his hand in the chest and almost flung him over. They stood and regarded it dumbly. It was like the sandal of a slain goddess. It was an emblem of Clelia's own light, scampering soul.

They moved on, saddened, and all of them watching for the other slipper. They expected to see it running across the snow as its mate had done. But when they found it at last it was caught in a little bush at the foot of the rock by the great tree where Larrick had found Clelia in the lake. He held the two slippers in his hand against his heart while they paused and considered the bleak region.

The glare of shore and lake, the shiver in the pine needles, the absence of everything warm and gracious, gave the little red and blue patterns of Chinese silk a strangely incongruous grace.

It was hard to believe that not many days had passed since the lake and the banks were filled with balm and with tender warmth. There before them, easily discernible in the older ice, was the new ice that had filled the place of the block Jeffers had cut out and hauled ashore with oxen.

The sheriff's theory was that Miss Clelia had been dragged here, beaten to death, and flung off the rock into the deep water. The newspaper man felt that she had rather been lured. In the first place, if she had been dragged her slippers would have been torn off near the house and would show signs of struggle. In the second place, he dearly loved the word "lured."

The sheriff growled, "How could anybody loor a nice young lady like she was out here in her nightgown?"

"Well, she was out here, wasn't she?" Madsen demanded. "She came out here, didn't she? I tell you she was loored."

Brummit had to admit that Clelia had left the house in her nightgown and that was as hard for his village mind to explain as the motive any man should have for destroying so pretty a thing, once she had come there.

This was easy for Madsen. The newspapers were always

printing stories of beasts in human shape who tormented pretty girls to death. He said:

"Some fiend got her. He might have been a dope fiend or a black devil. We'll have to examine the body to see if there are any marks of violence."

Nancy Fleet checked Larrick's desire to put marks of violence on the man whose profession was inquisitiveness. She said:

"We all saw Clelia plainly through the ice, Mr. Madsen. There were no marks upon her except the cut in her forehead. Her pretty feet were bare and unbruised. Her hands were clasped in prayer and they were not bruised."

Madsen would not be denied: "Then we ought to have a physician examine her to see if the fiend—"

He caught the look of a fiend in Larrick's eyes and did not finish his sentence.

They stood baffled, each thinking according to the machinery of his soul. Larrick was musing sullenly upon the paradox: if it could be proved that a man had wrought upon this girl the evil this man hinted, no punishment would be thought cruel enough for him. Men would think that in lynching him they had only absolved themselves and their community and humanity from the stain of his unworthiness to exist among humanity. And yet the God that Clelia seemed to be praying to must have permitted the fiend to exercise the deviltry that God permitted to enter the world. To revere an all-wise, all-merciful Deity for permitting what was considered degrading for a man to do was strange. As Larrick put it to himself, "Folks must have got God all wrong somehow." But he had not fathomed the how of it when the sheriff turned away from the misty emptiness of speculation to regain the cabin where the empty shell of Clelia slept.

As they all moved slowly up a slant of the glassy declivity Larrick remembered Hingeley and foresaw with a nausea of revulsion all the further treatment that awaited the poor girl.

He wrung his hands in anguish and cast his eyes upward in a protest to Heaven. His eyes caught a black wing of smoke fluttering above the pines. Then he saw the red plumage of lofty flames leaping into the black.

CHAPTER V

THE others saw at the same moment and set forward with cries of alarm. They slipped, fell, scrambled up, fell again, and made sorry progress.

One of the cluster of buildings was plainly on fire. The trees and the round hillocks concealed from them which one it was. As they ran stumbling, skating, and sprawling, one headland and another disclosed this building and that standing dark and unharmed.

They all guessed that it was Randel's cabin and he was filled with dread of the suspicion that might attach to him. He thanked his stars that Nancy had compelled him to be with the sheriff and Madsen.

They had not yet come in full view of his cabin when Hingeley appeared, shouting, "Fire!" and floundering across the snow. He was so excited that before he realized it he had assumed the entire blame, talking pantingly as he turned back with the sheriff.

"I was settin' there waitin' for you. I'd finished the papers and I was kind of dozin' off. 'Ain't had much sleep recent, and we left the village so early and all. But I shook m'self awake like and lit my cigar again. It had went out. I'd 'a' swore I blowed out the match before I dropped it, but all of a suddent the noospapers blazed up and I like to got set on fire m'self. I jumped up and tried to tromple the fire out, but it kept ketchin' on the papers and things. I run out the door lookin' for a pail or somethin', but couldn't find one. I throwed armfuls of snow inside the door, but the blaze was somethin' turrible. That pine's chock full of rosum, you know. The smoke come rollin' out so's 't I like to smothered. I'm awful sorry, but—"

The sheriff did not waste profanity on him. He lurched forward, crackling through the snow, the others with him

except Jeffers, who set off for the shed where he kept a reel of hose all ready against just such an emergency. As he ran he called back to the chauffeur to fetch the fire extinguishers out of the Big House.

Suddenly, as the others ran, a screen of snow and pines seemed to withdraw and disclose the expected picture.

In the surrounding frame of black-green pines the cabin was all one blaze like a huge fireplace. The flames were singing aloft with a symphonic harmony, an *allegro* of rejoicing, a festival of scarlets, crimsons, yellows, and whites. Sparks went up in tinsel confetti, and the smoke was a vast black shawl flaunting among the pines.

The trees about the cabin were catching and long pendants of red flung up from the long pendants of green.

Larrick thought only of rescuing Clelia, and he drove forward, breaking through the ice as if wading through a greenhouse. He would have darted into the very core of the furnace, but Nancy, running lightly across the surface that yielded and checked him, overtook him and wrapped her arms about him, screaming to him above the surf roar of the flames wild pleas against his madness.

He tore her hands free, but she gripped him again. She only halted him when she made him understand her desperate threat:

"If you go in there to die you've got to take me with you."

This held him back. Indeed, the thought of her made him conscious of the blistering heat that was scorching his face and hands and hers. As he stood irresolute, a tree that had grown against the very wall of the cabin, and was now a tremendous plume of fire, came over crackling and crashed about them with a thud and a swish of flame.

He had enough to do to drag Nancy through the gauntlet of clutching hot fingers, and the blast of heated air almost suffocated him before he carried her out of danger and dropped to his knees on the snow, carrying her backward in a swoon.

The immediate need of the living drove from his mind for a moment the useless help he would have rendered to

Clelia, and he dashed snow in Nancy's face and chafed her hands until he had her eyes open again.

But she fastened upon him and would not let him go. When Jeffers came running up with the line of hose, aided by the other men, still she would not release him.

He hardly forgave her even when Jeffers yelled that the water pipes were frozen. The men ran back to the Big House for fire extinguishers, but by the time the chauffeur arrived with the first of the brass cylinders the very trees about the cabin were afire and spread a red barrier against approach.

The first extinguisher barely quenched the flames on the nearest tree before it was exhausted. And then the tree blazed up again.

Randel came limping up with a cylinder on his back and fell gasping at Nancy's side. It was useless to waste on the trees about the cabin the fire-quelling liquids that might be needed to save the rest of the buildings.

There was nothing to do but sit and watch. All the men lounged about in idleness before the frantic revelry of the fire. Mrs. Roantree and Berthe stood on the porch of the Big House, wringing their hands no more vainly.

Finally the roof collapsed and a new fierceness possessed the heart of the oven.

Larrick's body shook as if the weight had fallen upon himself. Randel, however, found something to be glad of even in that horror.

"It's the best thing, old man," he mumbled. "Think what it will save that dainty body from enduring further. The logs she rested on will be like a funeral pyre. She is ashes, and there is nothing more for her to suffer. God love her bright soul!"

Larrick refused comfort at such a time.

"But her beautiful body—and the proof of the crime."

Randel almost laughed as he groaned:

"We have all the proof there is in those plaster molds we took, thank God. And all her beauty is there, too—all of it that could live."

CHAPTER VI

THE silence of the desert it may have been that robbed Larrick's tongue of facility.

At all times the desert is rumorous with tiny commotions, whisperings, and rustlings of sand and sage and creeping things. And inside Larrick's heart there was always a certain murmur, since one who thinks at all must think largely in unspoken words.

He could speak at times, of course, as now and then the desert itself laughs and rollicks or bursts into uproar. But, compared with the people about him, who kept up an almost incessant prattle, Larrick spoke rarely, briefly, and without grace.

This was not resented, for silence is only rarely offensive: it is speech that is nearly always risky.

In the mountains his taciturnity was less noted, since the heights had a quieting effect on everyone. They were themselves monstrous syllables in a vast sentence, and quelled the most voluble. They seemed to roll up a thunder so deep and of so slow a vibration that, though filling the air, they were never quite audible.

In the completeness of Larrick's grief he did not cry aloud like Job, though he was as bitter as Job, and felt himself equally the innocent victim of a cruel bet between God and the devil. In Texas they described a bad man, a really very bad man, as one who would shoot a man to see which way he fell, and take a bet anyway. That was Larrick's present opinion of the Deity.

Larrick's love had found little to say to Clelia, and his grief found little to say of her. His contempt for heaven and its wanton ruthlessness found no expression. He suffered wordless. He bled inside. He was what the poet

Sa'di called, "the moth that desires and is drawn to its agony, mute."

His wordlessness oppressed Randel and Nancy and Burnley now. They felt the vanity of all speech; yet any chatter was better than black silence. Larrick quenched their talk, however, by the very weight of his silence.

The sheriff and the reporter, on the other hand, did not know Larrick or relish the hush of meditation.

They had come here to slake their curiosity, to find out things; they bristled with questions. To the reporter, Madsen, especially, silence was a denial of bread and butter. It was worse than an insult; it was an embargo on business.

Sheriff Brummit could still less brook the offense to his authority. Silence was in itself a form of hiding from justice. He must apprehend the souls of all the witnesses and ransack their memories in quest of clues.

When Madsen and Brummit opened their batteries of questions, awkward, ill-worded, unintelligent, crass questions, Nancy, Randel, and Burnley made impatient and contradictory answers that were convincingly innocent from their very lack of skill.

But Larrick said nothing at all; he walked away as if he were guilty. And indeed he did feel remorse and guilt of a kind. If he had not suggested the statue of Clelia, had not helped Randel carry the shaft of ice to the cabin, had not helped him with the plaster casts, Randel could not have accomplished a task that had begun to look to Larrick less and less like the work of a priest and more and more like the work of a ghoul.

If Clelia had not been taken to the cabin the cabin would not have been set on fire and Clelia would not have vanished utterly from sight—almost from imagination. Randel had felt that he was robbing the grave of a beauty it would only hide and devour. But by the same token he had robbed Clelia of the high right of a resting place. He had robbed her even of form and substance, of integrity, of that existence which even the dead have. She was nothing now.

They had robbed her father and mother, too, of the farewell vision of her, and of the possession of the body they had

given her. They had not now so much as a little urn of ashes to enshrine. Clelia was like a figure in a dream or a fiction. She was as if she had never been.

Thinking with terror such thoughts, Larrick felt guiltier than Cain. He wanted to run howling about the mountains. It took all his self-command to walk away slowly. He made surly answers or none when he was followed and questioned.

Rebuffed and offended, Brummit and Madsen could see him pause at a distance, wringing his hands, pacing the snow, and flinging his head about in torment. This was guilt, indeed, of a strange sort, but they took it for guilt of a sort very familiar, but no less incredible.

Murders were so frequent nowadays all about the world that the crime wave was spoken of as a cosmic disaster, a tidal wave following the moon around the globe day after day, night after night.

Silence was wisdom, as they had often heard tell, and it seemed to them the shrewdness of guilt that recommended silence to Larrick.

Their logic was good in the premises. The guide and the chauffeur had told them of seeing Clelia in the ice with the scar in her brow. This meant murder. That meant a murderer. Larrick was the only guilty-looking, guilty-acting person in the region.

Madsen wrote copious notes and prepared telegrams to be sent as soon as he reached the village again. He nagged Brummit with his theories and made the slow sheriff jealous of his ready deductions. And, finally, he openly demanded the arrest of Larrick.

CHAPTER VII

THE sheriff, not quite convinced, debated his duty aloud, went to Mrs. Roantree and mentioned the reporter's suggestion.

Nancy promised to slap the damned fool's fool face for him. Mrs. Roantree spoke with the dignity of an ambassadress:

"You don't think I'll allow you to arrest one of my guests, do you?"

The sheriff mumbled, "We-ell, that's so."

But Madsen broke in, sharply, "Somebody murdered one of your guests, Mrs. Roantree."

The sheriff pendulated, "That's so, too."

Mrs. Roantree waxed furious:

"Mr. Brummit, you'll do me a favor if you'll put that impertinent idiot off my place."

The pendulum swung every which way. Mrs. Roantree was an important summer customer, but Madsen represented the political tyranny of the press. To Mrs. Roantree's suffocation, the sheriff obeyed the reporter, apologizing to his patroness:

"If a feller's innercent, it won't hurt him to be in the hands of the law."

He hurried away to escape the lava that was about to erupt in Mrs. Roantree's soul. He approached Larrick and set a hand on his shoulder, saying, meekly enough:

"I'd just as soon you didn't get out of my sight. I might want you."

"All right," Larrick said. "Anything I can do—just let me know."

He was so pleasant about it that Nancy, who had followed, flared:

"Do you realize that you are being arrested for—for—" Larrick was startled. He expected her to say, "for

destroying the body of Clelia." And he flew all the visible signals of confession.

But Nancy finished her sentence with the words, "for killing Clelia. This newspaper creature thinks you killed Clelia!"

She watched with anxiety to see how Larrick would take this charge, and so did the others. There are so many ways of taking an accusation. As the judge said in "Mrs. Dane's Defence," there is the calm of innocence, and there is the brazen calm of guilt; there is the confusion of innocence startled by a baseless accusation—and the confusion of guilt confronted with discovery.

Nancy expected Larrick to laugh uproariously

Larrick was stunned for a moment. He had to think his way through several layers of insulation before he came to realize what he was actually accused of. He stared at Madsen, who was inspecting him as if he held a microscope over a spider.

It was characteristic of Larrick's selflessness that he did not feel that his own majesty of innocence had been impugned or his personal dignity assailed. He thought of his love of Clelia.

That love was like a chalice on an altar. And a foul scoundrel had spit in it.

As a priest would strike out at sacrilege, so Larrick's very muscles wrought his will before he could meditate on action.

Madsen went backward down the hill, somersaulting over and over and accumulating bulk like a rolling snowball. The sheriff reached for his pistol, expecting that Larrick would start to run. But Larrick marched down the path the revolving Madsen had cleared and kicked the snow off the wretch, yanked him out of it, and lifted him with one hand to meet the blow of the other hand, as he groaned:

"You dare say a word against Clelia and I'll beat the life out of you, you—"

"I haven't said a word against the lady," Madsen sputtered with bruised mouth.

Larrick snarled:

"You said you thought I killed her. What did she ever do that I should kill her? She was God's own, and I worshipped her! I'd have died for her! And you—you—"

He was choking with vile words that he could not utter in the very face of Nancy, who had thrust in between him and the prey of his ire.

Madsen's head was swimming less with the buffets it had taken than with amazement at Larrick's mad theory. When Nancy had wrested him free from the menace of Larrick's fists, and held those painful sledges fast, Madsen shrieked:

"Accordin' to that, nobody could have killed her, because she was so—so good." He had nearly said "so damned good."

Larrick flung back at him over Nancy's shoulder:

"Of course nobody could have killed her but some crazy beast that hated her because she wouldn't be a beast with him."

And now the outcries of his reverence for Clelia fell upon Nancy like blows:

"She was sweet to me as she could be. I wanted her love, but I wasn't good enough to get it. I loved her all the more for that. When you say I might have killed her you insult her, not me. Call me what you want and I don't mind any more 'n I'd mind a rattlesnake's noise. But you say a word against her, or my love for her, and by God, I'll—I'll hamstring you!"

Madsen had no impulse to brave this promise. He was altogether convinced both that Larrick could not have murdered Clelia and that he could very readily murder Madsen.

Madsen would have gladly seen Larrick swing. He would have lent a hand on the rope. But he was helplessly converted to Larrick's innocence of taking Clelia's life. Larrick's almost greater guilt was that of blasphemy and the violent laying on of hands. The Press, the ark of the great god Curiosity, was assailed in the person of its Levite.

But the sanctity of the news gatherers was not yet recognized by the law, and there was so special penalty for manhandling them.

The sheriff was doubly on Larrick's side now. He had felt his own dignity more compromised by Madsen than by Larrick, and he felt grateful to Larrick for administering a punishment he had not dared.

He took command of the field, and Madsen maintained a humbled demeanor.

"I guess we'd better look for a cloo or somethin'," the sheriff said. "If they was any tracks down by the lake the snow and ice have covered 'em. We might begin with the poor young lady's room. That's where she must have started from, and we maybe might locate somethin' there."

The sorry procession wended its way to the Big House and left snowy footmarks on its rugs.

When Clelia's door was thrust open by the heavy hand of the sheriff the French maid, Berthe, was discovered. She sprang up like a frightened ghost and Madsen wondered if she might not be an accomplice. He loved that word and the kindred phrases, "accessory before the fact" and "after the fact."

The little dog, the Empress, sent up shrill protests against the intrusion. She barked and charged, retreated and charged again until Larrick gathered her into the familiar nest of his arms and reassured her.

Nancy explained to Berthe in French that the visitors meant no harm, and Madsen acquired another suspicion. Why should French be used except for purposes of deception? It was a wicked language, anyway.

He and Brummit persecuted Berthe with questions and enraged the Empress with their search of every cranny. They opened every drawer and pried into every closet, tried every window. Whenever they laid out a garment or any property of Clelia's the Empress took possession of it.

Madsen hunted for fingerprints. They had played an important part in all the detective fiction that was published as fact in the news press and as romance in the magazines. But Madsen knew nothing of them when he found them.

They went out on the porch, but it was a mosaic of ice crystals, and the ground was clad in complete mail.

They dawdled back into the house and plodded from room to room, fumbling hopelessly at everything, to Mrs. Roan-tree's intense wrath. Her grief for Clelia was abysmal. The visitors seemed to be cattle trampling about a grave.

When they reached her chamber Nancy Fleet's manner

changed from one of scorn for Madsen to one of hostility. She had been brutal and direct with him before. Now she grew anxious and plainly complex. The cleverest deceiver can rarely mimic perfect sincerity; it is not a question of what not to do or say; it is simply the inescapable fact that people who have something to hide must always think with a divided brain.

Nancy was using all her wits, but it was evident even to the sheriff and the undertaker that she had something on her mind. Madsen shifted his weather-vane suspicion to her quarter now. A theory was ready at hand:

Nancy was plainly in love with Larrick. Her quick rallies to his defense proved that. But Larrick said he loved Clelia. Even in his own bewilderment Madsen had noted that Larrick's outburst in Clelia's glorification distressed Nancy.

The next step was easy: Nancy was jealous of Clelia and had put her out of the way. Jealous women were always furnishing the hungry newspapers with murders. It would be easier for a woman to have "lured" Clelia out of her room than for a man.

