END OF THE CIRCLE

PERCY GOMERY

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has a curious theme which, to our knowledge, has never been handled before in a novel in English. That a dying man's desire to live again could be so strong that he was able to project his soul into the body of a new-born infant is less a miracle in itself than that such is made into a plausible and fascinating study in psychology. The child, commencing life with the brain of a man of sixty and with all his knowledge, was compelled to live his life from old age to youth until he had expiated the sins of the dead man, and had won the love of the woman who, in his former life, had been unattainable.

The reader who demands an absorbing story will here be satisfied, the student of psychological problems will surely encounter a fresh one, but he who grasps the deep significance of the book will gain most.

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By

PERCY GOMERY

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Dedication in old English volume published 1631:

" . . . .

And tell him thou camst from an unknown friend
Whose love's a Circle, round, without an end."

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CHAPTER I

MYSELF

ALWAYS hopelessly mystified by my own mentality—humiliated, silenced, terrified by the concepts of a nature which I dared not reveal—I had cast about in search of evidence, some independent human testimony as to the unnatural personality with which I was born and which created me a lonely and unhappy being amongst my fellows. After the death of Professor Osgood Murray, I sought access to his records, the records of the chair of psychology at the University. His writings were known and valued the world over and I had the conviction that the interview he had sought with me at his daughter's party was no chance affair. Through his kindly manner there had come a stinging directness of enquiry and, although he had subjected me at moments to searching questions as to my life and antecedents, I felt nevertheless peculiarly drawn to the old man both at the time and afterwards. That he came a great deal closer to me than have other people is not to say a great deal, for, to the world in general, I have always kept myself a stranger. Circumstances placed me in contact with youth but to youth I made no appeal, and I had come to dread the appeal I made to age.

Amongst Professor Murray's notes was the following:

"Having heard the young people of my household from time to time discussing the remarkable personality of Arthur Burden I was the cause of his appearance at an entertainment in my house, in order to ascertain at first hand the important characteristics in which he was said to differ from the typical youth of seventeen years.

"In appearance he is dignified and self-possessed to a degree. At a distance his face is much like that of another boy, but, regarded closely, the nose, mouth and temples are surrounded by innumerable tiny wrinkles. The eyes are almost uncanny in their difference to that of others. He tries to speak as a boy, even employing the flippant words and phrases of the youth of to-day, but they are not his. When led away from what appears to be an attempt to simulate youthfulness his thought and judgment come forth with an amazing maturity of reflection. Something deep back in his eyes seems to be looking out and examining you like a judge from behind half a century of world experience. Knowledge of intellectual and artistic subjects is not apparent; it is rather the measure of words, the wisdom of his judgment which impresses one. I found nothing whatever to note in his heredity. His father was a clergyman, and both parents as well as grandparents on both sides were people of quite normal mentality.

"In serious discussion the lad is entirely free from the impulsive inconsistency and hasty ignorance of the ordinary youth. At the same time he betrays marked prejudices and dislikes, but these are more like the pet bogies of an old man than the untrained conclusions of youth. By suggestion I designedly invited him to voice his interest in young ladies. The result was almost humorous. He seemed glad to have somebody ask his opinions, but they proved to be the most unboyish thing about him. Girls he regarded as children rather than the opposite sex. He quite evidently had the conviction that budding beauty belonged to others and that it was befitting in him to admire from a distance.

"There is something decidedly out of the ordinary in this case and, I am convinced, of importance psychologically. In so far as the mind appears to be perfectly natural and clear it would be a mistake to classify it as abnormal. I experienced while with him a sense of agreeable companionship. That which I fail utterly to harmonize with my impression is the personality of a boy. Had my eyes been shut meanwhile I should remember Arthur Burden as a man of fifty."

Great psychologist as he was, I am certain that Professor Murray never guessed how nearly he had come to solving the secret. The party and the professor's death both occurred in 1895. I was then, as a matter of fact, mentally fifty-five years of age.

My childhood had been to me one long baffling mystery. In the first year of my life are things as clearly remembered as things I did this morning. It was only recently I overheard some men discussing their earliest memories. A wag amongst them said that, as an infant, he had seen his nurse kissed by a policeman, which incident he noted mentally as he intended to tell his mother so soon as he should learn to talk. Instead of amusing me, the witticism had the effect of precipitating me blushingly back into my own morbid childhood. It was as though somebody had brutally exposed a secret of the dark past, for the incidents of the period that I could tell are many.

My parents (my natural father and mother so unrelated to me) were overjoyed when, at the age of ten months, I talked. Walking did not follow for a year or more. The spectacle of a baby scarcely able to sit up, yet uttering sentences of an adult mind, was one which might well be exhibited for the admiration and amusement of neighbours. Everybody thought, of course, that I was simply the parrot of my elders. But in sober truth something within me—I knew not what—was striving to express itself. Precocity is not a strong enough term. I uttered thoughts not only without premeditation but more often than not without recollection. It was as though the words were put on my lips which were beyond the power of my baby brain to formulate or to retain.

Before I was two years old, strangers were stopping my little carriage on the street in order to hear my wise sayings. Undoubtedly I would shortly have been the subject of educational enquiry had I not become terrified at the attention I was attracting and sagaciously employed in my own defense the very intelligence which threatened to make me famous.

From that time forward I tried to hide from the world. At least I kept myself a stranger to all humanity.

Instinctively I realized the place of books in life, and designedly kept away from everything in print. It was somewhat difficult to run shy of nursery books containing the alphabet and numerals, but I knew for a certainty that a ten-minute acquaintance with them would fully verse me in their uses. And I foresaw with equal certainty that, then, knowledge on a vast scale would be revealed to me, the knowledge which had already become hateful.