This theory was simmering cozily in Madsen's skull pan. The more Nancy tried to hurry the inspection of her room the more Madsen deliberated.

When Brummit offered to open a door Nancy made haste to say:

"That's only my clothes' closet."

"Oh," said Brummit and moved decently away.

But as soon as Nancy had walked past, Madsen opened the door. Nancy whirled on him with such a frightened look that he pushed in. He found himself in a deep jungle of dresses, dinner gowns of satin, sport suits, furs—more women's togs than the whole equipment of the Paris Emporium in the village. The room was fragrant of a beautiful woman's habiliment.

While Madsen's head was lost in silks and sables his feet were trampling over tennis shoes, slippers, boots—enough to stock a small shop. But his feet also encountered a blanketed heap of something that rolled under him and made him stumble.

He fell to his hands and knees and could not imagine what

the blankets covered. He hoped it was a corpse. Then he could call this place the House of Mystery.

Nancy was instantly upon him, commanding him to come out of there. But as he rose he lifted a blanket away and disclosed, to his stupefaction, an array of white blocks of various sizes and curious shapes.

"What's those?" he asked.

Nancy feared to tell the truth, and she was quite unable to think of anything that the plaster molds looked like except plaster molds. She turned her eyes helplessly to Randel, who wasted no imagination, but answered, "Plaster molds."

"What of?" said Madsen.

Then Randel was silent.

It was not so much ingenuity as lack of it that led Madsen to guess the truth. He had thought of nothing but Clelia for hours. He had seen the plaster splotches in the cabin before it burned. He nodded and made it in one guess.

"Of Miss Clelia?" he asked.

Nobody denied it.

And now Madsen rose with a grunt of triumph—a sort of uncouth, "Aha!"—a clumsy, "Umm-humm!"

Madsen was as exultant as a terrier. The others were as guilty as dogs caught at sheep killing.

Nancy's scorn, Larrick's violence, Mrs. Roantree's calm superiority were all suddenly clothed in an altered light. They could not but see themselves as they looked to Madsen. The loathsome, meddlesome cad had suddenly become something dreadful. His impertinence was ennobled by its success.

Mrs. Roantree had the quickest and the most practiced temper. She was trebly offended by the crime in her home, by the insolence of Madsen, and by the duplicity of her guests. They had not even hinted to her that such molds existed.

She turned on Randel with the wrath of a queen mother. Her glare made everyone cower, as the lightning does with expectation of the thunder din to follow.

Randel put up his hand to check the tempest.

"I made those casts of the poor child's body for two reasons," he said. "I wanted to preserve her beauty and I wanted to preserve the evidence in its most permanent form."

Sheriff Brummit, desponding again before Madsen's superior skill, looked at Randel with a dazed new hope.

Randel went on:

"I read a story some years ago by Melville Davison Post. It told of a lawyer who got a murderer acquitted by advising him to destroy the body utterly. In court he defied the prosecution to bring forward the body of the victim—or any part of it. There was no *corpus delicti*, therefore there could be no case for a jury. The judge had to admit it, and discharge the jury and the prisoner.

"My cabin was burned up through no fault of ours. With it every trace of Clelia vanished. Of course, several of us saw her in the ice, but our testimony would be of the vaguest sort.

"Now we have the absolute replica of the poor child and of the fatal wound in the minutest detail. I can reconstitute her form to perfection. You owe me a debt of gratitude, Mr. Sheriff, instead of the suspicion this young newspaper fiend is trying to fasten on each of us in turn."

The sheriff was profoundly impressed. But Madsen would not surrender to any emotions of the sort. He was no respecter of persons. He laughed harshly and shook his finger under Randel's nose as he sneered:

"That sounds very noble and fine. But if your motive was so grand and all why did you hide the casts in here and why did this lady try to keep us from finding them and act so funny when I came across 'em? What you got to say to that? I'd like to know."

Randel, with the patience of an artist for a Philistine, answered:

"I'll tell you, but you won't understand. Mr. Larrick suffered so bitterly because the girl's beauty would pass from sight and memory that he made me feel his grief. I proposed to take the cast. He helped me. The work was purely a labor of love and of art. The legal phase of it occurred to me later. It was merely incidental and quite unimportant."

"Unimportant!" Madsen snapped.

"Comparatively," said Randel. "It can make little difference to the world whether it ever finds out who killed Clelia or not or why he did it. If you found the wretch

and convicted him and put him to death in the electric chair what difference would it make? Crime would go on. You would have one murderer the less, but no less murder.

"Since the beginning of the world people have been committing murders and being caught, or not, as the case might be; and convicted or acquitted, as the case might be; and executed or pardoned, as the case might be.

"Since the beginning of the world the courts have been spending untold sums on detecting criminals and punishing them one way or another. And what good has it done? More murders are committed in many of the states where there is capital punishment than in states where there is none. When judges have been severe, crime has flourished. When what we call justice has slept, crime also has sometimes dozed—and sometimes not.

"Punishment seems to make absolutely no difference one way or another. The world has never heard of so much crime as is going on to-day. Yet Christ died to save the world nearly two thousand years ago, and every imaginable scheme has been tried on the criminals, from boiling oil to the parole system, and nothing seems to work."

Madsen was impatient of such a digression from the forthright of his mission, but he deigned to interpose a condescending irony.

"I suppose you'd give up punishments and just let the world all go to pot. You wouldn't punish the murderer of Miss Clelia if you found him?"

"Oh yes, I would. I'd be glad to take a cast of him in molten lead. But that would be revenge, not justice. It's justice I'm talking about. And it doesn't make any difference what I think or say. People are going on committing the same old crimes and applying the same old household remedies, no matter what I think or say. You can't stop crime and you can't stop justice. But what I say is that neither of them seems to be getting anywhere.

"It wouldn't do any particular good now to find Clelia's murderer or to punish him. But I can do—I have done—one glorious thing—I have saved Clelia's beauty from his miserable hands. Her darling soul is gone, her fun, her laugh, her mischief. But her image is redeemed.

"The most famous statue of Greece was Praxiteles' Venus of Knidos. It was taken to Byzantium and burned up in a fire. All we have of it now is a little picture of it on some old coins. It can never be brought back to the world. It is lost forever.

"A fiend set fire to Diana's Ephesian temple. The death of that fiend couldn't be any consolation, because it couldn't restore the temple.

"Suppose you get whoever it was that destroyed Clelia. It wouldn't make much difference. It wouldn't make anybody any happier or the world any better. But Clelia's beauty will be so marvelous and so nearly immortal that it will make it almost worth while that she perished this way instead of growing old or shapeless or dying of some disease or accident.

"When you come to that, it was really the man who killed her that gave her to art and to eternity. Without him we should never have had her."

Larrick could not endure this excess of logic chopping. He flung Randel a glance of such protest that Randel mumbled, "I beg your pardon," and grew more humanly sorrowful over the fate of the girl denied the world and denied to the world.

Brummit and Madsen looked at each other and shook their heads, implying that Randel was half cracked. They pitied him with village contempt for urban foolishness.

He pitied himself a little for exposing his secret gospel to these barbarians.

But the four were really priests of different religions. Randel worshiped a misty god called Art, with a vast college of priests, no two of whom agreed on the nature of the wishes of their god any more than any other priests united in one cult. Larrick worshiped life and the right to live and love.

Brummit's god was the Law, another vague cloud-deity, whose priests have always battled among themselves.

Madsen's god was a more definite creature with a simpler table of commandments. He dealt in happenings, and it was his creed to find out as many as possible of an interesting sort, to make them as interesting as possible, and to lose as little time as possible in getting the report published. Like

the authors of history and other forms of semi-imaginative fancy, he wrote fiction founded on fact.

He was studying the plaster molds now. He had never seen any before, and he could not understand how Randel could pretend that they contained so much.

His infinite capacity for giving pains was not yet exhausted. Just as Randel was convinced that he had overwhelmed Madsen with large talk and large ideas, the correspondent broke out again:

"Admitting all you say, Mr. Randel, there's one question I'd like to ask you: seeing as your motives were so artistic and all that, why did you hide these plaster molds? Why didn't you tell us about 'em first off?"

Randel winced at the inextinguishable distrust,⁶ but he answered frankly, never dreaming of involving Nancy in his apology:

"In the first place, I was afraid that Mrs. Roantree would be shocked by what we had done. Afterward, I was sure she would be very glad the thing was done. But just at first I feared she would think it an unpardonable presumption. I felt the same way about her parents.

"Then we saw you people coming and we were afraid you might misunderstand—just as you have done."

Madsen sniffed, "Maybe we misunderstood and maybe we understood."

Randel shifted a little of the burden:

"You will please remember, young man, that when we took the cast we did nothing to the child's body except to remove the ice. We never dreamed that one of you would set the cabin on fire and leave nothing but ashes."

Mr. Hingeley, who had been intensely interested in the investigations, lost his interest abruptly and walked away. Randel went on:

"You can thank Heaven now, Mr. Sheriff, that we took the cast. If it weren't for these molds you would not have a single clew, as you call it. You people would be giving explanations instead of demanding them."

"That's so," said the sheriff.

But Madsen had still another annoyance in reserve. He startled Brummit as well as the others by proposing:

"Sheriff, looks like to me you ought to have Mr. Randel take these here molds and perdooce that statue he tells about so's we could have it on hand for the inquest and the trial."

The sheriff uncomfortably regarded Randel. But Randel shook his head.

"I can't make a cast from the molds here. That fire you people started burned up all my materials. I'll have to take the molds to New York and finish the work there at my studio. I can send you a copy from there."

His physician had ordered him to keep out of New York City for a year or more, but Randel, who had no courage for war or the hazards of adventure, would have laid his gaunt frame down for a stepping block to his art.

Then he had a sudden fright. What if this unquenchable reporter and this stodgy sheriff should decide to forbid him to take the plaster molds from the county where the trial must be held? If they did not speak of it, the village prosecutor would suggest it. Randel was determined that he would smuggle the molds out of the reach of these profane hands at any cost.

Madsen would doubtless have risen to the opportunity of a final interference if he had not been engaged in literary meditation. Pondering the mold he held, he was trying to figure out the most exciting way of presenting the story to his readers. He felt that he must have his story ready to pour on the wires as soon as he could reach the telegraph office. He knew that a great and harrowed public was fretting for further details. His little clientèle of a few hundred readers was enlarged now to include the entire population of a republic in which the right to know all the scandals was held inalienable.

He was afraid to leave the sheriff there lest something should turn up to give the sheriff an advantage of information; but he could not persuade the sheriff to set off for the village. The sheriff had come there to arrest somebody. He had nothing to gain from publication until he had accomplished something definite.

At length the undertaker, Hingeey, consented to take Madsen back to town in his own sleigh. He was as melan-

choly as an undertaker ought to be. He had brought across the snowy mountains the best casket in his shop, and then had been unlucky enough to burn up the cabin and with it the only excuse for his wares. He could hardly ask Mrs. Roantree to buy his merchandise. She had suffered the loss of a building and a beloved guest already.

Nobody could be more useless there than Mr. Hingeley and no one more unwelcome than Madsen. When they offered to depart together, nobody even asked them to tarry for a bit of food. They set off through the snow broken only by the grooves of their own runners.

The sheriff seemed to take on majesty as fast as Madsen took on distance. As the setting sun elongates shadows that he annulled at noon, so the newspaper man increased the policeman's stature by his mere departure.

While the sheriff sauntered about in a stupor of indecision which he disguised as meditation Mrs. Roantree and her guests made ready to escape from the white prison walls of the mountains. The trunks of the others had gone long before, but Randel and Burnley began to pack their things also.

Carefully avoiding the notice of the sheriff, Randel concealed the plaster molds in his luggage with the help of Nancy and Larrick. They had the surreptition of smugglers, with a hope of only the vaguest profit.

In the meanwhile the guide and the maid, Berthe, had been preparing a belated luncheon. It was only when they were called to the table that the overwrought souls realized how hungry their forgotten bodies had grown.

Their absorption in the refueling of their exhausted furnaces kept them from all thought of observation or expectancy. They were startled and disgusted when they heard a knock at the door and Madsen reappeared.

He was greatly stirred, for he brought with him new material. He had met Clelia's father and mother on the road, together with a troupe of newspaper men and detectives from New York.

CHAPTER VIII

THE father of Clelia was one of those fierce souls that hurtle through life with the swooping ferocity of the hawk. Clelia had inherited his velocity, his rapacity for emotions, but had lived too brief a life to encounter the storms and the battles for quarry. Her father loved with all the voracious passion of his hate. When he received Mrs. Roantree's telegram telling him of Clelia's loss he made ready for instant departure. When his secretary found that the first train to the Adirondacks would not leave New York for several hours he demanded a special train.

The railroad was in confusion from the mauling of the big storm, and the secretary was rebuffed with curt indifference. Then old Blakeney forced his way past all opposition to the president's office and compelled him to put an engine, a tender, and a private car at his disposal. The railroads had just been returned to private ownership and management after the devastating effect of government control during the war, and personal influence was once more substituted for political.

Blakeney's grief for his child gave him frenzy. To be doing something saved him from madness. While he fought official opposition he lavished tenderness on his frantic wife. Her physician forcibly prevented her from taking the wintry journey until he realized that action was safer for her than suspense.

Blakeney gathered up two detectives for his purposes, and half a dozen newspaper men persuaded his secretary to persuade him that it was better to take a few friendly reporters along than to leave Clelia to the mercy of the public imagination and the fantastic work of copy writers under no constraint of fact.

Already the city was besnowed with extras headlining the

young girl as if she had been an assassinated President or some other public property. Beagle packs were nosing out every bit of information or misinformation concerning Clelia, her family, Mrs. Roantree, and all of her guests; and the newspaper "morgues" were being ransacked for old clippings, photographs, anything that might help to fill a column.

When at length the little train had slashed through the gale and the snows to the village Blakeney commandeered the fastest and biggest automobile in sight. He fairly compelled the owner to take him and his wife across the mountains. The reporters chartered what craft they could, and followed. Halfway to the Roantree camp they met Madsen and Hingeley, who turned back with them.

And so at an unexpected hour the Blakeney's arrived and Blakeney dashed in breathless, as if he had run all the way from New York. His wife followed in a rush and flew to Mrs. Roantree's arms. The two old women wept together, while Nancy Fleet assumed the hideous task of answering bewildered questions with cruel truths.

Larrick had neither the right nor the courage to listen to the ghastly sounds that issued from the throat of a mother whose daughter was slain in her youth; or the intolerable choked sobs of a powerful man driven craven to the helplessness of a terrified and lacerated child.

Their anguish was pitiful over the mere loss of Clelia (God save the word "mere"). They were not yet aware of the succession of griefs before them. The sight of Clelia's possessions and her trinkets refreshed their power to suffer.

They cowered from the little dog, the Empress, who could not understand Clelia's prolonged absence, and welcomed them with rapture like a bitter irony. The Empress kept purring and leaping about them and going to Clelia's door, whining there and barking. Poor inarticulate thing, with so many questions to ask and no language! But they themselves were as inarticulate before the tangle of problems and sorrows before them. They were but the beaten hounds of fate, wondering why they were punished, and helpless to express their woe except with raucous and unsyllabled noises.

Mrs. Roantree moaned to Nancy Fleet:

"You've got to tell them about the cabin burning—and all the rest. I'm beaten. I'm useless. I want to die."

Larrick herded the sheriff and the newspaper men from the room. Madsen was eager to remain, but one glance at Larrick's bloodshot eyes and the dreadful hand he reached out sent Madsen into the snow on the run. He saw his own obituary in the Texan's glare.

Larrick had physical courage enough to have attacked the whole mob. He would have welcomed an excuse to wrest the sheriff's pistol from him and beat him to death with it, but arrant cowardice drove him from sight or hearing of Clelia's father and mother. He plunged through the snow and into the woods.

Randel and Burnley followed him. Their faces were sickly wan. Deep as they pushed into the thickets, they could hear, or thought they could hear, the wails and shrieks of that couple whom love had joined, whom a child had blessed and cursed with new gifts of love and sorrow, whom grief lashed now with the whips of all the furies. Larrick felt like one of those skulkers who in the old days had hidden, perhaps, in these very woods, while Indian savages plied the tomahawk and hunting knife on pioneers. Larrick felt that somehow the Indians had learned the art and the glee of torture from the angels themselves who roved the world devising agonies for innocent wanderers through life.

It was only when the twilight chill threatened to freeze them all to death that he and Randel and Burnley moved back to the Big House. A wind with the force of a glacier slid down the mountains, crashing through the trees and pushing the unfrozen snow forward in a cascade. As the wind reached the clearing it became a maelstrom of currents made visible in the little cyclones of snow corkscrewing about the air and forming angry spirals that spun and ran across the floor of glare ice.

As Larrick and the others came forth from the trees they saw the father and mother of Clelia standing on the porch, looking toward the burned cabin. Nancy had just told them of what had happened.

Randel muttered: "God help them! The poor wretches haven't even the comfort of the child's body to weep over. They haven't even her ashes. They are all mingled with the ashes of the cabin."

Old Blakeney had found strength to endure even this in the compulsion to sustain his wife. She had known the travail of Clelia's entrance into her own body and into the world; she had given her blood and bone and sinew and milk and warmth, had manufactured from her own frame that beautiful child, and felt rewarded by the flower that bloomed and expanded toward fruitage. And now all those pangs, all those hopes and visions, were but a long, sweet dream dispelled at the opening of the eyes. It was as if she had never given birth or nurture to a child.

To keep her from despair beyond despair Blakeney had whispered to her that she should have something of Clelia's to cherish. The whim had come to his insanity of grief to gather up the ashes of the cabin and the pyre and keep them all as a surety that among them there was something of Clelia.

But when tragedies are heaped too numerously upon one another they turn to farce. Piling Pelion upon Ossa reaches the height of the ridiculous alone. Excess of anything breeds laughter. Otherwise, perhaps, mankind would long since have gone all mad before the infinite multiplication of its woes.

There seems to be at times a barbaric sense of farce in nature. The winds are the laughter of the world, and it was the wind that turned the too-many anguishes of these poor fools to a joke.

The gale came roaring down the mountain like a gigantic jester, a drunken jongleur, whose sport is kings and stately sorrows. The gale fell upon the heaped ashes of that cabin and of what had been a girl and flung them into the air, juggled them, ran with them in clouds, hurling them, twirling them, kicking them about when they fell, and sweeping them as with brooms down to the lake and across it, until the ashes from being everywhere were nowhere at all.

In that appalling buffoonery Clelia's father and mother,

were covered and brushed clear again of ashes that might have been the embers of Clelia's own flesh. They covered their eyes from the cloud that went by.

When the place where the cabin had been was winnowed of its chaff and all the region thereabout was free and white with the inexhaustible snow, there came a pause in the air.

It was as if the motley fool, having played ninepins with the great, paused and grinned as much as to say:

"Where is your daughter now that was so beautiful, so strong and swift and glad? What hope have you now of her resurrection? How many angels will it take to find her at the Judgment Day?"