For the first thirty years of my life, I longed with a painful longing for the blessed privilege of working for knowledge and for a living like other men.

It was not that I possessed a ready ability to acquire knowledge. Knowledge was already mine. That was the incomprehensible thing. Each impression of the eye and ear seemed somehow to slip the cover off a cell in my brain containing the complete history of the thing seen or heard. There was a notable exception: a number of scientific

discoveries had been made about the year 1880 and were much talked about. The phonograph, the hand camera, a wonderful power principle which came to be known as the internal combustion engine, and an almost laughable proposal for bottling electrical energy, later to be called the storage battery. In the sphere of such I found it was a case of acquiring, not possessing. Closer analysis of the category showed that these subjects with which I had no spontaneous acquaintance had originated in the world *since* 1878, the date of my birth. Stored-up knowledge appertained to earlier years.

On one occasion some guests in our house were discussing the solar system, and instantly I could have supplied the disputants with scores of facts which they had not mentioned and in all probability did not know. It was as though a multitude of fuses in my mind were just waiting to have a match applied. One winter's evening, when I was five, my father and mother drove me with them to a distant section of the parish where there was to be a social gathering of the church. On the way home my parents gossiped of the peculiarities of a dozen of the people. For protection against the frosty night I had been tucked away almost out of sight between my elders. But I was numb with the cold. The unaltering prospect of the starry heavens, the sliding motion of the sleigh across the flat country, and the monotonous jangle of the bells combined

with my cramped position to make me forgetful of my habit of pretending to be merely a little boy. Suddenly, and with no conscious intention of doing so, I entered the discussion and analyzed the characters of the people who had not been mentioned.

"Why, Artie!" exclaimed my mother, "What in creation possesses you?"

Both of my parents were strangely silent for the remainder of the journey.

I was glad of the incident if it made grown-ups reticent in my presence, but after that night I became still more sensitive about the thoughts that came to me and to dread the realization that I was an amazingly clever child. My brothers and sisters were from four to fourteen years my senior, yet that I should contemplate their minds and pursuits as purely childish interests and far beneath me was as natural as though I had been their grandfather.

I contrived (through means unsuspected) not to be sent to school until I was seven years old.

To appreciate my feelings finally on entering, one need only picture to himself a man of sixty-five, his mind still alert, discovering himself in a position where his hourly interest is the lowest grade of a public school.

Of the effect of the lessons themselves I can think of only one simile. An acquaintance passing in the street calls, "Good morning!" then, stopping, he comes back to explain the meaning, origin, and

significance of the word "good", afterwards treating in like manner the word "morning", spelling out both words and having you repeat the spelling twelve times. A study of the philosophy of the class-room was all that prevented my going crazy over the repetition and unendurable dullness of it all. I marvelled that women of such slight attainments should be made teachers. The pompousness of the principal drest in his little brief authority would have made me laugh if I could have laughed at anything. Of the recreations, sports, and recess-conversations I wanted nothing. My chief relief was to talk with the old janitor of the building. I would waylay him in the coal-cellar as he was filling buckets for the stoves in the school rooms. Together we would discuss the ways of the world, the ethics of religion, and human character. It sounds strange to say that he was my only teacher; he was in fact the only person in the world at that time of whom I was not shy and from him I earned much honest companionship and solace of mind. Occasionally I would catch the old man holding his pipe away from his mouth while he eyed me suspiciously as though perchance some game were being played on him. Otherwise his mind was not given to wondering.

Turning to account the matured intelligence with which I was unwillingly endowed, I tried by all manner of subterfuge to prevent advancing by leaps through the school and out of it. But a growing

cynicism which was souring my nature I could not hold off. And it rendered me thoroughly out of tune with a misfit world as it appeared to me. I once heard my mother telling a friend how disappointed she was in me because, as she said, "He was a very happy baby until he began to talk."

My eighth and ninth years brought no relief. Gradually the conviction settled upon me that I was not the child Arthur Burden at all. Arthur Burden was a name applied to me by mistake. It belonged to some other person. At times I seemed to remember perfectly well that the chubby hands and little feet which went everywhere with me were not, in fact, my possessions. I was somebody else; there could not be the slightest doubt about that. Who was I?

CHAPTER II

HENDRICK CHARTERS

I WAS still in my tenth year when, one afternoon, a most remarkable thing happened. My eldest sister, then aged twenty-one, was having her turn at entertaining the town Literary Society. The twelve or fifteen ladies were sitting on the front veranda. I was close by, supposedly playing with a child one of the members had brought and who enjoyed turning out earthen moulds from an old-fashioned flower-pot. In reality I was drinking in the entire proceedings of the Literary Society. Here indeed was something which bored me a great deal less than the usual course of small town life. A chapter from Dickens was under consideration and the lady elected to read aloud had just finished one of those comprehensive three-page character descriptions of an eccentric old man. The character now came under discussion and the ladies were trying to fit it into life. "I think I can understand a man stepping suddenly like that into a new manner of living," defended one of the members. "After all, this character is not so different from old Hendrick Charters."

Instantaneously I started, as though a high-power shell had at the moment hurtled through the garden. My actual movement, whatever it was, must have

been disturbing to the Literary Society in general because my sister turned abruptly and said, "Unless you can keep still, Arthur, you will have to go away and sit somewhere else."

My repentence for disturbing the peace was complete, obedient and sustained. That name had struck a chord of revelation in my brain. The effect could not have been any more disturbing had I, a successful fugitive from justice, been suddenly called by the name which I had deserted and in fact succeeded in forgetting.