In this lull, as of that windy breath which is our life, there came a lull in the grief of Clelia's father and mother. There was so much to suffer now that they suffered no more at all. There were so many mysteries blowing about them that they had no whys to ask whatever.

They needed that pause, that little death of thought.

By and by the wind would come again and grief would return upon them in hurricanes and in gentle zephyrs of regret.

But for the moment they were calm in the repose of utter defeat.

They almost smiled, for it almost seemed as if it were Clelia herself that had done this thing. It was like her to find some cause for hilarity in the solemnities of the old; to giggle in church and to dance away from everything dull and dour.

Larrick remembered that he had first seen her as Puck dancing into the moonlight and going out again like a candle-flame that has fluttered and gleamed and leaped into the dark.

No one had ever been able to lay hold upon Clelia's soul or keep her body fast. Why should they think that they could ever have jailed that sprite in a coffin or an urn? What use has the flame for the dross of the dull wood it has lent its red wings to for a while?

Clelia was laughter and light. Where do they come from and where do they fly? What difference does it make? They are beautiful. That must be enough, whether we like it or no.

CHAPTER IX

THE next day the Big House was closed and all its people departed except one detective and Jeffers, the guide, who lingered like a sexton in a white graveyard—and Clelia, perhaps, whom he sometimes thought he saw dancing in a white nightgown among the doleful cedars.

His reason and his experience told him that he beheld only a scurry of snowflakes. But, after all, what else is anybody but a brief assembly of dust caught up from the ground and given a semblance of shape and unity only by its vertiginous motion about its own axis till the wind forsakes it and it falls apart again?

Audacity is as good a gamble as austerity. The shameless impudence of Randel, the sculptor, who violated all the rights and decencies to capture the image of Clelia, had become the one conservative force in the whole disaster.

The thing he did in secret, for fear of the horror and the punishment the Philistines and the cherishers of old customs would visit upon him, was the thing that saved their little world from bleak nullity.

The sheriff, who would have imprisoned him for invasion of personal rights, the reporter and the public, who would have lynched him or at least his good name for scandalous outrage, looked upon him now as a savior of something vital.

The father and mother, who would have torn him to pieces with their hands for his infamy against their daughter, clung to him now and caressed him; he had brought out of that complete void, that blind chaos, a precious figure which would represent Clelia's very self in their eyes. He would give them her image to fondle and behold and to point to with triumph.

That is why the censors are always wrong whatever they do, however lofty their intentions. That is why the whole spirit of censorship is but an ape of deviltry masquerading

in the black cloth of puritanism. The censors commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, against the inquiring spirit that lifts man from the mire and keeps him aglow. They quench the soul or try to. Their deadly candle snuffers make a stink and a smudge where there was a struggling tongue of fire that was trying to light a little scone and might have passed its light along until, as one taper often does, it set all the candelabra of a cathedral ablaze.

"Put not your trust in princes," is wisdom; but the artists should be given *carte blanche*, for they are trustees of high emprise, whose only hope of prosperity is in the enlightenment and aliment of the multitude. Out of a few loaves and fishes they make a miraculous banquet; out of a little tallow and a piece of twine they make a radiance for an altar. And no one can ever know what he does when he whiffs out the least of these candles. Though he find it quivering in some dark, forbidden alley of the labyrinth of human life, it may point out a pathway to sacred relics or to a hidden spring or an unexpected stairway to the sky.

There is nothing to art but fire. If now and then it blisters or scorches an unlucky venturer, the total of its harmfulness at its worst is contemptible before the glory of the good it does. Art, like the sun, is blinding and perilous at times, but it is our one hope.

So the lean and ruthless artist, Randel, who had sought beauty at all hazards, was the one friend Clelia's father and mother had now. There was a kind of ecstatic laughter in their sobs when he told them that he could give them back so much of the Clelia they had given up for lost.

Their prodigal girl who had run away out of the world was only teasing them, after all. She would come again to their home in white peace, demure and content and forever at her little prayers.

Clelia's mother thought only of this, but Clelia's father was thinking also of the other thing Randel had told him—that those plaster molds contained the monument of the crime against her child.

Like a hawk that an eagle has robbed of its prey and flung to earth bleeding and bald and crippled, he renewed

himself with wrath. He grew strong again slowly in the hope of revenge. His epithet once more was *rapax*.

He could be as gentle as a falcon to its young or to its mate, but he was restless for the hunt. When his wife fell asleep at last, wept out and pacified by sheer exhaustion, her husband stole away to talk to the detectives and the reporters who had drained Madsen and Sheriff Brummit and everybody else of all they knew or thought, and more.

Madsen had indeed been subjected to an almost fatal strain by the arrival of the New York newspaper men. Loyalty to his own press association counseled him to keep his story secret until he could get it on the wires first. But he burned also with the desire to shine before these famous leaders of his profession, and he dealt them out a few bits of information like tips.

Almost any man or woman would rather dazzle a rival than conquer the public. And gradually, almost unconsciously, Madsen gave up all he knew or guessed. He was crudely majestic about it. But the reporters wrote down what he said and smiled as they stole his goods. Pioneers are usually bilked by the second line of advance.

Madsen warned the reporters and detectives against Larrick especially, but failed to fill them with horror when he told them that Larrick had actually knocked him down—him—Archimedes's own lever lifter! The reporters laughed as they nodded good-by to Madsen when the train pulled out. But he felt like a man marooned. Another century might pass in that village before such another story "broke." The winter promised to be as lonely long as a century.

Madsen had tried to persuade Sheriff Brummit to arrest or otherwise detain Larrick, Randel, and Miss Fleet. The sheriff would have been glad to hold such picturesque guests, but he had not found evidence enough to cast a worthy suspicion on anybody, to say nothing of clanging an iron door. Besides, the village jail was not furnished for the comfort of swell prisoners, especially in winter.

Furthermore, the metropolitan detectives and the reporters had pooh-poohed the suggestion. Madsen insisted that this was because they wanted to get all the criminals down to

N'York City for their own consumption. Madsen, like many another outlander, was jealous of N'York City.

And he was very jealous of this crime. It was beginning to look to him like a private murder of his own copyright. Brummit was goaded at last into a sarcasm:

"Young teller, you better watch out or first you know you'll be goin' round claimin' you committed the murder yourself. Then we'll have to commit you."

In the meanwhile there was equal futility in the discussions among the passengers in Mr. Blakeney's private car. Some of the reporters sourly prophesied that the mystery would never be solved. In New York City with all its compactness, its countless array of eyes and ears, and its vast mechanism of police, dozens of murders had recently been added to the file of unsolved mysteries. What hope was there of explaining this death at night in the solitude of the mountains followed upon by a furious storm that, like a deft accomplice, tore up every shred of evidence, erased every footprint?

In the long, slow hours of the train's fleet passage there was time for every theory to be heard.

Larrick sat and listened and rarely spoke. He was reminded of the discussion that had flourished in the camp before he found Clelia in the ice.

The easy explanation recurred, that she was self-slain. The answer to that was her character. These reporters and detectives did not know her. They could believe her capable of flinging away this world which was to her such a toy of endless delight, a return ball on a rubber string that she would only toss aside for the privilege of catching it back again.

The newspapers would play up all the grisly possibilities of mad fiends loose in the mountains and of mysterious scandals among the rich, whose scandals are such a comfort to the poor. But the reporters agreed among themselves that the girl had killed herself in some fit of blues or greens.

Larrick would not share his own suspicions with the detectives or the reporters. He was determined to follow his own trails. He had tracked cattle thieves through the

desert by little signs that he had learned; and he had learned to keep his theories to himself.

There were two men that he was trailing. If they had fled the city he would hound them around the globe. If they were still in New York he would fasten them to their chairs and rummage their very souls.

When the train stopped at the 138th Street station, unexpectedly, Norry Frewin came into the car. His haggard look, the fierce wringing he gave Larrick's hand, his rush to Clelia's parents—these things staggered Larrick, for they seemed to absolve the man before he could be accused.

It was Norry that had stopped the train at 138th Street. He explained to Mr. Blakeney that a mob of reporters and photographers had been waiting at the Grand Central Station for hours. By leaving the train at this small and little-frequented suburban stop the gantlet would be avoided. He had even arranged that motor cars should be waiting in the street to hurry them to the comparative privacy of their own home.

When the Blakeney's thanked Norry with surprise for the trouble he had taken, Larrick heard him murmur:

"I had always expected to be a member of your family some day, but now—"

He turned away and came back to Larrick.

CHAPTER X

NOTHING is more hateful than a decent action in one that we have fondly hated. Some people are easy and earnest haters, but the average amiable soul finds it hard to get together enough enemies to keep himself warm. Enemies are constantly slipping away from one, particularly in these days when science is proving so much more merciful and forgiving than any religion ever was.

Norry Frewin, as the murderer of Clelia, was a personage for Larrick to look forward to with hope and a kind of respect. But to find him crushed with grief, solicitous for the girl's parents, and fairly craven with innocence—this struck one of Larrick's crutches out from under him.

The only strength Norry showed was in his stubborn insistence that Larrick should come home with him instead of going to a hotel. The Frewins had reopened their town house, and Norry said that his father and mother would be bitterly hurt if their "son" Larrick did not come back to them. So Larrick yielded, but with regret. He saw that the curse of hospitality would hamper him. How could he live in the Frewin home and try to fasten a crime on the beloved heir of his hosts?

He felt a sudden disgust of the whole ugly business of revenge. What would he not do to bring Clelia back to life? He would slaughter anyone for that exchange with death. But to slay somebody to appease her ghost would do her no good. It would be as bloodily silly as the old habit of slaying hecatombs at the tombs of the dead. And Clelia had not even a tomb.

On the motor ride to the Frewin home Larrick was surprised to find how little the winter had touched New York. It had dealt so cruelly with him that he expected to find the world in a state of white siege. But New York had no

snow now and the air was full of balm. Central Park, as they ran down its upper region, was green, and Fifth Avenue was as glossy and brimful of riotous luxury as if death had never been and never would be. Young girls of much the same model and radiance as Clelia ran their own cars, rode, wind blown, on the tops of the busses wabbling like green ferryboats, or swung along the sidewalks past gleaming mirror windows that offered them their own images as well as the enticements within—as if just such a girl had never been snatched out of the world.

Larrick's eyes regarded the carnival as something heinous, unforgivably heartless.

Fortunately the Frewin home was reached before he had much of this mocking to endure. Mr. Frewin was at his office, but Mrs. Frewin greeted him with motherliness. She was suffering for Norry's loss of Clelia, and she did not know that Larrick felt even more bereaved.

Norry cut short his mother's visit and hurried Larrick to his room, where he demanded a continuation of the story Larrick had told him on the way down.

Larrick was more eager to ask questions than to answer them, but Norry's very curiosity was in itself a denial of Larrick's unspoken suspicions.

Norry flung on a table a heap of newspapers with Clelia's name and picture everywhere upon them in blotches of type:

"See what the fiends are doing with my darling," he groaned. "Nearly everything is lies, and what is true they have no right to print. But what can we do to protect her? Tell me the truth."

Larrick told him all that he knew, but he could not confess the wrath he had felt toward Norry. He let his hatred slip from him reluctantly and acquitted him with regret. But abruptly Norry woke his suspicions again by an outburst:

"I'm really to blame for Clelia's death."

Larrick's hand clenched on Norry's arm with frenzy. "What do you mean by that?"

Norry was too deep in his own brooding to catch the spirit of Larrick's words.

"I always adored Clelia. She was my first sweetheart,

and she always liked me, but she never could seem to love me."

This strangely gave Larrick a comfort, an unworthy one, but perhaps the more soothing. Norry went on:

"She might have come to love me in time, but she was slow growing up—as a woman, I mean. She was like a wild young boy who makes fun of love, thinks it trash, doesn't know what it's all about. I don't believe she ever knew a real temptation or ever kissed a man with warm lips."

Larrick shivered. It was uncanny and accursed to talk of the sex of the dead. He remembered that canoe voyage he took with Clelia and how near they were to the abyss; how she peered over dizzily and felt all the impulse to go forward that people feel at the precipice' edge. Larrick had held her back instead of leaping into the pit with her. And now she would never know a pang of desire again, and never know at all the supreme rapture of the flesh. Larrick wondered whether this were a cause for gratitude or for utter regret. With the heaven of the pure in heart before her it was well that she had never sinned; yet in that heaven there would be no flesh, and all her growth to earthly perfection had been but a vanity, a flower that froze just as it bloomed.

But Norry's talk trampled down his reveries.

"Clelia never knew what passion means. But she inspired it in me—it seems a crime to speak of it—or think of it now. But she drove me almost mad—and other men, too. Coykendall, for instance.

"I wanted to kill him when I saw him watching her, gloating over her in her light costumes, daring to think of her as a woman. And when I saw her dancing in his arms, well, I had to talk to myself to keep from actual murder.

"Then I realized how I felt when I watched her, how I burned when she was in my arms. It's a fearful thing to abominate another man for certain traits and then find them in yourself.

"But I could always forgive myself, and I couldn't excuse Coykendall. That last night on the piazza—you remember how we quarreled? I saw her dancing with Coykendall.

The moonlight was so bright I could read his eyes. And it seemed to me that Clelia was yielding to his influence, or the moon's. Anyway, I imagined that he was winning her to his own way of thinking.

"When the Victrola record gave out and the dance stopped they walked away and whispered together, and I felt as lonely as if I were a castaway in the open sea. I couldn't help edging closer and I heard him murmuring to her, asking her to walk with him to the shore of the lake. 'It's our last chance,' he said, 'before the blizzard strikes it and freezes it, and, besides, we leave to-morrow morning.'

"I heard him say that, and I waited to see what she would say. And she laughed, 'All right.' I thought her voice broke a little nervously. I went blind with rage, and just as they were leaving the porch I stepped forward and grabbed Coykendall by the arm and I said, 'Coyky, you try to take Clelia away from this piazza, and you'll never know what struck you.' And then the hot words started. He was afraid of me, but Clelia wasn't. She was never afraid of anybody. She said she could take care of herself, thank you, and if I were such a caretaker I could go back to New York and take care of the girl that was looking for me.

"I assumed that Coykendall must have found out about that affair, and I said, 'We're all going back to New York to-morrow, but you can't go out there with Coykendall.' And she said, 'And why not?' And I said, 'Because he's a yellow dog!' And she said, 'What kind of a yellow animal are you?' or something crazy like that. We weren't very brilliant, and the only repartee I could think of was to invite Coykendall to come down to the lake with me and I'd drown him there. Coykendall was all for a quiet life and he backed away. But Clelia was white with anger, and our voices rose till Mrs. Roantree came out and sent us all to our rooms in disgrace."

Frewin fell silent at this point in his bitter recollections, till Larrick recalled him with an impatient question:

"But you said that you were to blame for Clelia's death. What did you mean by that?"

"I meant that if I had been truer to Clelia she might have married me—or loved me, at least. Her beauty set me on fire, but she refused to love or let love. So I told her one day that I'd find somebody with a heart. She only laughed. I tried to make her jealous. But she had no jealousy in her—at least none of me. Or she saw through the game. Anyway, she only made fun of me.

"I could never stand her laughing at me. Love was no joke to me. I was mad about her, crazy for her. She wouldn't even pretend to love me, but she made me so hungry for love that finally I went after it—elsewhere—like a drunkard who sees champagne and can't reach it and goes after cheap whisky.

"There was a pretty fool I met, who hadn't Clelia's beauty, but had all the—the fire that Clelia lacked. And she—it sounds idiotically conceited—but she loved me as desperately as Clelia didn't. She was as easy as Clelia was impossible. She pursued me as I pursued Clelia. I ran away as Clelia did and this girl followed me. She was one of those that sin in a minute and repent forever—easy stumblers, but slow on the recovery. Repent and repeat.

"That day, you remember, when you came to my apartment as Clelia was just leaving the door, Clelia had called just out of pure deviltry to tease me and shock me, because I never wanted her to be anything but what was proper and circumspect. For I was always a stickler for appearances even at my worst, and Clelia never cared a rap for them, for she had nothing to conceal. As hell would have it, that other girl had forced her way into my place just a little before Clelia rang my bell.

"When I opened the door Clelia saw her hat in the hall and ran away, laughing like mad. But from then on she wouldn't even tease me any more. She abhorred me. She felt that I was unclean, treacherous to the love that would some day have come to us. At least I think so, I hope so.

"But she'd never listen to an apology. She laughed, but it was a hurt laugh. She realized a phase of me that she had never understood before, the man of me. I broke her faith

in the world—or at least in me. That was the day she woke to the ugliness of life, as it is really lived.

“I blamed the other girl and threw her out, chucked her, never would see her again, any more than Clelia would see me. The poor wretch wept and pleaded over the telephone and hounded me just as I had hounded Clelia. I took you up to the farm to get out of her reach.

“And then one day I got a telephone message from her lawyer that she was going to sue me for breach of promise and all sorts of things. That was why I went to town so suddenly. I met Burnley, the painter, and told him my trouble and he said he was on his way to Mrs. Roantree’s and that Clelia was to be there. He told me that she had begged Mrs. Roantree not to invite me. That made me desperate.

“I had no money to quiet the other girl, and I didn’t dare ask my father. My lawyer advised me just to disappear for a while and see if the storm wouldn’t blow over. And that’s how I came to take you up to the Adirondacks, for one last desperate try for Clelia. And there Coykendall was, playing on her sympathies, playing on her nerves, slowly teaching her his kind of love. Thank God she escaped that!

“If I had only been patient a little while longer with Clelia, and truer to her, she might have come to love me. Then she wouldn’t have gone to the mountains to get out of my reach. She wouldn’t have listened to Coykendall, she wouldn’t have been interested in such scum. And he wouldn’t have killed her.”

Larrick was astounded to hear his own thought spoken by another’s voice.

“You think he killed her?”

“Who else could have? When I wouldn’t let him take Clelia for a walk in the moonlight that night and she was sent to her room I believe she was just in the mood for mischief. I believe that he slipped out and tapped at her window, and begged her—or, more likely, dared her to come out. And she did!”

Larrick’s adoration revolted at this.

"But she wouldn't have gone out to him dressed like that."

Norry hated even to admit the possibility, but he groaned:

"She did go out like that, didn't she? She was found so. You see, Clelia had no sense of—of indecency. You saw what she swam in. She hated the sham of clothes, and the prudery of people. She was like Eve. The scales hadn't fallen from her eyes. For all her knowledge, she didn't really know the world.

"What else is there to believe but that she ran out on the impulse just as she was? Then maybe—it must have been so—he thought her mood was the same as his. And when she understood she must have tried to run away from him. She may have screamed for help, and none of us heard her.

"I can see him pursuing Clelia. He must have gone mad. He couldn't overpower her, I suppose. She was strong as a panther, and he always was a weakling. So he must have taken some weapon, and finally—you say her hands were at prayer and her forehead wounded. He must have struck her dead. And then he became the coward he always was. Then he flung her into the water and slipped back into the house."