Hendrick Charters! I think that I would willingly have hung there by the neck to hear more particulars about that person. Who was he? Where could he be found? A few seconds I held my breath in agony, fearing that Hendrick Charters would prove to be only another fictional character selected to compare with Dickens. But, no! One of the women was shortly continuing in a quiet voice.

"Mr. Charters was very much of a recluse, though I understand it was from disappointment in life rather than from any lack of material success."

"And during his last year," began another, and then paused as though questioning the wisdom of speaking. I could scarcely contain myself for the inward agitation threatening to burst into questionings. Was Hendrick Charters, then, really somebody alive, or even one who had been alive? Could he be actually a person who was known to these ladies? The speaker was presently going on.

"Yes, during that last year, poor Mr. Charters was quite different. The specialist from Philadelphia said exactly what Doctor Biggar had said about it: there was apparently nothing whatever to account for the extreme benign influence which so mysteriously came over Mr. Charters at the end of his hard life."

"I suppose nobody ever actually knew," spoke another, digressing in feminine fashion from the main subject to a side issue, "just what money Hendrick Charters did give away. Everything you ever heard of seemed to get something. Whatever his former life may have been he must in reality have been a lovable character."

"Ah!" said an elderly Miss Bancroft, shaking her head sadly, "I am afraid my father would have told you a different story. We lived in the city of St. George when Charters was making his money."

"You knew him, Hortense?" and white-haired Mrs. Ayer lifted her head in a sort of awe, while every busy hand in the circle dropped and every expectant face was raised. Without lifting her own eyes, Miss Bancroft, after a pause, spoke, little more than whispered.

"He was always a man people were anxious to hear about, but not to talk about."

"Yes, dear?"

"He seemed to be too strong—too terrible—for just one man. My father sat on a board of directors

with him and after each meeting, I remember, my father used to be in a state of torment. I remember one night his suddenly crying, 'When that man's eyes are on me—and he wants something—I can actually feel the creature rooting through my brain, picking up what's useful to him'." In the dead silence of attention Miss Bancroft went on. "Mother said it was like being possessed of a devil and the idea seemed to agitate father more than ever. 'Sometimes,' his voice rose excitedly, 'I imagine Charters uses men's minds to play with. Lifetime friends turn on one another at his willing, sworn enemies join forces and dart off at a new tangent together when he bids it. Why, at that conference this afternoon, just as I was congratulating myself that the trouble-making Holt was absent, I found myself saying exactly the things Holt would have been saying. It was just as if Charters had projected Holt's brain into my skull.'

" 'Why, that's terrible!' my mother cried, for father seemed over-wrought and had dropped his head on his arms.

" 'That man would be feared even in death!' he groaned finally."

The "Literary" dispersed, evening came, and the world slept again, but until daylight I lay looking into space and dreaming open-eyed of my new-found friend or whatever he was. To me he was mysteriously more than real. Scores and hundreds of thoughts, pictures and impressions concerning him

filled my imagination. It could not be possible that the few chance remarks of the Literary Society were the foundation for them all.

During the days that followed, while dawdling on my way to or from school, throughout the stupid lessons, at my meals, and always at night, I strove to solve the riddle of Hendrick Charters. I contrived a conversation with the funny little man who hobbled about mending sidewalks, and asked him if he had ever heard of Hendrick Charters. "Of course I have! Everybody here in Bloomfield knew about him once. He lived here nine or ten years 'afore he died. He'd a hard name amongst most of 'em, but they talked different when he give away all his money."

"You don't know where he lived I suppose, Mr. Hardisty?" I plied the man.

"Sure I do. He lived in one of them fine big houses they put up on the Onslow road about fifteen or sixteen years ago."

Instantly I did know (though probably had never seen) the group of imposing residences on the other side of town. "When did you say he died?" I spoke with smiling childish inquisitiveness.

"Let's see!" The man scratched his head through his cap. "Time goes pretty quick. I wouldn't wonder, Artie, but it was somewhere about the time you was born."

"I'll be ten in February," I boasted artfully, pretending to turn the subject.

"Y'are? Well, I guess that'd be about the time —it were right in the middle of winter too that Hendrick Charters died."

It was a long way for me to go alone, but I went, went unerringly to the house with the round green towers. It was joined to the barn and stables by two or three small out-buildings. With a familiarity that almost frightened me I walked around the barn, and through the garden by an unused path till I came to a rough board door. This, I easily remembered, opened on the tool-house. A sudden curiosity seized me to see whether the wooden vice was still fixed to the end of the bench in such a position that it struck one's chest unexpectedly every time one tried to open or close the window just above it. The tools I looked for in the wooden racks were not there, but otherwise the place was exactly as I knew it would be. Walking through the farther door and into the stable, a voice from my lips suddenly shouted, "Hello, Black Strap!" to the heavy horse in the right hand stall. My voice alarmed me so that I decided to trespass no further. Turning to go, I glanced back once more. There was no animal in either stall and had apparently not been for a long time. Cobwebs were thick across both.

Frightened yet exultant I fled the place, walking rapidly away, and having the distinct feeling that somebody was calling me back, though I could hear nothing whatever.

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At Mr. Charters' death the use of his house and all its contents had been willed to his old housekeeper, Mrs. Fletcher. She had asked two or three of her relatives to move in from the country and they had all lived there since. This I learned from the grocer whom I rightly concluded would be supplying Mrs. Fletcher. I offered, for the following Saturday, to run some errands for this man and so contrived to have myself appointed to deliver a basket at the old house.

This time I entered the semi-outdoor cooking shed used during the summer. It had just been abandoned for the season, so I walked through it, and turned aside to scrape the soles of my shoes noisily on a sharp iron bracket evidently screwed to the floor for that purpose. Without pausing to wonder what prompted me to do this I stamped once or twice, tried the kitchen door, and then knocked. Immediately I was conscious that, without intention, I had rapped a peculiar, "Tap-tap, thump-thump-thump-thump-thump". There was the rattling of a walking stick as though in a hand suddenly unsteady, and silence for a few seconds after the stick had come close. Then the door flew open and there appeared a very little old lady whom I knew to be Mrs. Fletcher. Her eyes were flashing as though she expected to see a ghost and she gasped when more than once she tried to speak, and finally exclaimed,

"What in the world is it—boy?"

"From the store!" I replied meekly, but the next moment other words passed out of my mouth, "You're remembering to keep the trap door to that cistern closed, are you?"

"Land sakes, boy! What are you talking about. He—poor Mr. Charters—was always saying that." Again I felt that thrilling terror I had felt when looking into the empty stalls. "Sit down there, boy, while I take the things out of the basket," she added, tremblingly endeavouring the while to master some surging emotion. Then, as though unwilling to let me go at once, "Wait till I get you a glass of milk and a cookie."

Perceiving her fear, and longing to know more of the place, I stayed.

"What boy are you?" Mrs. Fletcher demanded, returning after a minute or two. She asked the question as though she had been gathering courage for it.

"I'm the Reverend Mr. Burden's boy," I told her.

"How is it I never saw you before?" Her continued bravery of attitude was an effort which shook her old body. "Maybe I'm getting queer but—" Mrs. Fletcher was not looking at me. "You—you —Now mark this, my boy, I'll not be tricked by any falsehood—"

She looked up now and met, what I did not intend but still felt to be, a stare of affronted dignity. Her little courage vanished. My eyes kept darting

glances through the hall doorway, imperative glances which meant I knew not what, but which decidedly meant something.

"The chambers are made up," she announced, as though to end an embarrassing silence, "and the study's rid up."

All at once I was on my feet, my posture seeming to invite or insist on verification of her statement, so that presently, with no more than a meek confused mumbling, she was leading me through the front of the house.

At the rear of the broad central hall leading from the front door was Hendrick Charters' study. As we entered here a sense of numbing unreality seized me, for my very identity was leaving me. I had to insist to myself that I was little Arthur Burden, but for some reason the name failed to mean anything. The furniture in the room was not merely familiar to me: it was my furniture.

Concealed behind the door, so that I had not yet seen it, was a pivot chair beside a broad heavily-drawered desk. The chair squeaked as though somebody was in it. For a moment an angry blush held me—the hot resentment a man would feel at discovering an interloper. I turned defiantly.

"I'll have to go for a minute," Mrs. Fletcher was saying. "My invalid sister upstairs is calling."

In her haste the poor woman had stumbled and touched the chair.

The moment I found myself sitting in it, and alone in that room, every realization of childhood left me. I became—suddenly, naturally and unafraid—a slow-moving, self-willed old man. Pulling open the third right-hand drawer, I took out a black-covered note-book. From inside an envelope pasted on the last page I slipped out an ancient daguerrotype. It was of a young woman, possibly twenty-five, benign of expression and dressed in the style of the earlier years of Victoria's reign.

CHAPTER III

DREAMS

WHEN finally I left Mrs. Fletcher's house it was, I distinctly remember, with the feeling a criminal must have on abandoning a loved home for purposes of safety. Presumably I returned the basket to the grocer, arrived at my home and went through the routine of supper, obedience to my parents' wishes, and going to bed. But, and although my memory of those days is crystal clear, I have no recollection of anything between the time I left Mrs. Fletcher and the moment I woke up in bed that night.

Hendrick Charters was no longer merely the pivot of my interest: he was the key to the riddle of my existence, the very source, somehow, of my chance of happiness.

For hours there floated through my memory the domestic life in that towered house. I was always an old man in the pivot chair, reading from ponderous leather-bound volumes and paper-covered novels, stroking first one long moustache and then the other. Every detail was in the picture. Leading to a small veranda on the east side of the library was a door in which were two long glass panels rounded at the top. Outside the glass of the panels was a heavy cast-iron grill painted green. On fine mornings the

sunlight streamed through this and made a pattern of flattened squares on the old carpet. I would come in from the breakfast table carrying a large cup of tea, which, while I read, I would stir continuously until it was cold. After drinking it, I would get up, go into the garden for a little while, tilling the potatoes or gathering the bugs methodically from the bushes, scrape off the spade with my foot, put it away in the tool-house, and pass on to curry Black Strap. Although the morning's mail never contained anything of a personal or friendly nature, I sighed heavily each time this fact was established. After dinner a man came to harness the horse and to drive me a little way into the country if I did not feel like driving myself. Late afternoon found me reading again, and in the evening I often made quite a business of settling up my small business affairs. The money due to tradespeople and others was slowly counted out and placed in long envelopes which were duly sealed with wax and addressed. In one corner was written instruction for possible return of the letter and in the other was affixed one of the long registration stamps. This was the best hour of the day, for I was free of Mrs. Fletcher's pottering about after me and eternally asking for her orders about the minutest details of the work which she performed each day of her life.

It was only the following morning, when the child Arthur Burden was called to get up, that I paused to wonder if such visions were visions only.

At any rate I must find out more about Hendrick Charters. The old man who mended sidewalks for the corporation knew nothing whatever of the personal things that I desired. To ask either of my parents never occurred to me. I thought of the ladies of the Literary Society, but decided instead to visit Mrs. Fletcher again.

As lack of exercise had left me with little bodily stamina I waited for the lad who drove the butcher's two-wheeled cart on Saturday morning and got a lift part way. Scorning the games of other children as I did, they never desired my presence amongst them, so no notice would be taken as to what I did or where I went.