The picture was as vivid in Larrick's vision as any nightmare. It repelled his powers of belief, yet people were always getting murdered. And he had seen the wound in Clelia's brow. He reasoned no longer. He spoke with hoarse fury:

"Where's Coykendall?"

"I don't know. I've looked for him everywhere."

"Why did you let him get away from the train?"

"When we left the mountains none of us knew or dreamed that Clelia was not alive. We were all talking about her. Coykendall was very nervous, but I supposed that he was simply fidgety because she wasn't along. We supposed she had stayed behind with you. And we both cursed you.

"I never learned what had happened till Clelia's father called me up and told me he had had a telegram from Mrs. Roantree saying that Clelia was mysteriously drowned and wounded.

"I went almost mad. I wanted to go up on the private train—but it got away before I knew it. Then the newspapers came out with the horrible stories of the ice, and they've never rested since. I didn't know what to think till they began to hint at murder.

"Then I thought of Coykendall and I saw his behavior in the train in a new light, and I went to look for him. But he was not to be found. I even went to his lawyer. But the lawyer was out of town on some errand his office people wouldn't explain.

"I was so desperate I went to Mrs. Coykendall's house. And she was out of town! I can't imagine what has happened to all of them."

Larrick rose and flung his head up like a bloodhound howling along a trail. He cried:

"I'll find him!"

Then there was a knock at the door. Norry flung it open and the Frewin butler spoke:

"Is Mr. Larrick there? Ah yes. You're wanted on the phone, sir, if you please."

"Who wants me?"

"Mr. Coykendall, sir."

CHAPTER XI

THE one thing Coykendall could have done to satisfy Larrick would have been to permit Larrick to run him down and then wring from him a confession that he had murdered Clelia.

The one thing Coykendall could have done to render Larrick desperate was to rob him of his last working theory. And that was what Coykendall chose to do.

When Larrick and Frewin heard his name mentioned and realized that he was actually asking for Larrick, who was just starting on a still hunt for him, they looked at each other and gave him up. Very reluctantly they acquitted him of guilt before they heard his case. If Coykendall had committed a crime he would never have tried to bluff it out; he would have fled and hidden.

When Larrick answered the telephone with all the bitterness of accumulated wrath Coykendall began to shower questions on him about Clelia. He had just seen the newspapers, he said.

Larrick sent a tentative lasso after him when he answered: "I don't like to talk that subject over the phone. Where can we meet?"

"I'll run right up there, if you say," said Coykendall, ignorant of the staggering effect of his words.

Larrick agreed for the sake of coming to close quarters with him.

While they waited, Norry and Larrick discussed him. They had always found him poltroon, and now there seemed to be something sneaking in his very innocence.

They watched from a window and saw him swing to the curb in his racing car, leap out, and run up the steps. He was already talking when he caught sight of them.

He seized Larrick's hand and clung to it, babbling:

"Tell me about Clelia. What in the name of— How could— My God! it's unbelievable."

"When did you find out?" Larrick asked, coldly.

"I haven't found out yet. I don't know what happened."

"You're the only man in the country that doesn't know, then. Didn't you read the papers?"

"I've read them all. That's why I don't know what happened. The first one was very definite. But the others all contradicted one another. Tell me the truth."

"Where have you been?" Norry demanded. "I've tried to find you everywhere. I've even tried to find your wife."

"We went up to a little up-state town."

"Together?"

"Yes, to get a divorce and keep out of the papers. I gave her the evidence."

"Yes, you did!" Larrick snarled, glad of an excuse for denouncing him. "You gave it to her after you threatened her with disgrace if she didn't accept it. How in the name of all hell could you have got hold of that slimy lizard that compromised her and confessed—kissed and told lies about it? How did that animal come to tell you about it?"

"Why, I hired him in the first place," Coykendall exclaimed. The matter of his divorce was casual with him—a page torn out of his diary.

"You hired a man to make love to your wife and then make an affidavit that she was guilty of—of—"

"I didn't intend to use it. I only wanted to make my wife listen to reason."

"To reason! You yellow-bellied snipe, you—"

"Well, call me what you want to. I didn't love my wife any more. I couldn't help it. I told her so. I begged her to let me go, but she wouldn't. The laws of New York are so damned strict that there's only one ground for a divorce. She would never have given me that ground; she never would pay any attention to any grounds I gave her. It's all the fault of these rotten laws that try to chain a man and woman together when their hearts are dead and when

love has turned to disgust. It's indecent and they call it religion and the home and—rot!"

"As long as your wife could stand it, why did you have to throw her out?"

"I was madly in love with Clelia, and—"

Both men, both lovers of Clelia, gave such a start of fury that Coykendall checked himself.

"Well, I—anyway, my wife refused to let me go. She was like a woman that drags a man down when he's trying to save her. He can swim, she can't. If she'll let go, both will live. If she won't, then both will drown. Well, I tore my wife's hands free. That's all."

"But this hired man of yours, who swore to such lies about her—where could you find such a—a— What is there to call him?"

"Why, he was a private detective. There are lots like him. These strict divorce laws make their business and a million other scandals. I told them my story. They said they could manage it. And they did."

"And you introduced that detective in your home—to your wife—as your friend? You left them alone?"

The very thoughts were like vomit in Larrick's mouth.

"That was better than murdering her, wasn't it?" Coykendall cried. "I didn't do her any harm. She's a good woman. She loved me and couldn't stop. She's built that way. I'm built my way. She gets credit for being a saint and I'm a cad. Well, all right, I'm a God-made cad. I can't love a woman just because she's good or just because she loves me. You may be able to. I can't. I'm not built that way. It's not my fault. I never could love anybody more than so long and—I'm just as sorry about it as anybody. But I can't help it. It seems as if there had to be just so many snobs and cads in the world, and I drew one of the tickets in the lottery. It hasn't made me happy. I've been miserable. I hate myself for it. I'm ashamed of myself. But I couldn't help it. If you've got to blame somebody, blame God, not me.

"I never had any stability. I didn't when I was a child. I never shall have. A fellow can't make himself a hero by just wanting to. Clelia would have been the one love of my

life. She understood me and felt sorry for me and defended me from everybody's contempt. I really loved her. She could have kept me true—and now, she—”

He winced again lest they beat him for letting her name slip out once more. He was trembling, but not quite sobbing; his wet eyes were rolling this way and that, furtively. He was a wretched object, like a fox caught in a trap, running to and fro and dragging the clinking chain, hurt and ready to snap, but still shifty and helplessly elusive.

Larrick and Frewin, with all their own tricks to be ashamed of, abominated his tricks because they were not theirs.

It is strange how partial forgiveness is. We forgive and admire the lion and the leopard and the grizzly bear, the Cæsars and Napoleons, the prize fighters and the thugs. But we loathe the snake, the rat, the fox, though they are driven through the world by instincts they did not select. The mouse might well wish to be a lion, but he remains a mouse.

There is a pathos about disloyalty that is somehow either over our heads or beneath our hearts. Anyway, it evades us. The Benedict Arnolds, the Judases, the congenital traitors suffer a helpless remorse before and after their perfidies. They simmer and fry in the hells of their own shame and the public contempt. But how shall they escape their natures?

We forgive people for other deformities. We help the blind across the street. We temper our voices to the deaf. We coddle the lame, the sick, the insane, the hot tempered, the illiterate, the inartistic.

We forgive people for most of their physical and mental poverties. But there are a few traits that we damn incontinently, and their victims with them.

We speak of the quicksands as treacherous, but how can they help it if they cannot support the weight of the pilgrim? How can they help looking like other sands or smothering those who crush them apart?

What an ugly industry it is, this whole commerce in blame! We are all critics, damners of other people's souls. And we find a sense of superiority in it, though nothing

human is so contemptible as contempt. There are even men who make a trade, a profession of it, and yelp across pulpits and editorial desks ignorant ruthlessnesses in the name of a God who, according to them, has little other business in eternity but eavesdropping, despising, and distributing punishments, a runner-in for an incredible hotel called hell!

Larrick could have killed Coykendall in anger. He could have turned him over to justice in cold blood. But he could not punish a weakling who took refuge in his own weakness as in a martyrdom. A tomato worm cannot be anything else, and a man cannot but feel reluctance to crush it. He took refuge from his own weakness in a flare of rage.

"Why don't you go back to your wife? She's the only person on earth who likes you."

"That's not true. Clelia—"

The name rang upon the air. Larrick's fists clenched, but he could not strike. He was shackled by the memory of Clelia's defense of Coykendall. She had warned him not to try to gain her favor by abusing Coykendall. There was something angelic in her tolerance. Frewin had run across that warning of hers, too. Her mystic hands seemed to reach out from somewhere to shelter this pest, this caterpillar.

Besides, both Frewin and Larrick were utterly convinced that Coykendall had not harmed her—could not have slain her. They liked him none the better for taking away their last excuse for venting their jealousies upon him.

He began to demand the truth about Clelia's tragedy. Larrick answered his frantic queries without courtesy, evasively from disgust of the man. And by and by both he and Frewin saw that Coykendall was questioning them with a kind of suspicion that they might be no more guiltless than they had thought him. And, indeed, circumstances involved them as much as him. Larrick remembered Madsen's doubts and insinuations.

The intolerable ignominy of Coykendall's suspicion gave Larrick the impetus he needed. He broke off the parley with a sharp snap:

"Coykendall, I don't know what your wife sees in you to

love. But you're one of those queer animals that women do love. Maybe you've got the secret of winning them. Maybe it's because you are so helpless and shiftless and no 'count generally that you appeal to the mother in them and they take you to raise. You make them feel superior, kind of, and that's the way you trap 'em. Then as soon as you've got 'em, I reckon, you lose interest. Maybe you'd have played on Clelia the same way if she had lived."

"Oh no! No! Not Clelia. I adored her!"

"You say that because she got away. She was the one you never caught, and maybe it was just as well that she died. I couldn't imagine her breaking her heart over you—but I saw a picture of your wife when she—before she went to that face surgeon, and she was mighty handsome, too."

"Oh yes, she was beautiful then. I was mad about her—then."

"She's cursed with loyalty and loving only once, just as you're cursed with disloyalty and loving often. She sacrificed her beauty to hold you. And she lost everything. I reckon maybe you d best go back to her."

"Why, I just gave her a divorce."

"She'll give it back again."

"You must be insane."

"Well, supposin' I am. As you say, I can't help it. You couldn't blame me if I told the judge what you told me. That would bust up the divorce on the ground of collusion, wouldn't it? And I'm just about crazy enough to hunt up that private detective and put him in my private graveyard. All us Texans have our private graveyards, you know. You must have seen it in the books how quick and reckless we are with our shootin' irons. And you couldn't blame me for being a hasty shooter, because I'm built that way."

Coykendall was not afraid of the gun talk, but he saw the hazard of a mere hint to the courts. He made a show of resistance:

"Why are you so interested in my wife?"

"Oh, I'm not in love with her. If I was I wouldn't be turnin' her over to you. Fact is, I never met the lady. But I heard her cryin' once. I heard her say: 'He's goin' to divorce me. He has more than evidence enough—but I'm

all too innocent.' I'll never forget what her voice sounded like—like stranglin' a little girl. I saw her photograph, too, and I saw her twice with her face all veiled up—and all I can say is, she's suffered enough, and if she wants you, I'm goin' to get you for her. So I say, if you don't go back to her I'll get you myself, and I'll see you don't get anybody else. What I'll do to you will make what that face doctor did to your wife look like nothin' at tall."

Coykendall writhed, but he knew that he was caught. His knowledge of Texans was gained from fiction, but fiction reiterated is better believed than history.

Larrick said: "Norry, you know the poor angel that this little tin devil married. Supposin' you telephone her or go see her and ask her to take him home and forgive him, because God built him out of some skunk-material He had left over one day."

Coykendall hastened to protest:

"Oh, I'll—go back. I'll go back, damn you! You don't need to see her."

Larrick said: "That's right. You run home and get the credit for doing the right thing for once. You love to brag about your own weaknesses and get women to mothering you. But just ask your wife to telephone Norry that the prodigal has come home and the veal is in the oven. I don't expect you'll be a very good husband or a very true one, but you're the kind of thing she likes, and as Abe Lincoln said—"

It was many hours later when Norry was called to the telephone. Larrick, standing near, could hear a crackling voice hysterical with laughter. It was Mrs. Coykendall crying:

"Oh, Norry, Norry! Roy wants me to tell you that we've decided to forget past differences and—and— He says that you've been a good friend of his and you would be glad to hear it. Isn't it wonderful? Poor Roy, he's such a darling. He's had such an unhappy time of it. But now we're together again. And I'm so happy! Oh, so blessedly happy!"

Norry told Larrick, and they felt that they had managed to interpolate in the gloom of the world one interlude of joy; they had torn a little rift in the clouds for the sunlight. But they were more than ever lost now in the riddle of Clelia.

Book VI

THE AFTERGLOW

CHAPTER I

NO theory, insane soever, was left, unspoken or untried, in the search for an answer to the puzzle who killed Clelia and why? Other girls had vanished and never returned, except in the recurrent feature stories of the newspapers. Criminals of the more horrible sort were arrested in all parts of the country and released only after they had been readvertised. The search was not confined even to this earth.

Mrs. Roantree, who was fashionable in all things, was of a practical mind as well. When she accepted spiritualism, it had already been lifted beyond a dismal solace of the shabby poor into a somber recreation for the rich. Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and other English knights aberrant were going about the world like gorgeous crusaders proclaiming that "a hole" had been made in "the wall," that the dead were indeed at last talking to the living.

Sir Oliver Lodge had published hundreds of pages of stenographic reports of conversations with a boy who could not be other than his son. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had irrefragable proof (which none but the most bigoted could deny) of his own contact with his own son.

With the usual American passion for reducing everything to machinery, a kind of typewriter for spiritese had been devised, a popular revival of the old planchette under the trade name of the ouija board. Millions had been sold by a manufacturer who laughed at their occult significance.

It was said that Edison was preparing a special machine, a labor-saving device for ghosts, or a new arc light for the dark valley. Automatic writing was all the rage. It was an unpopular soul, indeed, who could not find a dead correspondent to exchange letters with.

Mrs. Roantree, like many another aristocrat, had a keen business sense. She demanded good service for good money. When she accepted spiritualism she proposed to put it to work at once. She went straight to a medium who had brought "back" many a dead soldier, had put many a lost daughter into communion with mourning parents.

To them there was a precious reassurance in such a stingy message as, "Tell mother I am well and happy and not to worry." But Mrs. Roantree would not be put off with such shoddy merchandise. "If you can talk to the dead, talk to the murdered dead," she demanded. "Bring back Clelia. Get her own word and we'll capture the fiend and drag him into court. What better testimony could there be than the victim herself? Nobody questions a deathbed statement. How could anybody doubt one made still later?"

But, strange to say, the facile mediums who were offered this chance to convert the most skeptic, demurred, refused even to put in a call for Clelia. The mediums never ventured into the courts with Clelia's or any other person's postmortem statements. The police paid no calls upon the mediums except occasionally to arrest them, though unsolved murder mysteries piled up until they became a newspaper scandal, and official investigations were conducted and many an officer broken.

The murdered dead never denounced their assassins, and nobody expected them to.

But Mrs. Roantree was of an exacting disposition. When she found that hours spent following the meandering ouija and hours spent in listening to the imitation epilepsies of the mediums, produced not even a hint of Clelia's case, Mrs. Roantree forswore the cult.

Clelia's mother and father, for all their yearning, could not or would not believe. They would not seek the mediums. They kept a dreadful sanity that kept their sorrow deeper, more poignant.

Mr. Blakeney fought the gloom with paid explorers. He sent a school of detectives here and there. But even they wearied of the vanity and resigned the task. To save their

faces they agreed upon suicide as the simple and normal explanation. But those who knew Clelia somehow knew that this easy answer was not the answer.

One day the baffled Larrick received a telephone call from the sculptor, Randel, and an invitation to come to his studio. It was the first of the sumptuous studios that Larrick ever saw. The palatial room, with its lofty ceiling, its arras-hung balcony, its immense draperies, its tumbled brasses and bronzes and marble fragments, its magnificent disarray, looked like a storeroom of spoils from conquered cities.

Burnley, the painter, had already arrived. He greeted Larrick with a fellowship in bereavement. Randel guided Larrick round a colossal horse of clay and iron that made an alcove of the north side of the room.

And there Larrick saw four Clelias. All four held the same attitude. Each tiniest wrinkle in the silken drapery was exactly repeated. The hands prayed the same prayer.

Larrick felt bewitched, bemocked. Tragedy had again been turned to burlesque by multiplication. Four times one did not make four, but nothing at all.

The unique disaster and pathos of Clelia's beauty were rendered cheap, almost commercial by their reduplication. There was no comfort in being jostled away from a grief so deep that it seemed a final beauty, a precious sorrow to hug tight and never let go.

Randel saw what Larrick suffered and explained:

"I made one for her father and mother and one for the law; one for you and one for me."

Larrick's heart quickened at the thought of possessing a replica of Clelia, but he could not bear the sight of that white and rigid quartet of her. Randel threw cloths over three of the casts. Instantly the one that remained took on reality and an incomprehensible charm.

With her three sisters gone from view, this Clelia was all Clelia, so snowy, lithe, and intent that she seemed almost to surge forward with the vigor of the Winged Victory.

Larrick could not but draw near her and appeal for a word or any sign from her. She seemed just about to raise

her eyelids and pour language from her irises as in a happier day.

Yet she did not move or breathe or lift her lashes. And she seemed hardly to be Clelia at all in the aloofness, in this first refusal of an opportunity to dart a mischievous glance, draw a taunting smile, and laugh some light mockery.

Larrick turned to Randel, eager for a word of praise, and shook his head:

"It's not Clelia, after all. You've got her form, but you haven't got her color. It's bad enough to think of her standing there through all eternity without once budging, but she wasn't a pale, whitewashed thing like this. She ought to have her own color of hair and skin and mouth. The statue ought to be painted."

"Oh, my God!" Burnley groaned, with all the reproach of a trained artist for a hopeless Philistine. "Surely you've been off the range long enough to get over wanting tinted statuary, the cheapest trash in the world."

The humble Larrick felt himself snubbed indeed now, but Randel came to his rescue:

"The Greeks tinted their statues, used golden draperies and jeweled eyes. I read once how Praxiteles engaged a famous painter to color his Marble Faun for him so that it would look like nature in every detail."

Anything the Greeks did is good enough for any artist. So Burnley, after some throat-clearing, was suddenly converted to Larrick's fantastic thought.

"Let me tint one of those," he said. "I made a sketch of Clelia when the child was in the ice. Her color was half her beauty. I'll have a try at it."

And so on another day Larrick was summoned to see Clelia redeemed from pallor. Her hair, her flesh, her lips, her creamy gown were all delicately hued. Though he had attempted fidelity, the indomitable artistry of Burnley had somehow given a little more than realism to the work.

Larrick was profoundly thrilled.

That envelope of contours and planes which had inclosed all that Clelia was was no longer a cold and fatal white. It was warm and various, no longer naked and forlorn, but

clothed with a tinted sheen as if scarfs of ineffable delicacy had been wreathed about her. The profiles that had shifted from melody to melody as he moved before her were now like tunes enriched with harmony, voices singing above instruments played tenderly.