When Mrs. Fletcher's door opened for me a second time the little woman's eyes widened in a sort of superstitious terror, presently narrowing to a mystified suspicion. She essayed to treat me as an ordinary small boy but slipped several times into a preoccupied "Sir". I felt that she was not the person who could impart anything of the intimate or thoughtful life of Mr. Charters. I had come to find the name of somebody who could, somebody possibly who had been his friend. Everything people had said indicated that Hendrick Charters had had no friends, but for some reason I felt that he had. Mrs. Fletcher would know the name. I trembled lest it be somebody in the town, somebody who would know me and my parentage and who would therefore not take my enquiry seriously.

Mrs. Fletcher would not have told me had I asked, but I perceived that the old lady loved a listener, so I listened with intent patience. Presently, as her babble ran on, I heard it. Benjamin Sanford.

"He came all the way from St. George to the funeral," she said. "Afterwards he spent nearly the whole night in Mr. Charters' study. Mr. Sanford told me they had been lifelong friends. He had received a most beautiful letter from Mr. Charters six months before. And I was to write Mr. Sanford later if I needed advice about anything." Mrs. Fletcher showed me the soiled yellow card Mr. Sanford had left her.

That night in secret I wrote a letter to Mr. Sanford, purposely conveying the impression that I was a grown man and deeply interested to learn more of the last years of a life so nobly and unselfishly concluded. Would he be so kind as to give me any information he possessed, addressing me in care of Mrs. Fletcher?

The next week, in a state of expectant agitation, I called and was given an envelope addressed to me in the scholarly handwriting of the period. Mr. Sanford wrote respectfully and briefly. He could, he said, do no better than enclose for my perusal the strange and beautiful letter he had mentioned to Mrs. Fletcher. He begged to remain, "My dear sir, your most obedient servant—"

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTER

MY dear Benjamin,—It is forty and one years since we parted. I refer to the breaking of our comradeship—for in reality you and I cannot part. That my affection for you, Benjamin, was the greatest and best as well as the last in my life is the plea on which I now ask an hour of your sympathy. I am a lonely old man—much older than my age. During the ten years I have spent in this place it has been too late to make friends, too late to begin again renewing the laughter and wholesomeness of youth, but not too late, I find, to regret and to weep upon recollections.

You and I brought to one another the happiness of boyhood, old friend, and how happy we were then in our carefree twenties. What a good lad you were perhaps only I knew, as I myself—I say it with no blush—had been a good lad through your influence. Would that I could say I have always worked as faithfully and loyally as we worked together for that eight and twelve and fourteen dollars a month which seemed opulent enough to us as we went blithely along towards young manhood. You remember the new suits we used to buy, the neckcloths and shoes, and the parties where the jolly, clever girls invented games. How wise you were to marry

Effie and to live through your poverty together. I understand too that you have been fairly prosperous. In my last years, Benjamin, I envy you with all my soul. I do not know your children's names but they are in my prayers nevertheless. I should like to do something for them but suppose they are all away and doing for themselves.

It is needless to tell you now how right you always were about Sarah and me, and what a mortal fool I was not to claim Sarah Geddings as my wife when the time was ripe. This is the matter on which I feel compelled to write, for I have just learned of her death. The youngest brother, Alverton, writes me about it in a way which bows me down with pain. Her brief marriage it seems (and as I greatly feared) was a failure. Latterly Sarah had made her home with this brother whose wife only a year ago had her first child. From what Alverton tells me now I think that Sarah must have pondered much and even spoken of me, and the children that might have been ours. 'When the promise of the child came,' the brother writes (and I have the feeling that he did so in fulfilment of a promise) 'Sarah watched over the prospective mother almost as though the arrival was to be her own offspring, and when the little life commenced (at the loss, alas! of her mother) the solicitations and blessings of Sarah knew no bounds. She was mother, grandmother, almost the Deity itself to my darling daughter.' So runs the letter, and who more easily

than I can realize how the noble sweet soul of Sarah Geddings would pour out the whole of her childless mother nature into the avenue at last opened before her.

'One morning,' the letter concludes, 'my little girl surprisingly uttered her first word. I hurried to awake the foster mother only to find the dear face growing cold, though in a smile of inexpressible content as if enraptured by some wonderful vision. It was a sort of drama of life coming and going, had I not been seized by the incomprehensible feeling that no life had really gone. It somehow brought to mind, Hendrick, your own unearthly ideas of life and death, which I have always remembered.'

Ah, Benjamin, these are hard things to read and realize. How young to-day does thirty sound! Yet at that age I took the step which spoiled my life. Sarah would have taken me and poverty but refused to take me and wealth the way I was acquiring it. It has been a curse to me that I always did completely the thing I determined on. Having decided that money-getting was the aim of life, I soon found that, to succeed, one must not have scruples. For twenty-five years I went on, greedy, relentless, a slave to the empty ambition. At fifty-five a serious illness made me pause. I travelled then, spent money seeking rest and peace. I sought them in gaiety, in solitude, in far countries. The result was a mockery. Perhaps I could have solved my problem in service for others but by this time

such a thing was unnatural. I confess it never occurred to me. Dollars were my only allies—boon companions and false friends.

Then I gave it all up and came here, a forsaken, hopeless man, old before my time. And it has been little but a purposeless clinging to life. And now, with Sarah's death, the final flicker, the going out of youth's sweet memory.

But, during these last weeks, my thoughts have turned strongly to things spiritual. Perhaps—and sometimes I have felt terribly certain of this—it is Sarah's sanctifying influence, suddenly stronger in death; as though my mind, dominant during our lives, will henceforth feel and acknowledge the leadership of hers. All at once I am conscious of a purpose, a motive for my existence. My Life? What has it been? Shadows, shadows! But the substance was there, Benjamin. By nature I had the will and the soul to take up life, but withheld my hand. Is that firm substance, then, non-existent? Inspired minds tell us that, in nature's scheme, nothing is wasted,

'That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void—
When God hath made the pile complete.'

Every ounce of material, every ray of light must be used, somehow. Why cannot I use my faculties which have never been used? To build now upon a rock? My life has been but half lived and nothing,

in God's scheme, is incomplete. I want to live again, Benjamin! I have tried life one way and failed. If death is not the end, *if we awake* I believe the Almighty might take a life like mine and give it a chance, *by turning it about.*

If I have not crowned a glowing youth with useful life, could I not perhaps build a shining youth on the foundations of unrealized age? The mistakes, the sins of my later life could, I know, find atonement in youth, if youth only came last. You remember how the learned Doctor Faustus in his cell wanted youth again. But he wanted it as reward for a mere selfish wish. My bargaining is to live back the path from old age to youth, to suffer if necessary for ill-spent years, and thus gradually to achieve youth, which I would then know how to improve and to glorify. For this, surely, there is no need to sell one's soul to the devil.

It is not a matter merely of the disappointed asking life over again. I have wasted my patrimony and do not for that reason seek to usurp another's. I ask only the privilege of going back and picking up the lost talents, by atonement and labour. I ask not youth again as a gift, but only the chance to undo the wrong, to uproot the tares and, at eventide, to sow the seed that may bud before my wearied eyes once more, into the sweet promise of youth.

A deathbed repentance cannot change a life. A whole year's effort will effect the life only in the

measure of that year's intensity. But (and I know not what impels me to know this) a deathbed resolution is stronger than one taken at any other time.

I weary you, old friend, but you would bear with me if you knew how real and vital this is to me. It is not a dream but a belief. The God who lives and creates and destroys has done more wonderful things. I want to live again! I must! I am prepared to pay the price. I want to justify Sarah's early faith in me, the faith which it seems never quite died in her. I want to live, to father and bless the spiritual child of her old age.

And now you have heard, Benjamin. You know the things I could not speak, and which would not be believed by another earthly soul. This great hope has come to me like a religion, a salvation. In order to leave me free to cherish it and pray for it, I have been getting rid of all my possessions, with the exception of the merest provision from to-day until the day the book closes.

When the spirit shall leave this presently tired, disappointed body, you are the only friend I could hope might be on hand to close my eyes.

Faithfully and hopefully yours,

HENDRICK CHARTERS.

CHAPTER V

DOCTOR BIGGAR

SURROUNDING my father's oblong brick house was a two-acre farm belonging to the church. Dividing the small garden and orchard from the larger oat-field, was a row of elms, beneath the shade of which the grass grew short and smooth. Between the two trees most remote from the house was my study, my secret contemplation ground ever since I could walk. It was here I read the letter.

The old eyes in my young head must have assumed strange aspect. The effect was, at times, that of an artillery battle raging within. Sigh after sigh overwhelmed me, surging waves of emotion, great terrifying shudders. It was not the letter alone, the pathos, the soul-wringing affliction of it, but the visions it stirred up for me. I seemed to have known the letter once my eyes fell on it, not only to feel its words, but to be sharing the great anguish of remorse which prompted them. And its conclusion! What the passer-by would have thought the crazed hopes of an old man was miraculously the most real and vital part of it all.

The amazing problem into the vortex of which it hurled me, the riddle of life and death, lay like an immovable weight on my brain. My inner being

wrestled with it, seemed every now and then to give way under it; but the weakness was merely as when a strong man, in his fight to establish the right, sore pressed and defeated from time to time, knows still that he will prevail. My faith in Hendrick Charters' hope was fixed; the only question was as to how it was to be accomplished. By which one of God's wonderful ways would that unfulfilled life commence—or had it commenced—to retrace its steps.

There, amongst the falling leaves of the elms gently swaying in the October breeze, within ear-shot of childish play in the street, sat a little boy, hands on stockinged knees, cap awry, and head bent down with the cares and sufferings of an embarrassed old man.

How was I to find out more? Who, even if others still lived who knew, who other than Benjamin Sanford would ever take seriously the sorrowful quest of a child?

Doctor Biggar!

Was it not Doctor Biggar who had passed the opinion about the change during Hendrick Charters' last year. Everybody in the town knew the doctor; he had lived here for a great many years. He had been to attend my brother when he had a poisoned foot. The more I thought of him the more fully I realized that Doctor Biggar was my hope. But how could I find out anything from him? I would be unable to explain myself. Although I could think

bravely the thoughts that would appal another child I shrank with fear from things that others would do without hesitation.

Weeks passed. My resolve and my fears alternately succeeded one another. What was it to me that, while I ached in indecision, those amongst whom I should have been playmate were plowing gleefully amongst beds of crinkling maple leaves, and who, anon, were greeting with cheers the first snow-flakes and, presently, were strapping on their skates and were restless for the last day of school which brought so near the glorious Christmastide. To allay the frequent care-laden glances of my father I joined my metallic laugh to the festivities and tried to talk as I heard children talk. But always my soul was heavy-laden and the problem of myself an agonizing suspense.

One night in January my father came in late for supper. "I'm afraid he's a sick man," he told my mother. "Mrs. Biggar is talking of a consultation."