The formality and vigor of white sculpture had been un congenial to Clelia, but now, flushed and imbued with that miracle of broken light we adore as color, her image was more like herself.

And yet, after the first rejoicing that this beauty had been restored to her, the deep damnation of her taking-off seemed even more inhuman, ungodly, even undevilish. The weight of grief was doubled.

For as the increase of knowledge only multiplies the scope of ignorance, so the increase of beauty is but the aggrandizement of the cruelty of death. So grief grows defiant of torture, and torments itself, whips itself and salts the wounds, makes scars for memory's sake.

And now Larrick, wrung with new anguish for Clelia, so loved his very regret that he wanted to make sure of its constancy. He demanded a monument to his agony.

"There's only one thing more we need. We ought to have her now as we found her in the lake there. If we could only put her back in that block of ice—in ice that would never melt any more than marble would! I wonder if we couldn't build a shaft of glass around her."

Both Randel and Burnley shuddered at this. There was no precedent for such a deed in Greek or any other art so far as Randel knew. He joined Burnley in a gesture of abhorrence.

But Larrick persisted:

"Don't you remember the way her light played over the—the sunset and the moonlight and the daybreak and all? It was like holding her in the heart of a diamond. That's where that statue ought to be. I'd pay anything. I'd pay all I got in the world to have that. Couldn't it be done? Couldn't we try it, anyways?"

Larrick was so passionate, his instincts so sincere, his primitive simplicity so unspoiled by schools of art and the

despotries of criticism, that Randel was beginning to respect him.

He hesitated now to ridicule or deny a whim that might be an inspiration from that source of inspiration, the deep inner sea of universal longings. Randel knew that one of the secrets of genius is the retention of the power to wonder and to thrill at simple, familiar things and moods and to combine them into new forms. When a man has lost his gift to be as a child he will do well to listen to children.

So Randel, dreading to disobey the fantastic demand of this unlettered and unspoiled native of the wilderness, went away meekly and took up the telephone.

Burnley and Larrick waited in mute contemplation of the statue—how firm and precise and lifelike it was, and yet how lifeless, how deathful; how beautiful and serene and content and thinking it was, and yet how hideous it was for the soul to vanish that shaped and was shaped by the body that shaped the mold that shaped this statue. Everything was shapes and reflections, and all we knew of people was the beating upon our eyes of the light that had beaten upon them; the quiver against our ears of the air that they had shaken, the echo upon our senses of the forces that had shaken their senses.

It was inconceivable that the soul of Clelia was not something that preceded her birth and persisted after her death. And yet two souls had never been known to hold communion except through the flesh and its dealings with matter. A countless many had believed and declared that such messages were constantly sent about the earth and to and from infinity, into and out of the grave. But their testimonies were suspect and denied and in any case of no intrinsic importance and of no agreement.

The two men fell into that kind of stupor which some call meditation, that wide-eyed sleep of the mind. They were so dream deep that Randel's voice startled them when he came back.

"I got Louis Tiffany on the wire and he said that it would be quite possible to build a mold and pour into it molten glass that would surround the figure. It would have to be

annealed and that would be a long process, but he says that the result would be very beautiful, because the slight fractures and irregularity of the glass would probably give the shaft an iridescent glow."

Under the auspices of one who had given to glass so many new beauties and given to beauty new glasses and to his country's art such luster the caprice of the cowboy's grief became a revelation of genius. The painter and the sculptor were eager to share his glory.

The history of every art is full of such critical somersaults, *bouleversements*, about-faces. The tides of opinion can be made to flow or stand or ebb at times by some loud-voiced Canute, and what it is scholarly to ridicule becomes overnight scholarly to revere.

In the chronicles of the immense additions America has made to the world's arts this is forever happening. The very impatiences and uncouthnesses and racial mysticisms, humors, skepticisms, and arrogances that disgust the Europe-looking scholar abruptly become the sacred outbursts of volcanic fire, hot lavas from new craters in the plains.

And so we find the Indian savage and his celebrants; the cowboy and his retainers; the little lazy Poe; the professorial Emerson who ate pie for breakfast; the shy, little old maid, Emily Dickinson, who scribbled in secret better poetry than Sappho; the parson's timid wife who wrote a novel about slaves and brought on an enormous war, and gave the rail-splitting Lincoln his chance to be mankind's sublimest figure; the world's joke, Susan B. Anthony, who said that the wives and mothers of men deserved the suffrage as well as the suffering; the wallowing Walt Whitman; the derided builders of the skyscraping office steeples; the diabolic Edison, who dared to attempt to fasten sound and motion to permanent records; a Whistler dawdling from West Point to the conquest of *salons*; an uncouth Inness dipping his brush in Yankee fire and light; the sculptor, Borglum, from Idaho, who, like his ancestral Thor, must hammer a mountain into a monument—these and many another have turned the laughter of the critic suddenly back into his throat. They have accepted and defied the mockery of their own neighbors

and have won through to immortal glory. If ever they stumbled and were awkward and undignified it was because they carried a great burden of beauty and were more anxious for its safety than for their own dignity.

One might think that the time had come when no American critic would be fool enough to deny his country's majesty in every art. One might well believe that the American critic would be chiefly afraid lest at the end of his life it be found that many a genius had passed him by unrecognized and uncrowned. But the rarest thing of all is to find a critic in any art who does not chiefly announce himself by standing on the dungheap of his own bad guesses and proclaiming that his country is now and ever was and ever shall be but a barren barnyard over which he rules with spur and beak and cock-a-doodle-doo.

Meanwhile on the roads the great artists go by, in the fields the delvers are busy, beneath them the miners drag up gold and silver, and the sky is full of song.

CHAPTER II

TO build a huge lens about Clelia's statue was an instant thing to think of and to approve or disapprove, but to achieve it was a process of long and scientific toil.

Randel brought from his telephone conference information that made necessary the preparation of a new cast, not of plaster, but a fire-resisting clay that would keep its shape in a furnace of two thousand degrees and more.

The colors must be applied in a permanent enamel of metallic oxides, which the clay would partly absorb and which the heat would not destroy. And these colors, like the palette of the ceramic artist, must be chosen not for their appearance before their incineration, but for their afterglow.

He set Burnley upon the track of the necessary lore, and he went in quest of the proper clay for his molds, and of a glass factory where the experiment could be made.

In the meanwhile Larrick, the Texas Mæcenas, who could furnish artists with fire and fuel which he could not kindle in himself, went about his other businesses. They seemed entirely unimportant now, and unsatisfactory beyond endurance. He had had no business, indeed, but pleasure. And the very thought of happiness was abhorrent.

He had never won a promise of love from Clelia, or anything better than comradeship in play, except for one little while when in the moonlit canoe she grew dizzy with the fumes of new emotions and kissed him with a passion that was less a tribute to him than a brief surrender to a sudden fever.

Yet Larrick felt himself her widower, at times; at other times, the priest of her beauty and the pitiful brevity of it.

To dance or laugh or love or seek diversion anywhere with anyone seemed an insult to her memory and his loyalty.

He wore crape upon his heart and he brooded bitterly.

New York was the desert again; and all its throngs, and the storms of its prosperity, its industry, and its frivolity were only such far-off tumult as had filled the desert sky when the clouds were in travail and could not rain.

Norry Frewin had been imbued with some of Larrick's own solemnity. His consecration to Clelia's memory somehow took the shape of a desire to sacrifice himself to some honorable cause. He could think of nothing more honorable or more self-sacrificial than to offer his hand and his name to Francine Haslett, the girl who had been the victim of the desires that Clelia had unwittingly inspired and would not respect.

Norry discussed with Larrick the whole duty of a man in such a case, and both were so insatiable for sorrow that they agreed upon the matter. It was plainly Norry's obligation to redeem the poor girl from the shame of her vicarious transgression. And so Norry set forth to humble himself as a suitor before her, to offer her an *ex post facto* betrothal, to present the newspapers with a sensation and his father and mother with another heartbreak.

Larrick wrung Norry's hand and bade him Godspeed to the stake as earnestly as any young martyr ever was sped. Norry came back unexpectedly betimes and his humor was anything but martyresque. He was whooping with laughter, choked with the burlesque that life is always making of the loftiest motives. He was so incoherent both in his thoughts and his language that Larrick could hardly find out what had happened.

"The Lord never meant me for a hero!" he howled. "Every time I try to do the noble I step on a banana peel. That poor girl that I led astray—well, I didn't lead her astray. Old Dame Nature beat me to her by years and years—and is still at it.

"I went to her humble apartment house and was about to ring like a combination of bridegroom and undertaker, when I heard voices rolling through the thin door. Her mother was doing most of the talking and I felt that I had a right to the information that all the other neighbors were listening to from their open doors.

"I found out that my victim had not only been very busy before I met her, but has not been idle during my absence in the mountains. Her sainted mother was denouncing her, not because she was wicked, but because she was so careless of appearances that my lawyer had collected no end of documents and had told her lawyer that he had better call off the case. Her lawyer was in the room then, to see if he could collect his expenses for the blackmail that didn't work. Francine's mother had expected a fortune, and she got a bill, and she was uproarious.

"I tiptoed away and telephoned my lawyer. He said he had been trying to get me all day and that I needn't worry.

"Good Lord! what an escape! If I had telephoned poor Francine, she would have met me at the License Bureau, and we'd have been man and wife by now. Oooh! what a solemn ass I was! Well, I got by once more, and I hope it will be a lesson to me. I'll never try to do a decent thing again, for I never felt such a fool in my life."

Larrick had shared the tragic note of Norry's beautiful plan of immolation. He had to share the ridicule.

He was at the breaking point of grief, so poisoned with the very fatigue of sorrow that he must either snap or rebound. Being young and hale, he had not lost elasticity. As the Greek tragedies were followed by the antics of satyrs who swatted one another with bladders and worse, so Larrick reverted to a gayety almost more cynical than his despair had been.

He felt a drunkard's thirst for revelry. But an instinct of decent hypocrisy ruled him. As a widower might, from pure respect for the departed, slink away out of sight of his familiars, for a carousal that he could no longer defer, so Larrick felt an impulse to get abroad, to put an ocean between his mourning and his frolic.

His fortune that had come so easily rebuked him by its almost undiminished grandeur. The hospitality of the Frewins and others had checked his inroads on it.

He wanted to gamble and to be drunk, to be very drunk for a long while. Getting drunk in prohibited America was

not difficult, but it was of necessity surreptitious and it was also dangerous, since the law had put an end to the pride of the distiller in the purity of his wares. Only a chemist could tell wood alcohol from grain in advance, though the coroner could easily tell afterward.

To Larrick Paris, Monte Carlo, Ostend, Venice, Madrid, the Riviera were little infernal heavens for relaxation. He resolved to escape from this America which he had never left before. There were too many reminders of gloom wherever he moved here.

He saw Nancy Fleet now and then, but always by accident. He felt an increasing longing to go to her and to take electricity from the storage batteries of her galvanic presence. But he was ashamed of the perfidy he had shown to her in his infatuation for Clelia, and he blenched at the faithlessness to Clelia implied in his inclination toward Nancy. In Europe he would be free of both fetters, and his impatience grew to the frenzy of a cowboy in an attack of "prairie fever"; he had a mania for galloping madly through crowded settlements.

He spent much time in planning his foray. He consulted Cook, Raymond and Whitcomb, and other dealers in voyages. He was reminded of Mr. Frewin's warning that he would have to pay his income tax before he could get a passport. He spent an anxious time with an expert, who drew up his return for him and tried in vain to find some excuse for diminishing his payments.

Larrick had no dependents to claim exemption for; he had no expenses except living expenses, and those were not deductible; he had no factory, no office, no pay roll, no raw material; he could not claim depreciation or bad debts or business losses.

And so he found that he must indeed suffer for his unhampered prosperity. The government that he had never seen, the government that had never done anything specifically for him, reached out like an old monarch and took 40 per cent of his wealth.

The seizure of more than a hundred thousand dollars in taxes was like a compulsory amputation of all his limbs. His

remarks on Uncle Sam would have been treasonable and would have got him a life sentence in prison if they had been uttered during the war.

The pride of being able to pay such a tax was no consolation to him, though he had never expected before to rise above the groundling incomes that pay no tax at all. The fortune that was left after the tax was deducted would once have seemed to him a fairy's inexhaustible purse. But now he could think only of the magnitude of his loss. What remained seemed almost pauperdom.

The tax expert had pointed out that Larrick could make a handsome deduction for gifts to charity, if he had made them. But to his shame, when he was asked to list the recognized philanthropies he had contributed to, he found them few and small.

He was generous by disposition and could never resist an appeal outspoken or withheld. Had he not risked his life to save Norry Frewin in that far-off epoch when they met in Texas? Had he not borrowed money to lend to the penniless prodigal? Yet the catalogue of his other benefactions would not have done credit to a shoe clerk.

It was not that he had shut his eyes and ears and heart to misery. He had simply been traveling in regions where the wants of the poor were not audible or visible.

He determined to remedy this disgrace, and he began to send checks of liberal size to such charities as he encountered—to the kindergartens, to the Seaman's Church Institute, to the Salvation Army, to various hospitals, to the Armenians, the Near East Fund, to the French War Orphans' Fund, the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and to Animals, to the Actors' Fund, to the Chinese Famine Fund, to the funds for the help of the disabled war veterans whom America neglected.

When it became known that he was of a giving disposition, his name reverberated along the corridors of organized mercy. He began to feel a trifle overworked. His mail grew heavy with circulars and personal letters soliciting doles. He easily acquired an appalling ability to drop into his waste basket circulars, letters, and pictures calling his attention to

the fact that unless he acted at once a child would die somewhere that a dollar would have saved.

Among his mail one morning came a letter from Randel telling him of the difficulties he had met in finding a man to incase Clelia's statue in glass. Most of the big manufacturers were specialists who would not venture out of their own fields; one made bottles for medicines, one made them for milk, another made flasks of various sizes and was proud of blowing demijohns that held many gallons and achieved a thickness of half an inch. Some made window panes, and others mirrors. Plate glass for shops took all the output of many; motor windshields that would not splinter occupied others, and dishes and bowls and blanks for cut-glass wares still others.

One firm was making glass caskets for infants, and occasionally for men of moderate bulk, and was proud of conquering difficulties that had balked inventors for a century.

But nobody had made anything resembling the solid shaft that Larrick required, and nobody would even undertake it, especially as most of the factories were shut down.

An all-engulfing tide of hard times had by now thrown every third man in the country out of employment. The rhythm of prosperity was on the down swing now. Only a few months before and it had been almost impossible to find a workman for any job at any price. Suddenly it was almost impossible for a workman to find any job at any price. The balloonish power of capital to be inflated and deflated was making fools and knaves of those who declared every panic to be the foul conspiracy of a mysterious god called Wall Street.

But that inflated wealth which had filled the sky like a vast, anchored dirigible was now a flabby, floppy bag banging the ground. One day everybody had money and laborers paid thirty dollars for a silk shirt. Next month the laborer wondered about bread, and the cruel employer begged in vain for pay-roll loans at banks whose cupboards were all but bare.

Larrick felt a sense of guilt in having so much money as the fruit of so little toil, when everywhere about him

willing labor loafed in bitter fear and looked upon large families whose very bread was precarious or the gift of charity.

He had an impulse now and then to devote his riches to the comfort of the idle multitudes, but when he measured his resources against the appalling needs he felt poorer than the poorest. If he flung it broadcast it would be like emptying a canteen upon the Mojave Desert. The desert would not know the difference, and Larrick would have nothing to show for his extravagance but an empty canteen.

The tenderest heart, when frightened, turns to a fretful porcupine and closes itself, presenting only spines to all comers.

CHAPTER III

SINCE he could not hope to attain an important work of charity Larrick resolved to achieve at least one work of beauty.

He made a search among the survivors of the ancient guilds of glassmen and finally discovered one whom he could excite to activity. Walter Sirch gave him little courtesy or hope, and growled that he was only moved by the extravagant money Larrick offered him, a guaranty of all expenses, and a noble reward for success.

Sirch was a petulant genius, and, gruffly as he talked, his heart began to bubble and seethe like a pot of melting glass as Larrick made clear his desire. He put his wits to work and got rid of Larrick rapidly, that he might incandesce alone. The very difficulties in the way gave him courage.

It was many days before Larrick heard from him, and then he was told that if he wanted to be present he could come over and see how foolish his hopes had been.

On the next morning Larrick went with Randel and Burnley to Sirch's kilns.

In a cluster of old sheds they found him among a few of his trained workmen, glad to be saved for a while from hunger.

The long, low furnace had been charged and a quantity of glass was already cooking. Compressed air from buried tanks roared in upon the converging flames of two oil burners, fed by oil from other tanks. Together they created a blazing torrent of fire that streamed the whole length of the furnace and swept round a curve into the alternate chamber, completing a circling of flame hot enough to melt into snowy syrup what had been sand upon a Belgian beach.

In that fiery nebula of atomized oil with its heat of twenty-five hundred Fahrenheit degrees and more, even the gritty

particles the sea had brayed to powder must deliquesce and simmer.

Larrick had no love of sand. There had been too much of it spread about his feet and blown into his eyes. He had never realized that it is only the dust of a wasted metal which, under the coercion of heat enough, becomes a creamy paste, infinitely ductile and versatile, until it cools. And then does not disintegrate and return to sand, but remains translucent, cohesive, sharp as daggers, yet a shield against rain and air, against moth and worm and rust, letting nothing pass but light.

As Sirch explained the metamorphosis, Randel mused aloud:

"Human beings are that way, too. They lie about in heaps like sand, and then some passion fires them, white-hot, and melts the flinty souls, and afterward they are never the same again. They come out of the furnace brittle, easy to break, and mighty dangerous when broken—but they are no longer dust. The light shines through them and they are beautiful. Sin has its virtues, eh?"

Sirch liked the analogy, but preferred to do the talking himself. He led his guests to the shed where the Belgian sand lay heaped. It was very silken to the clutch and ran between the fingers dulcetly.

An old man was shoveling it into a wheelbarrow and carrying it to the mixer, where soda ash, lime, arsenic, borax, and other chemicals were added in proportions carefully chosen to melt the sand more speedily or clarify or tint the glass.

Into this raw "batch" were thrown fragments of unsuccessful glass, granted a second trial, and then the unpromising-looking mess was dumped into the maw of the furnace, added to a seething lava cooking over a network of white-hot checker-brick. As Larrick and the others saw this stirred with a long bar, the heat leaped at them as with claws and teeth, and they fell back.

Sirch explained that gravity would carry the batch forward along the melting space to the working end, where it would reach a temperature of fifteen hundred degrees.

He had taken advantage of Larrick's endowment and the

necessity for making glass to rescue from idleness a few of his most needy veterans and set them to making milk bottles.

At one end of the furnace stood a man who dipped into the caldron a long rod with a ball of fire clay on the end. He twisted this "punty" and dipped up as much of the glowing mucilage as would drip off and fill a bottle mold. Another man passed this mold beneath a jet of compressed air that drove the glass home and filled the spaces.