There followed another night of sleepless fear for me. What if Doctor Biggar should not recover? I had planned to go to him in February, when I should have reached ten years of age, but now I must master my cowardice and put-off procrastinating. Next day, after school, I plodded through the deep snow to his house. The young woman who opened the door seemed pleased and touched that a little boy should have come so far to ask after

the Doctor. From upstairs the patient himself called out that he was feeling much better, and that I must be brought to him, so I took on a new courage. I have since learned that an old man may be counted on to be just as serious in his conversation with a boy as the boy may invite. Almost at once I was talking to the invalid about Hendrick Charters.

"A remarkable man, Arthur, a truly remarkable man," the doctor spoke kindly. "How does it happen that you come to know about him?" Then to relieve my embarrassment, "Still, natural enough I suppose. You've been always such an old-timer of a little man yourself."

"The ladies of the Literary Society, sir," I said, "were talking about him."

"Well, well! I should not have supposed that many people but myself would have retained any interest in the old man. Though, for years, I had only the most formal professional acquaintance with him, he was a man I found difficulty in forgetting for long. His powers of mind were so unusual—so astonishing, really—that, even to-day, I sometimes have to remind myself that he is dead. He was forlorn enough, God knows, and unhappy, but he would never accept sympathy and never gave anybody his confidence. Then, all at once, something made him very human, almost womanly in his tender regard of things. He was resolved to give away all his money, of which I discovered there was a good deal. In fact I helped him to disburse it. He began

reading deeply of the philosophers, scriptures and inspirational poetry, and to develop strange ideas as to the future life. Living had few attractions for him to be sure, but yet he seemed strangely determined that he had not done with it. One naturally believed with him, for he was the kind of man who might tell you that he proposed to turn the heavens upside down, and have you waiting in the half-expectation he was going to do it."

The speaker, at this point, turned to me. "But of course a boy isn't interested in such things."

"Yes, sir, I am. I really am. I know Mrs. Fletcher well, but she couldn't tell me very much."

"I suppose most medical men would have said that Mr. Charters' brain was softening, but somehow I could never think this to be the case. I even had the specialist, Doctor Michaelson of Philadelphia, come to give me an opinion. And it was a satisfaction to have him say that Mr. Charters' mind was functioning quite rationally, even though he might entertain irrational theories." Doctor Biggar stopped again as though in doubt as to going on, but my look told him that I was following every word. "It's rather an odd circumstance, Arthur, that I always think of Mr. Charters whenever I see you. Because his death will always be associated in my mind with your birth."

Keen anxiety prompted me to will with all my power that Doctor Biggar should go on talking. I felt all at once within myself a strange uncanny

power to compel him to continue. He nodded his head slowly for some time, as though he might be reciting mentally, then turned to me with an intentional carelessness as though offering to end our conversation.

"However, you've not yet studied about the origin of life, Arthur, or anything of the sort."

"Yes, sir, I have. A good deal." This was the moment for which I had unconsciously prepared myself. Perusal of an old medical guide amongst my father's books had led to other delving. And, as I naturally grasped things more by suggestion than by education, my knowledge of biology was considerable. I spoke of one or two things in proof of it.

"Well," the Doctor at last began, slowly, as though signifying his consent to continue, "Mr. Charters had been feeling pains in his head for some days. As I knew that I was likely to be wanted at your house I tried to give him instructions in case of emergency. The few telephones we have now had not come when you were born, and the midnight your father sent for me was the height of a cruel blizzard, so that I could not even bring out the cutter. It took more than half an hour to plow my way across to your father's and on my arrival I perceived at once that I was badly needed. Your father had a woman in to help me and things went along fairly well. But, just at the last, a serious complication developed which made me mainly anxious as to the

safety of your mother. To make matters worse we heard a thumping at the front door. Mr. Charters' manservant had come all the way to say that Mrs. Fletcher thought he was dying. Aside from the enormous difficulty of getting to Mr. Charters' house through the storm, I was obliged to regard certain principles which doctors hold as to saving life. In the choice between an infant and a mother the mother must have the preference, but when the choice lies between a very old person and a younger, it is youth that must be saved. I quite believed that Mr. Charters might be dying but I was powerless to aid him.

"You, Arthur, almost at that moment, had been born. My entire attention was required to save your mother's life. By the time I was able to turn to you it appeared to be too late. It struck me that you had breathed at first, but, looking at you now, I never expected you would do so again. Of course there are certain things, even in that case, that we must do before quite giving up hope, and these I brought into play. Using the breath of my own lungs, I forced it between your tiny lips, in the remote hope of starting respiration. I found myself bending every effort to the work, as though something were telling me it would succeed. Then, all in a moment, things turned for the better. Not only did you move and cry, but you did so with unbounded vehemence. Although I said nothing of it at the time, it was an amazement to me that you came

to life so quickly. Your father heard the cry and told me afterwards that it occurred at exactly five minutes past one.

"Hours later, when I reached Mr. Charters' house, he was dead. Mrs. Fletcher told me that, at the last, he had asked repeatedly for me, finally whispering, 'I wanted to tell you, Biggar, that I'm crossing over.' The housekeeper had exercised the old-fashioned custom of stopping the clock. Your father's words, 'Just five minutes after one' as I had dug out into the snow, were the most recent human sounds I had heard. When therefore I beheld Mr. Charters' clock stopped at precisely the same hour it was something which I have naturally remembered."

CHAPTER VI

REVELATION

IN subsequent years I have marvelled that Doctor Biggar's words failed to convince me of the definite solution of my remarkable existence or of the fugitive fascination which the name of Hendrick Charters held for me.

Life in our village drifted on another full year. I had my eleventh birthday and went along through that summer before anything further happened seriously to affect the current of life.