When this mold was cool enough it was opened and a hot little bottle stood revealed with a lingering flare of red in it.

One or two of these bottles cooled too soon and flew in a thousand pieces with a little popping sound. Sirch explained that a reheating and a slow cooling were necessary to give the glass firmness.

"Showing the value of a second marriage," said Randel, "or the importance of sinning at least twice."

Sirch conducted them then to the annealing furnace. The bottles were fetched hither for retempering by youths who lifted them from the mold shelf with long-handled scoops and transferred them to an oven, or lehr. Gas flames raised the cooled bottles to a high heat again. Thence they were drawn slowly back behind a curtain, and there cooled for several hours, and came forth honest, experienced bottles, ready for the rough knocks of everyday usage.

The rest of the factory was idle and silent, and all the furnaces were cold where formerly men had stood like the trumpeters of Judgment Day, dipping long rods into the glassy sea and setting them to their lips and blowing upon them till visible melodies came forth and froze, as they flung them in flaming arcs.

Others had continued the catalogue of miracles that heat wreaks upon the idle sands, teaching them to foam and yield to a gentle breath, to bloom like soap bubbles, soap bubbles that can be shaped and scissored, rolled and twisted, spun out into invisible hairs, formed into beads for rosaries to catch Heaven's ear, beads to win savages and new worlds with, jewels to mimic precious stones, lenses to bring the far-off planets under our eyes and to make visible the fauna and flora in the jungle of a drop of water, to give us new weapons

against disease and to multiply the knowledge of our infinite ignorances.

But all those blowers and trimmers and welders of glass were idle now except a corporal's guard. These Sirch called to his aid. Under his direction they drew from the lehr when it had been heated an iron box about the shape and size of a coffin. He explained that he had heated it so that it would not chill and ruin the hot glass poured into it.

Next they brought forth from the oven the figure of Clelia colored to the life and standing like a Joan of Arc waiting for the fagots to be lighted, her palms gabled in prayer.

Larrick's heart was checked in his breast at Clelia's sudden appearance in this dull chamber. The statue was so like Clelia that he could not believe it entirely devoid of some part of her soul. It hurt him to see it so roughly dragged about with chains and grappling hooks, and he cried out in protest.

Sirch turned to him quickly and tried to restore his calm. "It's only fire clay," he smiled.

"That's all any of us are," Larrick groaned. "I can't bear to see her mistreated."

The idolater does not really imagine that the idol is his god or goddess. He knows it is only an image, a reminder of an invisible belief. He does not really worship the image, but simply addresses his worship to it.

Yet so dear, so sacred the idol becomes that by and by it holds the believer's heart with a peculiar spell, and he who smashes such an image (as the Sultan of Mahomet did when he rode into Christian churches and shattered with his mace the "idols" of the Madonna and her Child) deals a blow directly upon the heart of the faithful.

So Larrick's heart was racked with pain and his own flesh seemed to shrivel as he watched the laborers hoist Clelia's image into the air and slowly lower it into the glowing furnace of the iron mold. He paced the narrow passages in a mood of black remorse for his own ruthlessness in urging this mad idea.

But Sirch thought only of his own glory and the glory he hoped to achieve. He believed that the fire clay would serve

as a core to the glass, helping it to cool with an evenness impossible if the interior of such a shaft had been all of glass.

Clelia made her ascension in chains, and the fire clay of her image had an uncanny light, the enamels gleaming and shivering with the commotion of the heat as she descended into the little hell of the mold and disappeared.

The mold was run then upon a wheeled carrier to the mouth of the glass tank. There a tap was opened and a flashing, boiling slow cascade flowed like twisting candy into the mold, filling every crevice and gathering about the hidden form of Clelia as the lava from Vesuvius caught and embraced and smothered and drowned the pretty Pompeiian girls it overtook.

All of the workmen were agog with anxiety and Sirch was frantic in his eagerness. But Larrick felt again that he assisted in an infernal rite.

When the mold was full and overflowing the tap was shut off and the glass subjected to the squeeze of compressed air. There followed a long, long wait until it should be cool enough to be removed and transferred to the annealing oven for the final tempering.

Sirch was in a travail of impatience and of dread. The others, ignorant of what he knew, were in haste only for the finished work. They could not understand how many dangers threatened success. His pride and his hope were involved. He had attempted what other experts had dismissed as impossible. Failure would mean derision; success would be triumph.

At last—a very belated last—the mold seemed to be cool enough to open. It was broken away like the coconut's rough shell that hides the white flesh within.

Sirch made the first outcry, and it was one of rapture. The others—the artists, the little congregation of glass-makers, and Larrick—quivered with welcome.

For a vision gladdened their eyes. Clelia stood before them in a magic investiture of glass. She was lost in a haze of light, an aureole tangible and firm, gleaming and pellucid as ice without its lethal chill. The glass was still haunted by the "red," a faint crimson luster tremulous throughout its

depth and gathering here and there in little pools like stains of wine.

They saw before them something that no one had ever seen before—a trinity of the arts, sculpture, painting, glass-craft, married in the tender name of love for the pure radiance of beauty.

The others were hushed with awe, but Sirch was like one gone mad.

“Stand by to carry my masterpiece to the annealing furnace,” he cried, “before it breaks.”

But even as the workmen drew close there was a terrifying crackle, a tinkle of falling splinters—a snow of sparkling flakes about the ground. And Clelia stood divested, stripped of her brief glory. The light that had been woven into a robe about her was quenched.

CHAPTER IV

THE others groaned with despair before a promised miracle recalled and denied. But Sirch only swore impatiently. He knew too well the fickleness of the whimsical muse of glass. He had held victory in his hand and he would grasp it yet.

"We've seen it once and we'll see it again. Everybody said it was impossible. Everybody is always a fool and a coward. What glass has done glass will do. I've learned something from this experiment, and I'll try it again with a batch of a different mixture. I'll keep at it till I succeed. And I will succeed, if I have to make a hundred trials."

He paused to turn a petitioning glance toward Larrick and added, with all the humility of the artist before his necessary patron, "That is, if Mr. Larrick is willing to spend a little more money."

"Money?" Larrick cried. "Of course I'll give you money, all you need. If I haven't got enough I'll steal some more."

It is not the artists alone who build great art. Always there is a passionate business man somewhere in the background or the foreground backing him up or beckoning him on forward.

Sirch nodded and, being assured of his collaboration, dismissed him with a few absent-minded words. The genius was already far away in a cloud realm of speculation.

As Larrick rode back to town with Randel and Burnley he was as proud as both Ferdinand and Isabella when they learned that the Columbus they had financed had invented a new continent.

But Randel's hot enthusiasm, cooling glasswise, cracked under the strain and he said, with a depressing cynicism:

"What are you going to do with this curious work of art when you get it?"

Larrick did not know or care. He was already impatient to remove himself to strange scenes where he could yield to the temptations swarming about him. He longed to yield, and to yield without restraint, to every external temptation; to encourage new whims from within and meet his opportunities halfway; to be very busy with new interests of any sort soever and distract his mind from the grief that was a perpetual nightmare from which he could never quite awake.

The old hermits withdrew into the desert and the wilderness that they might give themselves up to holy thoughts in a region of such discomfort that the very devils would be starved out. But Larrick wanted to withdraw into the thronged and ancient cities of Europe where the very crowds, all strange to him, unknowing and unknown, would provide him with a kind of solitude and keep him going in it.

With Mr. Frewin's help he set aside a fund for his income tax, and secured a passport. He bought his steamer tickets and his steamer rugs and other things that ocean-goers advised him to have.

As for Nancy Fleet and his farewell to her, he hesitated between telephoning to her that he had been suddenly called abroad on important business and spending the leisure of the voyage in composing a long letter in which he should tell her how wonderful she was, how unworthy he was of her, and how much happiness he wished her.

While he was still fretting over this decision he was called to the telephone one day and Walter Sirch shook the transmitter with his fierce, "Eureka!"

Persistence, the old lion tamer, had conquered stubborn nature and tamed the beast to service.

After many failures Sirch had found a composition that did not fall apart before it could be moved into the annealing oven. His difficulties had not ended there; he had lost more than one image in the reheating and the cooling. But now he had brought forth from the lehr, after days of slow reduction of temperature, a shaft of glass that would withstand a hammer blow. And this awaited Larrick's inspection.

Larrick gathered Randel and Burnley together and they

made all haste to the kilns, where Sirch awaited them in the childish self-approval of a Peter Pan. And indeed the artist must of necessity be always the youth that never will grow up. He always has his moments when he thrills with a shameless pride in being the wonderfulest boy that ever was.

Sirch had earned this brief insanity by days and nights of ugly, frantic toil and the bitter conquest of temptations to the luxurious repose of easy despair.

The statue was, indeed, a rhapsody of beauty. The glass had jailed a sunset within a more than alabastrian prison. Through labyrinths of relucant walls a restless light seemed to wander, groping and recoiling and always about to escape, yet never quite free. Serene and divinely content in a home of perfection, Clelia stood in eternal peace, as if she had fallen asleep while she prayed and knew that her prayers were already heard.

The witnesses kept silence about her like foreigners led atiptoe through a temple where a woman besought her unknown deity in a mood of holiness.

Then they withdrew to a distance that they might escape the struggling floods of such tears as drench the eyes and veil them when they look on some beauty too pure for mortal contemplation.

They regained something of that composure which enables men to look into one another's eyes and talk of earthly things. They regained the solid, if homely, ground of fact.

The union of art and piety had built a strange memorial for so volatile a girl as Clelia, but the elements were commonplace exceedingly.

What had been slimy clay had been shaped to human form; vegetables and minerals had been ground and powdered and blended into a color for its surface; sands that the sea had beaten to dust upon the shores of Belgium, sands that tramp steamers had labored with across the Atlantic, had been melted into a fuming cream and cooled to a luminous, illuminating rock.

The collaboration of diggers and sailors, longshoremen and truck drivers, oil-well crews and furnace men, pigment mixers and iron molders, laborers of every degree of grime,

and artists and scientists, had been necessary to make visible the dream of the cowboy with the broken heart.

And all this toil had for its aim and its result a picture of a girl who had no especial gift except a certain grace and gayety, who never saved a nation or an army or an idea, who never even had a husband or a child, who wrote nothing, painted, carved, enacted, inspired nothing except this fruitful regret in the soul of a man who had accomplished no more than the girl he mourned—unless this memorial of her should be accepted by those who saw it as an eye-gladdening, heart-quickening thing to be grateful for. And in that memorial Clelia had indeed collaborated. She contributed the inspiration and the form, Larrick the idea and the money—and others their various rôles.

This monument would strike many people as merely curious, cumbrous, and overelaborate. Critics would grow strangely angry at it. If it had been like other statues they would have called it conventional, academic, stodgy. Now they would denounce it as if it insulted something sacred to them, as if it endangered a precious heritage. Not knowing just what to call it, they would call it harsh names.

But it was done, and even the men who had given it their ardor could only wonder what next to do with it. Larrick had no home to put it in, and few people would have welcomed so poignant a reminder of death.

The conspirators for beauty feared nobody so much as the parents of Clelia, who had collaborated in the building of her spirit as of her form. They had furnished the chemicals and the warm fluids and the mold in which Clelia was fused and shaped and delivered to the world. And that living sculpture had been endowed with astounding powers of growth, of self-repair, and of motion, and with passions that sprang from what they might encounter. Yet that leaping, thinking, speaking, laughing, loving statue had been shattered and stilled by a blow and nobody could find a fragment anywhere either of the flesh or the soul that had made it.

Larrick felt guilty enough in all that had been done with Clelia's body. He dreaded what her parents would think of

him. If they should destroy both Larrick and the statue he would hardly blame them.

Randel took another view: "Clelia's father and mother have no more right to the statue of Clelia than they had to her. They could not have killed her without committing murder. They could not have sold her, or even married her off, without her consent. The *patria potestas* no longer holds.

"Clelia's soul and body belonged to herself. Where her soul is we don't know. But we do know that it deserted her body and left it for you to find. It belongs to the world now because it is beautiful and because it will light up a dark corner.

"Still, if we exhibit it now it will have only a success of scandal, since Clelia belongs yet awhile to the newspapers and the police. Crowds would mob the place to see it, not because of its poetry, but because Clelia was murdered.

"If her father and mother should see it now it would simply tear open the grief that time is trying to heal. A few years from now they can look at it and take a great joy in it. They will shed tears, but they will be like rain with a rainbow in it.

"The statue belongs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I think I can persuade the curator to accept it as a temporary loan, and keep it in a secret room where those who have a right to see it can go in and commune with its beauty.

"In a few years it can be quietly unveiled anonymously. It could be announced as a discovery in Italy, smuggled out of that country secretly to evade the law. It could be described as a probable masterpiece of the Venetians at a time when the craft was so occult that assassination was the punishment for any member of the guild who betrayed to a foreigner the mysteries of glass.

"Then the critics could fight learnedly over it and write beautiful things about the lost arts of the ancients and the pitiful degeneracy of modern art. And then, after a long while, Clelia's name could be given to it. By that time she would be only a legend, and as graceful as only a legend can become. Her father and mother would either have joined her in death or they would be so used to her absence that seeing

her again would give them something of the ecstatic rapture of witnessing the resurrection and transfiguration of their child.

"All we need is time. It will turn what would be an ugly, cruel, sensational bit of hateful Yankee realism into a deed of piety and of consecration to the loftiest ideals of beauty and reverence."

Larrick was not quite sure of everything Randel said, but the spirit of the words appeased his anxiety, and the solution of the problem had at least the comfort of deferment.

So he gave his consent and Randel set about the art-politics necessary to the success of his plan.

When Larrick had paid Sirch's astounding bill of expenses and an appropriate fee for his genius his wealth was diminished by many thousands of dollars.

He was strongly tempted to let Nancy Fleet see what he had wrought and bought. The very temptation proved how strong a hold she had secured upon him; how much the rope she had cast about him still held him. The more he fought and twisted the more he seemed to feel its withe.

Even when he decided that he would not show her the glorified effigy of Clelia it was because he feared to hurt her by subjecting her to the comparison, by reminding her how much he had loved Clelia, and contrasting that spiritual reverence with the always worldly nature of his approaches to Nancy. Nancy had had none of the unfair advantages of death and apotheosis.

Larrick gave up all thought of bringing the two women into confrontation and hastened his plans to go abroad. Only two days intervened between him and his flight, and his luck had still kept him from encountering Nancy. But as he came out of a sports shop on Madison Avenue, where he had been completing his equipment, he heard a sharp tapping on glass.

He whirled and caught sight of Nancy Fleet peering at him and gesticulating through the window of her limousine. The car drew up to the curb, the chauffeur reached back and opened the door, and Nancy's voice came forth. There was no escaping her smile and her outstretched hand. He was

surprised to see her and surprised to find how glad he was to see her.

She did not upbraid him for his neglect, and that was the most telling rebuke of all. It left him to rebuke himself. She had that habit of aristocratic self-sacrifice, the meekness of the gentle people who do not imagine a claim or press it, whose higher pride shows itself in concealing the hurts of neglect and resenting only open affronts.

This made it easier for Larrick, who could find no apology or excuse fit for the occasion. He did not contradict her when she increased his unkindness by assuming that it was unintentional.

"I know how busy you must have been, and I haven't bothered you, have I? I've been pretty busy myself—going in for charity and other old-maid sports.

"I don't suppose you have time to go with me to a little affair. It's charity, but the pill is well disguised in sugar. There's singing and dancing and afterward a luncheon—a lot of entertainment and only a tiny little shop talk about starving children. But I suppose you're too busy."

His gallantry answered for him, "I'm never too busy to steal a little of your time."

She made a rather wistful face at this, seeing more than he meant to disclose, seeing, perhaps, distresses that he hardly knew he felt.

He stepped into the car and it rolled on to the Ritz-Carlton, where he had met her first, and—he supposed—would perhaps have met her last.

CHAPTER V

THEY were a little late and the opening musical number was ending. It was followed by a group of songs and then by a series of dances. A wealthy young woman of family had taken lessons of one of the many teachers of dramatic dancing. Most of the dramatic quality was furnished by the revelation of girl flesh.

A pianist thumped and trilled and then the dancer came forth in a fantastic costume of Oriental leanings with Bakst revisions—a huge headdress, very little bodice, much slashed, and a pair of white silk trousers fluted and frilled.

She stepped, twisted, and postured in gyrations that may have been Oriental, but were certainly not Occidental.

She sidled off the stage to much polite glove-muffled applause. The pianist filled in with noise the time required for her change and then struck into a joyous rhythm.

The girl came forth again as a Grecian nymph, her only robe a short tunic that fluttered about her in rivalry with her fluttering hair. She circled the stage, prancing and bounding, hurling her body far back, and beating the earth with her bare toes and flinging her knees high. The spirit of youth was thus presented in a form whose daring was growing a whit conventionalized, whose nudity was becoming so frequent as to verge on tame respectability—since respectability is largely a matter of repetition and general usage.

She was a pretty thing, just between girl and woman. There was a something of Clelia about her that shook Larrick's heart and renewed rusty sorrows. Larrick felt a dreary resentment at wasteful fate, realizing how many girls there were alive and dead and yet to come who were so much like Clelia. He had recoiled from the sight of four statues of her, yet here she was and there she was alive again,

mischievous and shockingly beautiful as ever. There was an eternal Clelia dancing about the earth. There were multitudes of Clelias.

When the girl had galloped off the stage the speaker of the day walked on like a bearer of bad news. He tried not to be too depressing, and praised the audience for its well-fed look and air of prosperity. He emphasized the good fortune of America in having suffered so much less from the war than the nations of Europe. But the escape from devastation was the obligation to help carry the burden, to carry most of it, as after an earthquake the strong must aid the weak, who have burdens enough to bear in their pain and their discouragement.

He said that famine had been a merely historical word to him and to others until the war had made it commonplace. Hunger ruled the world now as never before. The sight of one starving child would unnerve most of us; it ought not to make us indifferent just because millions were starving. That form of consolation by multiplication was inhuman.

We have pictures enough and too many, he said, of children perishing slowly for lack of food. We have seen how they look when they starve to death. But we are too far away to hear their cries of agony as the vultures of hunger tear at their living entrails. He told how Capt. Kenneth Roberts had described the famines abroad, and used an unforgettable, an almost unbearable phrase: "I have seen many who were starving to death. But in that next room I heard a young girl starve to death. Did you ever hear anyone starve to death?"

The speaker protested that he did not want to be brutal to anyone, and had no right to be. But a collection was to be taken up for the salvation of little children from unmerited torture. He added: "There is to be a luncheon here to-day, and I hope you will all enjoy it. Surely you will like it better if you first give a pittance to those who have no money, no food, and scant raiment. If there is anyone here deaf to this appeal I hope the food will stick in her throat.

"Miss Evelyn has danced for you a barefoot dance of

rapture. I have asked her to dance again another barefoot dance such as millions—think of it, millions!—of children are dancing to-day as they stand barefoot outside the soup kitchens and find the soup kitchens closed—closed because you—and you!—and you!—have not yet paid the fee you owe. There are people here who have given liberally and faithfully. There are also men and women here who have given nothing, but spent fortunes upon jewels as hard as their own hearts, and each jewel is the tombstone of hundreds of poor little weeping, writhing, aching, screaming, slaughtered innocents. Don't lift a morsel of food to your lips to-day until you have earned the right to be called human."

He retired, regretting that his earnestness had once more throttled his wit, and that he had harangued where humor would have been more welcome.

He was hardly gone when the Eveyn girl was announced again by music—a jig, but in a minor key, a *danse macabre* for young skeletons. She appeared in the garb of a wretched little pauper. What flesh she revealed peered through the rags in her clothes. She ran eagerly to an imaginary door, found it shut, knocked in vain, indicating by a dancer's pantomime that hunger gnawed her vitals.

Then the cold nipped her bare feet and she lifted one to rub the instep on the other calf. She raised her feet alternately in the quickstep of freezing misery. She was so pretty and so well worth keeping alive that she touched the heart more deeply than a child more gaunt could have done.

When she had given up hope and dragged her frozen feet off the stage there was much applause. The choreographic art had done better than represent the picture; it had stirred the imagination and made each spectator recreate the vision.

A collection was taken now and as the basket approached Larrick he grew restive and perplexed. Hearing a clink of silver, he drove his hand into his change pocket. But silver seemed too petty a contribution. He took out a roll of bills. But he had little money with him.

Holdups were frequent and, besides, he had heard that

actually rich men carried only a little cash, and relied on a pocket check book for emergencies.

Larrick brought out his check book and lifted a fountain pen from its clutch on his waistcoat pocket. He was rash with sympathy and planned to write "one hundred dollars." He hesitated a moment and wrote "one thousand."

When Nancy Fleet's quick eye caught the amount she gripped his arm and whispered, "Wonderful!"

She asked him to take luncheon with her and he found that she was renewing her old captivation. It was so superb a thing to be alive. He watched her hands, her lips, her exquisitely managed hunger. He heeded, as if for the first time, the deep velvet of her eyes. Her hat fascinated him, her sleeves, the rich fabric of her costume and her richer skin.

But these were not pleasant to consider. He was Tantalus now, and he had no right to reach for this beautiful woman. He was in mourning. As he ate he could not help imagining that famished children set sharp chins on the edge of the table. He could see their great eyes burning with envy. He could feel lean, clawlike hands clutching at the food he did not need and pleading, huskily: "Gimme!" "Gimme enough to live on!" "Mister, gimme just the crust of your bread."

In all languages mobs of jostling children cried: "Gimme! Mister, gimme just only enough to keep me from droppin' under the table!"

A few pennies would feed a child an astoundingly long time. The great armies of Saint Hoover's men and women saw to that, braving plagues and enduring heartbreaks innumerable in the most beautiful crusade that ever graced the world—warriors for no race, no territory, no commerce, no relics, no dogma, no sect, no oppressive disputatious creed, destroyers of no rival temples or priests or governments, saviors of life, not slaughterers, an army without banners or music or weapons, battling for humanity, carrying bread and milk and medicine and warmth wherever there was need. The bugle call was the cry of children; the spoils of the war were lives redeemed and sufferings diminished.

Larrick was not used to crowds. He was a desert man by nature and long habit. He was not trained to luxury and he had not come to feel that the best was none too good for him. Rather, the worst had been none too bad for him.

Yet here he sat in a crowded room where splendid people fattened themselves on delicacies while wraithly crowds of dying children and mothers and fathers flung out wasted hands and, no longer able to shriek, whispered for help.

Larrick was revolted by the sight of the others and by his own presence among them. The gorgeous trappings of the scene dismayed him. He remembered with a stab of shame that in a day or two he was to sail for a wild revel in the very Europe where these miseries abounded.

He knew all of a sudden that he would never sail, that Europe would be no refuge from his gloom.

He was amazed at his own cruelties. His horse had bucked and flung him into an undreamed-of wealth, and he had bought nothing with it but expensive misery for himself, while throngs that he might have saved had already gone swirling down the black waters of anguish and death.

He grew so restive that Nancy Fleet begged him not to let her keep him from any engagement. He accepted the *cong e*, and when she mentioned that she would be home that evening if he cared to see her before he sailed he promised to call and hurried away.

Wherever he went he felt that battalions of children hobbled at his heels, whispering: "Gimme! Gimme!" He was like a Pied Piper who could not escape from the children enticed by the music of his money.

He fled at last to his bank to escape them. He had put in his book to be balanced before he sailed so that he might know where he stood financially. He asked for it now and was shocked to find how much less there was to his credit than he had supposed. A bundle of canceled checks came with the book and he knew that nearly all of them had been wasted on ostentation or spendthrift heedlessness.

He deducted from his balance the check he had written for the children and in a mood of desperate zeal for a complete atonement wrote a check for the whole remainder

payable to the order of the consolidated fund of the Allied reliefs.

He put this in an envelope he found in the writing room of the bank, addressed and stamped it, and dropped it in the post box at the door.

The moment he heard the iron jaws clamp shut on it he realized how precipitate, how suicidal his deed had been. He would have recalled the sum and split it with the children. But it was too late. He might have stopped the check, but he was incapable of so shrewd an action.

The exaltation that should have glorified the generosity was denied him. He felt himself a melodramatic fool who had beggared himself in a moment of maudlin sympathy. But beggared he was, and profanity would not mend his insanity.

He mocked himself with the gambler's solace, "Easy come, easy go!" and trudged up Fifth Avenue, a penniless tramp.

CHAPTER VI

IN his earlier days Larrick would chase a horse a mile to save himself a half-mile walk. In New York he had acquired the taxi habit. He put up his finger now to summon a cab to take him to the Frewin home. He brought his hand down with a snap, remembering that he was no longer a quicksilver king. From now on he must walk.

He had a little money on his person, but he must begin to save until he could earn some more. But how could he earn more? His only trade was cattle. Instead of going to Paris he would best make haste to Brewster County, where he belonged.

In his reckless humor he resolved to lose no time, but get right back. He walked up Fifth Avenue now as if he were on a farewell patrol, a long farewell, not only to his greatness, but to a city in which he had found little but kindness, eagerness for happiness, a relentless search for beauty in its countless phases.

He found Norry Frewin at the house and told him what had happened. Norry was aghast. He called Larrick the most outrageous names with the most disarming affection. He offered to beg, borrow, or steal enough money to set him up in business.

But Larrick had resigned himself to the loss of wealth as of beauty and of love. He shook his head at every suggestion and he smiled foolishly as he said with a hangdog meekness and a reversion to his old uncouthnesses of speech:

"Reckon I'll have to ask you to return that little sum I loaned you so I can pay my fare back to Brewster. Pop Milman will take me on again prob'ly. If he won't, somebody will."

Norry flushed a little, remembering how Larrick had funded his own return to civilization. It hurt him to have to

ship Larrick back to the desert. But he could not persuade him to stay.

While the mood was on him Larrick determined to catch the first train out. It would save him at least from the fiery ordeal of another interview with Nancy Fleet. He was afraid to subject himself to the temptations of her presence. His heart swung toward her too heavily when she set her clinging gaze upon him; his arms yearned too fiercely to fill themselves with her warm body.

He begged Norry to telephone her that he had been summoned "home" unexpectedly. The word home had a bitter taste on his tongue, for he had no home but homelessness.

It was not easy to break from the arms of Norry's mother, who called herself his own. But he would not linger, even to tell Mr. Frewin good-by.

His trunks were piled on a taxicab and his last splurge was the reckless tipping of the Frewin servants.

The ride to the Pennsylvania Station was elegiac with exile. He loved New York more than ever and he hardly managed to overcome the spell that fastened upon him as with restraining hands.

His heart ached as he bade Norry good-by. The two men felt a deep mutual gratitude and the jealousies that had almost made them enemies were but the dross of the past.

Larrick hurried down the iron steps to the deep tunnel where the train waited for him, waved to Norry with a mockery of cheer, and entered his car. The engine dragged it away and dived beneath the Hudson, emerged again upon the New Jersey flats, and began the long haul south.

Larrick came north in a drawing room and went back in an upper berth. The man who had the lower and shared with him the seat during the day was fat and bulged across the forward-looking seat, compelling Larrick to ride backward. But he liked that, for his hopes were retroverted. He was leaving a bright future behind him.

His seatmate wanted to talk, but Larrick wanted to remember. He escaped to the club car and, staring aft, let his thoughts pay out as if his soul were a spool of thread and one end of it in Nancy Fleet's hand.

It was his habit to repent nearly everything he did or said. He was bitterly remorseful now for leaving New York without seeing Nancy. What right had he to insult her so? It was only now that he realized what discourtesy he had shown her.

He drove himself to the writing desk and wasted many sheets of the Pullman Company's paper. He dreaded the pen at best and found it a more bucking steed than any broncho. But his first problem was the first word. How should he address Nancy? There had been such a strange mixture of the utmost formality and the utmost familiarity in their dealings, that they had not yet come to first names, though they had been far more than friends.

He compromised at last on the word that sweetens so much of the Southern speech:

HONEY,—This is the twenty first letter Ive started and if you don't get it youll get the thirtieth maybe. I been crossing out and tearing up till the porter has a headache.

I hope Norry said goodby for me like I told him to. It like to killed me to go without seeing you. But I knew if I saw you all by yourself I'd go crazy as per usual and treat you rough and ask you to marry me and promise to make you the happiest woman in the world. But I couldnt even feed you or buy what few clothes you women need nowadays let alone make you happy, for I couldnt even keep you in the air youre used to breathing.

You blame near ruined me, honey, when you took me to that charity meeting and got me full of something like old fashioned crying whiskey. After I left you and before I could sober up I sent my last red to your starving children comittee. I dont know how many it will feed but Im starved out for sure.

Im as poor now as I used to was and there aint any poorer than that so I got to get back to the cattle country where I belong.

I got no right to love you honey but I do. I feel like somehow I was shot up in the sky as far as the first big stars, and now Im falling back to the hard old earth and I cant take you back with me. But the brightest star that shines over the desert Im going to name it Nancy Fleet. And Ill watch you up there long after you forget you ever saw me.

There is so terrible much to thank you for Nancy Fleet. You took me round the sky with you and I will never get over it. I dont want to. Remembering you is all the riches I got left.

Maybe I will write to you and maybe I wont but Ill never stop thinking of you honey. *Adios! Adios!*

GAD LARRICK.

His spelling was as bad as many a prince's. But that was the letter he sealed and addressed and handed to the porter to mail at the first stop. He felt now that he had finished with Nancy Fleet even more than with Clelia.

He was completely ashamed of his soul. He felt as good-for-nothing as one of the countless sagebrush bushes he had seen uprooted and blown across the desert. When it was alive it was unimportant, and when it was dead it mattered even less where the wind kicked it.

CHAPTER VII

IN the welter of sand along the Rio Grande there was no hint of the blizzards that avalanched upon New York late that February after a mild winter. Gad Larrick rarely saw the newspapers, and those he saw had little to say of the metropolis except as a home of vice and crime and predatory capitalists conspiring against the prosperity of the rest of the country.

Larrick knew better. He knew what goodness was alert there, what simple friendly people were living out their lives as handsomely as they could. But the towers and the cañons of the streets and the millions swarming among them were already only a part of an old dream.

The Milmans had taken him back on the ranch with loud rejoicing and given him what hospitality they could. If they thought of their prodigal as a failure and a wastrel they never let him know it.

The old customs fitted him like a pair of old boots slipped into after a dance in tight patent-leather pumps. He was soon adapting himself to the cattle, whose needs were supreme, little as their whims were regarded.

Ma Milman tried to cheer him up and she took him for long rides in the handsome car he had bought her. It was somewhat dilapidated from sandblast and rocky trail, but it still reminded him too much of New York and of that Nancy Fleet who had seemed to nest in a limousine. He preferred to go back to the saddle and he cultivated solitude.

In the eternal summer of that region he forgot such Northern things as the seasons. He lost track of the calendar and did not realize that the winter had melted into

spring and the spring had blazed into summer, except that it was a little hotter than before.

One afternoon as he slouched across the back of a slumping cayuse, drifting across the blistered prairie after a vain search for stray cattle, Larrick noted that the sky was packed with clouds. They rode across the heavens far above the desert and mocked the yearning sands with a taunt of rain. There was no chance of rain at that time of year and the clouds were merely scenery. They reminded him of the mountain chains of high buildings, of the New York he had seen from across the Hudson—that vastitude of wealth and industry and beauty.

Then the wind shifted and opened the clouds and they reminded him of the crowded traffic of Fifth Avenue, massed limousines in a jumble of luxury, millionaire crowding millionaire and black limousine impeding black limousine. He felt for a moment the hatred of the poor for the rich, of the desert for the miserly clouds.

But he soon recalled that when he was one of the rich he found them to be nothing but ordinary people who had gathered money somehow and would relinquish it in showers when the right appeal shook them up.

The rich were the rain gatherers, the high travelers. Like the clouds themselves, they had come up from the earth and would go back again. The desert was pauperdom, idleness, inertia, ignorant or unprofitable toil, and vain agitation. The sky was opportunity, inspiration, luck, perseverance and its reward.

The poor must seek beauty in the sight of distant skies and mountains, smooth landscapes, homespun sentiments about contentment, and honest worth. The rich could build with beauty, play with it, juggle it.

All his own energetic ambitions had died of thirst. The unflagging heat had burnt out his initiative, his very will to will. Ambition's pale caricature, envy, was all that he could attain, and contentment's harsh sister, despair, was his housekeeper.

So dejected he was to-day that when his half-baked horse shambled across a dry arroyo where nothing flowed but sand,

and stumbled over a heap of black rock, Larrick did not observe it until he had passed.

His stewing brain so slowly considered what his eyes transmitted along the flaccid nerves that the horse had traveled many yards before he could perform the simplest processes of reasoning.

Like a defective under the Binet tests, Larrick's reactions were subnormal. But gradually his torpid brain saw what his scorched eyes had seen.

"Cinnabar! Mercury!" he gasped aloud.

The two words like flints struck a spark that caught the deadwood of his being with a little fire.

He wheeled his protesting horse in a lazy circle and walked it back along his path until he returned to the patch of mercury-bearing rock. It was a larger patch than the one that had sent him up into the clouds of wealth.

When he raised his head to look about and find where he was the sun lashed his eyeballs like a rawhide quirt and brought a few sharp tears to their rescue. He had not suspected that there was so much water in the desert as there was on his eyelids.

He stared at the dull mineral and talked to himself, mainly repeating over and over a somewhat inappropriate formula, "Well, I'll be gawdam."

He slid off to the ground and studied the black mass with its blotches of red. He walked around it and followed it up the hollow of the arroyo.

A rattlesnake sprung a noise like an alarm clock with the bell removed. Larrick's hand went to his holster and brought out his gun, while his eyes followed the directions of his ears.

He made out a coil like a fat rope of wet sand thrown down on the floor of dry sand. The monster was swelling and shivering with wrath, the erect spike of his tail making a glimmer in the air as its harsh trill rose in a fiendish crescendo.

Larrick was too far away to be reached if it flung its fanged head at him. He was too indolent of temper to answer the challenge with a bullet. What was the use

of killing a snake here and there? There were always more.

It was less mercy than fatigue and more loneliness than mercy that led him to greet the desert bravo with ridicule:

"Ah, there, Coykendall! Go on back to your fambly. As Coyky would say, you're not a self-made snake, but a God-made worm. Your lady loves you, I reckon, and you're all she's got, so go on along home! Go on now before I bounce a piece of this valu'ble cinnabar offen your flat head!"

The snake moved off, sullenly, with tail-uttered curses and defiances. Perhaps he went home—and perhaps not.

Larrick forgot him and returned to the study of his new Golconda. He sagged down till he sat on his heels and pondered the cinnabar stupidly, hardly so much thinking as maundering.

As far as he could remember, this region had never been claimed by anybody. Apparently a new fortune had been dumped at his feet by this nagging luck of his. Run away from love and luck and they will follow you. So he had heard. It looked likely.

Well, supposing it was, what of it? What was the use of getting rich again?

He could go back to New York or go on over to Europe. But what was the use of that? It would be a long, hard ride to find more trouble. If he had all the cinnabar in the world, it wouldn't bring back Clelia. And Nancy by now must have flirted her head off with a hundred other men. She was at Nooport, prob'ly, shoshin' round in the surf with nothin' much on, and that wet.

The thought of surf shook him awake a little. He remembered Coney Island and its outlook upon a desert of water vaster than even this ocean of drought. He seemed to feel a great sierra rising from the sea with a snow of foam along its crest. He bent his head as it rolled toward him and concaved above him, thunderous with joy and greening into sunshot emerald, then plunging upon him in a cold shock of glory, an earthquake rush, and an angelic exhilaration.

Its passage left him breathing deep, his blood hurrahing,

his flesh in a carousal of well-being, his voice in an uproar of Titanic joy. He had met the ocean and it was his.

When he opened his eyes he was once more a squat toad on a black-red rock pile, bent beneath the hammering sun. The only billow that had passed over him was a puff from the furnaces of hell rolling dead clumps of sagebrush over and over and sifting sand on cactus and scorpion and rattle-snake and furry tarantula.

Larrick sighed a hot sigh. He felt as he had felt at times when he had been lost and, all but mad with the heat, had stumbled upon a water hole and dared not drink lest he die of the too-quick slaking of his thirst.

Mankind is always blundering in a narrow corridor between the fatalities of too much and too little.

Larrick wondered which he really wanted to do—to stay put in this dismal lifelessness or to make another dash for liberty. He was too weary to want anything much.

He was too weary to ride back to the ranch house with the news. His decision to sleep on the problem where he found it was less a decision than an inability to move on.

He usually carried in his saddle pack a little provender for emergencies, and now he began to gather fuel. There was a pocket of sweet water not far away and the sand was mattress enough for sleep.

The smoke of his fire went up straight as a slim sapling in the still air, save when it was twisted by an infrequent breath like the gasp of one sleeping fitfully in a fever. By and by the bacon and potatoes clicked and sputtered in the little frying pan. Mr. Larrick was dining alone at his club.

The sun was westering now with a seeming increase of speed as it neared the horizon. The east was not so blind and Larrick's eyes were lifted to that horizon.

He thought he saw something move along the ridge—a lost steer, perhaps. No, it was a horse—a horse and a rider—a Mexican, perhaps. Larrick made sure of his gun, though Mexico had surprised the world with a blissful era of peace after the sudden overthrow of the Carranzistas and the death of the bearded old tyrant in the ruins of his

own dynasty. The one-armed Obregon, descendant of the O'Briens, administered such prosperity now that the Border was for the nonce at least a word without menace.

As soon as the horse was clear of the hill and silhouetted against the sky Larrick saw that the rider was not a Mexican, not a man at all, but a woman, wearing what used to be called man's clothes. She was, of course, all the more feminine, despite the innumerable romances built upon the manifest fallacy that a woman is disguised instead of emphasized in breeches.

Larrick would have thought her to be Ma Milman or one of her daughters, except that the rider, whoever she was, was no plainswoman. She and her desert steed had come to a complete misunderstanding. The horse was ugly, and she bewildered but determined.

All this Larrick's practiced eye made out in a brief scrutiny. He rose by his fire and waved his hat and shouted. The high feather of smoke and the heliographic flashes from the hat caught the woman's eye at last, and Larrick could see that she stood up in her stirrups and waved her hand.

Then her horse came plunging down the ridge and dodging in and out among the obstacles of mesquite, cactus, and Spanish bayonet.

Before long the horse was enlarging into full vision against a background cloud of sand dust.

The rider was Nancy Fleet.

CHAPTER VIII

LARRICK almost went over backward into his own fire. He believed that he was locoed, seeing things. Nancy could only be a mirage.

But her horse was no mirage. It charged straight upon Larrick and his whinnying horse. He advanced to meet it, and Nancy's steed, as was its custom, stopped short just in front of him by jabbing its forefeet into the sand. Nancy, forgetting her horsemanship in her hysterical joy at finding Larrick, continued her progress, flew over the horse's bowed head, and bowled Larrick over.

They rolled together in the soft sand and unscrambled themselves with hilarious laughter. They rose to their feet, shocked out of all dignity, and fell into a mutual embrace, while the horses stared at them in disapproval.

When they grew coherent enough to ask and answer questions Larrick found out everything in a disordered jumble.

The Milmans, she began, had offered to send for him, but she had insisted on riding after him alone. They had told her that she would get lost, but she had bullied them into silence. She had naturally got lost, hopelessly. Her Central Park school of riding had driven her broncho out of his wits and he had returned the compliment.

She had grown horribly afraid and had expected to leave her bones to bleach on the sand along with the horned skulls and skeletons of cattle that furnished their own tombstones.

Larrick felt an increase of preciousness and beauty in the thought of what a death she might so easily have found out here in what she called "this museum of horrors."

The one thing he wanted to ask, of course, was what

under the blazing heavens could have brought her, anyway. But it seemed hardly Southern hospitality to greet a guest on the doorstep with such a cold demand. He waited for her to tell him. But she had no curiosity in a matter she knew so well and she asked questions of her own.

She was in a fierce need of water. She gulped like a thirsty child from the trough of his folded hat brim. She would have made a riot in New York if a servant had brought her brackish water or a glass that did not glisten. She adapted herself with equal pliancy to the task of gnawing his bacon and potatoes from the more than suspicious tin.

"This is a little different from the Ritz-Carlton where we first met—yes? But the food tastes better."

She toasted him in his unsettled coffee and made a loving cup of the battered tarnished thing he had cooked it in. Then she encouraged his curiosity by saying:

"You're probably wondering why I came down here. Have you forgotten that night in my car when you were so bold and free? You invited me to call on you, and said that if I came you'd give me the key to Texas. Remember?"

He smiled sadly, his wonderment frustrated again. She went on:

"You told me you used to keep yourself company by imagining a girl sitting cross-legged by your fire and you holding onto her with one hand and rolling a cigarette with the other. Remember?"

He nodded tormentedly and took the hint, putting his arm out to enfold her, as she seemed to require, but she edged away, saying:

"I've learned to roll my own with one hand, thank you. Looky!"

And she took from her pocket the makings and, with a little pardonable pride, twisted herself a cigarette, licked the edge of it, and struck a match with her thumb nail as she had seen him do.

He rolled over and beat the sand with his hands, laughing enormously at the foolishness of her deed. He had not laughed so hard since he left the Adirondacks, and he

wondered why he laughed now. But it is asinine to ask a joke why it amuses.

A great drought in his soul was already broken. Laughter was the cool spring gurgling up in the desert of life and making a green space about it, quenching the fires of thirst.

Larrick felt strong enough not to question the cross-legged witch who had come oversky on a broomstick to sit at his fire and breathe smoke.

But before he could speak she gave a squeal and scrambled to her knees in fright. She had glanced over her shoulder at a rustle in the sage and thought of snakes. Her eye had fallen on a black object near her hand, a black thing blobbed with red. The gathering dusk made it vague and the blown sand seemed to give it motion.

"Is that a ta—tarantula?" she panted.

Larrick stared and roared again.

"Lord, no, honey! That's only a chunk of cinnabar."

"Cinnabar?" she cried. "Isn't that the stuff you found before?"

He nodded.

She shrieked, "Then you're rich again?"

"Maybe," he said, indifferently. "I might be. Looks like."

"Do you mean to say you're sitting out here in this loathsome, dried-up wilderness when you might be cruising in a yacht of your own?"

"Well, I just lit on it, and I hadn't had time to make up my mind whether I really wanted to be rich again or not."

She got a long-distance snub from this and drew her shoulders up with a shock.

"Oh, pardon me for intruding. I supposed you were poor and lonely as you wrote me in your letter. I didn't expect to find you reveling in cinnabar and cactus plants."

He saw how ugly his hesitation must look in her eyes, and he pleaded:

"Nancy honey, wait a minute. I found this just before you came along. It kind of knocked me off my hoss. My brain is all blistered with heat and misery. If I'd have thought you were still thinkin' of me you'd have missed me,

for I'd have been goin' lickety-split to Alpine to register my claim."

"That's better," she said, and dropped to the ground so close to him that she was in his very bosom and he had clenched her in his arms and fastened his lips on hers before he quite knew what had happened.

And now he was quite drunk with the long-denied rapture of womanhood embraced and embracing.

Suddenly they were in grave danger from the loneliness, the absence of witnesses, the fierce heat of the twilight beginning already to cloak the harshness of reality with mystery and pathos.

He was where he had been with Clelia in the night-shrouded canoe, and Nancy was even more dangerous to herself and him. They were alone in an uncivilized, aboriginal world and their souls rang with what Robie calls "the instinctive phyletic cry of mind and body for a fruition of hopes, for a fulfillment of instincts." The unscientific language is not so handsome.

Larrick remembered the battle he had had with Clelia's helplessness and that gave him the courage, or the cowardice, to play Joseph once more.

He wrenched himself free from Nancy's arms and muttered, "We better be starting back before it gets so dark we'd lose our way."

"I shouldn't mind that," she sighed.

He had not mentioned the fact that the stars could light his way home as often before.

"You wouldn't want to spend a night out on the desert," he faltered, ashamed of his own better self.

"I'd love it," she said, leaving the whole war to him.

He made a last pitiful effort:

"But I don't want Ma Milman and those dirty-mouthed ranch hands talking about my—" He had almost said "about my wife" when his mind darted down another channel, and he said, "What under the sun did you tell Ma Milman, Nancy, anyway?"

"When I arrived there from Alpine in a little car I asked for you. They told me you were out 'thisaway some-

wheres' and might not be in for a day or two. So I said I'd ride out to meet you, because I had most important news. They wanted to send somebody along, but I told them I had to see you alone."

Now he could ask her the long-deferred question and he did:

"Nancy, in Gawd's name, before I bust, tell me what brought you here."

She looked at him, then lowered her eyes and murmured, "The police got after me and I didn't know anywhere else to hide."

Larrick had a maddening suspicion that she was fooling him. He never could tell about her. She was none of your humorists who advertise their jokes with a merry smile, a sparkling tone, a twinkling eye, or an apologetic, "if you will pardon the levity." She believed that while one may grin at tragedy, jokes should be served with grim earnestness.

Larrick suspected her solemnities, but was equally afraid of her audacities. Besides, how could he know that she had not killed somebody? And as for seeking refuge in Texas, what was more commonplace than that? Thousands of men and women had fled to its spacious wildernesses.

He remembered how Madsen had suspected her of Clelia's murder when he found the molds hidden in her closet. He was sure of her innocence, but justice was a notorious bungler, always lynching the wrong person.

He groaned: "I'm sorry if that's true, Nancy, but Gawd knows I'm glad you came to me, and nobody will ever get you without gettin' me first."

Tears rolled brightly across the sills of her eyes, and she flung her arm about him again and kissed him, sighing: "You angel! You adorable, dear, damned fool!"

Then she took mercy on him and grew really earnest, and answered his question, seating herself at a respectful distance.

"I came to bring you news of Clelia. I found out how she died and I wanted to tell you myself. There's nobody pursuing me"—she smiled and gave him back the word at the head of his letter—"honey. It's me that's pursuing

you. I knew how you wanted to know about Clelia, and so I came; because I was lonely in New York and you had made me think the desert was a pretty place.

"I don't agree with you a bit. I think it's the garbage scow of the world, and I can't see why you stay here. I won't let you stay here, where there's no art, no music, no joy, no beauty, nothing but a few brave people fighting a losing battle for the sake of their children's children."

"But Clelia—you said you knew," he urged.

She nodded and went on:

"This is how she died."

While he puzzled over the odd phrase she was lifting off her great cowboy hat. Then she pushed back the hair swung so low that it met her brow. And there along her forehead Larrick saw the scar of a wound like Clelia's, save that it was on the other temple and even longer.

He cried out and writhed at the pain it must have meant. He sickened at the flaw on the marble of her fine forehead. He groped for an explanation:

"Nancy! Did the same man do that who killed Clelia?"

She smiled weirdly. "The same man? Yes."

"Who was he?"

She pointed to the sky. Larrick frowned with confusion. She checked his impatience:

"Listen, and I'll tell you. I worried over Clelia all winter and so did everybody else who knew and loved her. When the spring came and the ice went down the Hudson I knew that it was melting in the Adirondacks and the snow would be gone.

"I had a wild ambition to go there and look about. I put it off again and again, until I nearly went mad. Then I told my people a lie and went up to Mrs. Roantree's camp. Nobody was there but Jeffers, busy with repairing the winter's damages. He was amazed to see me, but he had found no clew at all.

"I wandered everywhere, searching for footprints or weapons. Jeffers had been over all the ground in vain, and he soon left me to my own devices. I kept coming back to the big rock by the pine tree where you found her in the ice.

I felt that perhaps the weapon that killed her might be down in there.

"The day was warm and the breeze full of pine fragrance and the water was still and sunlit. The spring air was fairly wheedling and the lake was simply irresistible.

"Somehow I felt that if I should get in there and grope about the bottom of the lake I might find a hammer or a revolver or something that had been used upon Clelia and thrown in after her.

"I looked in all directions through the pine branches and could see nobody anywhere. Jeffers, I knew, was far away. So on a crazy impulse I stripped off my clothes and made ready.

"It was so wonderful to be there with the sun pouring down on me, the warm air fanning me, the pine needles brushing across me, and no clothes to hamper me that I forgot to be sad. I became terribly primeval, animal. I almost forgot that death could exist. I almost forgot Clelia. Something—well—voluptuous and wonderfully physical made me want to plunge deep into the lake just for the joy of the leap and the shock and the long upcurve, and then the swim and the splashing and the—the being alive.

"Then I remembered my business there and scolded myself for feeling glad. I stepped to the edge of the rock and filled my lungs with air for a deep dive and a long search below.

"I swung my arms back and brought them together and down I went. How I cut the air! How I slashed the water! 'It was a pretty neat dive for me,' I said to myself. But I just had a moment's terror of the icy chill. It was ferociously cold. Then I was struck on the head as if some one had dealt me a blow with an ax. I rolled and twisted on the sharp-edged rocks and came up to the air all turned round, bruised, scared to death, blood streaming down into my eyes, and the water all red about my face.

"I went under in my fright, and gave myself up for lost. I just had resolution enough to remember that I must not die and disappear there. I fought against the pain and the fright and swam to the rock and pulled myself out of the

bitterly cold water, dragged myself up on the pine needles of the shore and fainted, I think. When I came to I almost fainted again as I looked down along my poor body through the blood dripping from my forehead. There was a slash on my right breast, one on my hip, and all along my right thigh, and my right instep was all clawed. I sat there, naked and freezing, dipping ice water from the lake and washing the blood off till the cold of it checked the flow. Then I clambered up to my clothes, my teeth chattering like a monkey's from chill and from my narrow escape. I managed to get into my things and hobble to the cabin.

"Jeffers saw me limping along and ran to me. He helped me to the house and got a lot of antiseptics and liniments and bandages and drove over to the village for a doctor.

"I stayed in the mountains a few days and came back with my discovery. I told poor Clelia's parents and they believed me and it made them ever so glad. And they gave it to the newspapers. You didn't see them?"

"I never see any new newspapers."

"I was sure you wouldn't. Norry was going to write you all about it, but I told him I wanted to tell you myself so that you wouldn't worry about Clelia any more. And now that's why I came. Aren't you glad?"

"I'm glad you came, but I don't know why—yet."

She mothered him with a caress. "You've been here too long. Don't you see, you dear old stupid? Clelia wasn't murdered. Nobody hated her and killed her. On that last wonderful night before the blizzard she must have looked out of her window into the moonlight. She loved it. Who doesn't? But Clelia seemed to belong to it, somehow, not as a sentimental excuse for nonsense with a man, but for its own beauty.

"She must have felt the call of it. She ran out to it in her nightgown and her little satin mules. She saw the light of it on the lake blinking at her. She ran along the shore. She climbed the rock to see the breadth of the path of the moon.

"Perhaps some big fish shot up through the water and fell back with a joyous splash. The waves must have fascinated

her. She loved to dive. You know that, and how well she dived. She wasn't afraid of anything.

"Can't you see her standing there in the moonlight among the pine branches, dancing and singing, kicking off her slippers, and making ready for one last glorious plunge? She must have laughed with delight as she put her hands together and went head first into the moonlit water.

"And then the sharp rock that I grazed caught her full in the temple, and she never knew a pang or a sorrow. She was just gone from the world."

"But her hands. The prayer she was saying," Larrick mumbled.

"That was the position of her hands for her dive," Nancy said. "They just came down to her breast as she floated up to the surface. Then the storm came and the ice formed about her and upheld her from sinking, and the snows covered her till you found her."

Larrick buried his head in his hands and stared into the waning fire. The light found tears on his cheeks and made rubies of them. If Nancy felt any jealous anguish she kept it back deep in her heart and proved the quality of her love by her tenderness with Larrick. She put her hand on his arm and pleaded with him not to grieve.

"Don't you see how beautiful it was? The glory of the night drew Clelia out into itself. The beauty of the lake made her dance with joy. Her whole soul was in a rapture of beauty and she dived into Paradise, laughing and blissful. She never knew sorrow and loneliness and shame and remorse and sickness and age and not being loved and all those things the rest of us poor people go through. She plunged into bliss in her youth. What more could you ask for one you loved? My God! how could you prove your love for her better than by thanking God that he took her so—took her on the wing? As if he had caught a song bird in the air and lifted it up to heaven!"

Larrick laid his hand on hers and pressed it, more for her comfort than his own. He was a slow thinker, and it was not the whole question to him that Clelia had died in happiness and in beauty. Her loss was none the less because

she was snatched away in a flash of ecstasy. The saint swept to bliss in a fiery chariot leaves the world all the darker.

While he brooded in a new shadow the sky was giving up the too-bright day with equal reluctance.

Clouds mustered above the horizon as if at the assembly bugle call for evening parade. They gathered in dull khaki lines. The sun, red as a huge rose, descended among them. Colors marched and countermarched, their uniforms magically changed from splendor to splendor.

Suddenly the rose was a vast ingot of pure gold melting in a caldron of blinding fire. Then the caldron was overturned and a torrent of molten gold spilled abroad, flooding the levels of the desert, setting each cactus ablaze, gilding the sage clumps to many-branched candelabra all gold. This gold dulled to brass, to silver, to dross as the miracle worker of light pulled the sun below the horizon. But the clouds were crimson now and shining downward as if with live coals sifted through the gratings of a fireplace. The cruel mountains were no longer ugly slag, but ranges of crushed heliotrope, peaked ashes of mignonette dust, as if all the mignonettes that had ever bloomed were heaped there. And so by the mere shifting of a light, the carrying of the sun's lamp from the height of the sky downstairs behind the hills, the whole world was altered from bitter prose to lyric verse, from dun nullity to carmine splendor. The clouds that had been mockeries of rain refused; the hills that had been hideous sterilities of all-denying ugliness were beautiful now, and tender and pitiful beyond belief.

Thus criticism and sympathy make all the difference between the aspects of a man, a deed, a work of art. Criticism, like a relentless noon, sends its shafts into every cranny, sharpens every roughness, aggravates every helpless imperfection. Sympathy brings its own mantle of color and its own merciful shadows and, finding the yearning for beauty, grants the prayer and gives the benediction. What are hate and love, indeed, but noon and twilight? Which tells the truth? or do both? or does neither?

Larrick and Nancy felt the light managing their own souls

as it did the sky. They ceased to cringe before death and love and duty. A solemn rapture opened their hearts like night-blooming flowers, exhaling perfume in the dark.

The borderland between rapture and despair was as vague as the line between day and night. They were not sure whether they were utterly happy or utterly sad.

But gradually the embers of twilight waned, as if weary of the struggle. The fireplace in the west grew dull and chill with the sorrow of defeat before irresistible night. The earth lost its radiance, its warmth. The man and the woman, the desert and the mountains, were lost in one blot of ink. The crests were but edges against a sky of paling blue, of old rags, of tattered finery.

There were no stars yet, and when one dawned it was far away and furtive as a hostile spy, a scout.

There was terror, and death prowled; the sky became the vast, frowning brow of Judgment Day.

Abruptly the air moved, and coldly, as if the flesh of the earth shivered. The little camp fire trembled and the flame cowered.

"I am cold," Nancy whimpered from the blanketing gloom.

That word "cold" made Larrick recoil from her, remembering Clelia. And she, understanding what he thought of, leaned away from him, as if departing to exile.

Then he remembered that day when he was lost in the blizzard, and cold to the very marrow of his soul, and how she had come out into the terror of snow to find him—and found him. If it had not been for her he would not have lived to break her heart by clinging to a vain grief.

Something moved him to say, "We who are still alive must keep each other warm."

He felt through the night for her and drew her close. And now at last she seemed to need him, to belong to him.

They clung together, invisible and inaudible, save as they heard their hearts thumping in their breasts. That machinery was bravely at work, though the night fell and the desert despaired.

It came to Larrick that it was better to try to wring a comfort from tragedy, to rescue a little wreckage from grief,

and to meet whatever came with bravery, than to wallow in a slime of cynicism, to mock at hope, and to dignify cowardice with the name of art or philosophy.

He would rise and go back into the best world he could find, and take with him this woman that loved him. And together they would make a pilgrimage after such joy and beauty and pity and grace as they might discover by much seeking among men and the works of men.

So he kissed Nancy Fleet and helped her up, saying: "I reckon we might as well be movin' on along toward home now. To-morrow—"

The horses had drawn close for company and were willing to be caught. The stars were coming out in herds upon the desert overhead, as the two horses jogged along close together. By and by an enormous moon rose slowly, claiming the jaded earth the sun had abandoned, and squandering mercy and glamour everywhere.

THE END

216
96

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 045 759 8