I was unhappy in that nothing seemed to give me happiness, although there were no unfortunate illnesses or sufferings. One reason I took so little part in boyhood sports and occupations was that I was extremely slow in my actions and movements and quite failed in mustering up the juvenile enthusiasm which must, of course, be part of the game. Older people I avoided even if it were necessary to scheme to do so. When I recall the extreme mental discomfort of being obliged on the one hand to remain passive and silent during a worth-while discussion and, on the other, being obliged to speak and consequently to think in terms of childhood, to say that I suffered from an embarrassment of intellect is literally correct. What, I wonder, would have been the feelings of the erudite school teachers,

merchants, and town councillors if I had told them that there were not two or three of the lot with whom, intellectually, I could have spent a profitable evening.

My everyday life, then, was a constant mental restraint. Had I been possessed of the impetuousness of the ordinary boy of eleven, such restraint would have been impossible. As it was I sought a certain philosophic satisfaction in living within myself. The idea of securing a confidant would have been more foreign to me than a desire to talk with God.

Then, early in September, my father received a call to a large church in the city of St. George and it became necessary for the family to pack up and move away. Here were to be new experiences and excitement.

Several times in the past, following moments of absent-mindedness, my vision had been obstructed by unexpected shapes and forms having no material existence. On each occasion a normal condition returned if I blinked and shook my head as a man does to get rid of drowsiness. Again, following a period of thought with closed eyes—to which I was prone—I would glance with puzzled wonderment at the smallness and frailty of my hands and limbs. Approaching a low passageway I would stoop quite unnecessarily to get through.

Our last day in the country rectory arrived. My mother and sister had gone ahead to prepare the

city home. We boys were to go on by ourselves and my father would follow shortly. Everything had, I remember, been taken out of my parents' bedroom except a large panel mirror which was to be specially packed. Wandering through the empty rooms in one of my pensive moods I chanced to look in this glass. As I gazed I had that feeling which a man experiences when, after looking fixedly at himself in a mirror, an unfamiliar personality suddenly stares him squarely in the eyes. In this case I beheld the reflection of a man. He was evidently about sixty, fresh complexion, heavy gray hair but moustaches still dark, the eyes wearily thoughtful but expressive, just then, of nothing in particular. As to where I had seen this very familiar figure before I could not imagine. Being naturally slow and measured in my actions, I waited a few seconds before turning to look directly at this person who had so silently entered the room.

A single startled glance around the bare walls showed me that I was alone in the place. Another look back at the gray-haired man in the mirror revealed his face now animated by something akin to the concern I was myself feeling. I lifted a hand to my face in mystified wonderment. The figure in the mirror did the same. By a powerful effort of will I shook off the serious mood in which I had been and forced myself to become the boy, Arthur Burden. The glass at once reflected that boy. There was no fading, nor even changing, it was

simply that one figure was there and then the other. A tremor ran from my heart to the four extremities of my body as I realized all my more or less vague suspicions justified.

Surprisingly enough, I slept long and soundly that night, quite undisturbed by imaginings and in due course the next morning stepped aboard the primitive railway train which was to carry us to the city and away from the scene of my weird unhappy childhood. It was with calmness and comparative unconcern, during those rumbling hours of the journey, that I contemplated the answer to my great question. The transient soul of Hendrick Charters, unalterably resolved to retrace its earthly course, had seized upon my infant, tenantless body and animated it into life. Hid in that first infant cry was a spirit seventy-two years old. To-day, approaching my twelfth birthday, I was actually a mental creation of more than sixty.

Each year brought me another milestone towards youth. Already there were signs, unmistakable signs. My very earliest thoughts had been of the imminence of death, resignation to the mystery and tragedy of life. Then, about my fifth and sixth years, came a close personal interest as to ages and conditions of old people whose deaths were announced. For the past year or two, I had thought less of these things; my consciousness was now rather that of a man whose active work was

completed and who had left behind the cares of the world of business.

What a strange coincidence it was, then, that, at precisely the age at which Hendrick Charters had left the city to end his years in our town of Bloomfield, I was going where he had lived out his middle life in successful though apparently not entirely creditable contact with the world. Had the god of chance—or was it some mysterious agency—put me on the identical track leading back to Hendrick Charters' origin? I had no doubt whatever now that his past was my future, but so far as my knowledge of a single day of it was concerned, it was just as dark, as full of uncertainty as that of another being at my time of life.

CHAPTER VII

BENJAMIN SANFORD

MY father, I recall, was eccentric in his frugality. After making a generous donation to a charitable object he would spend an hour trying to convert an old calendar into notepaper. Although all the family belongings had been packed for shipment he seemed to dislike seeing his sons start for the new home empty-handed. So he loaded us with some plain boards which had been used as extra book-shelves and might possibly be so used again.

Emerging, then, from the railway terminal in the heart of St. George, we found ourselves not only strangers but strange beings amid the rattle and clang of the great city which terrified my elder brothers. I was wearing a gaily coloured jockey cap and a spotted cotton blouse of the type in which country boys of the period used to stow away their stolen apples. Our elder sister had come to the station to guide us the several miles to our new home in the suburbs. One of our first sights was that of a pair of bony horses being whipped up a cobblestone hill drawing a street car. It decided my elders to walk rather than add to the poor beasts' suffering. Whereas the attention of the others was sufficiently occupied by the wonderful shop-windows, for my

part I felt only demeaned and humiliated at the ridiculous figure I felt I presented. People smiled cruelly at us when they were not swearing at receiving the ends of the boards in their chests or backs, or having their hats knocked off.

As, one by one, the street corners were rounded it was to me like turning the pages of a forgotten old book. As a home-coming it was, perhaps, not so sad as the home-leaving of my prototype, Hendrick Charters, over twenty years ago. The newer buildings in the upper city claimed my attention just as any man returning from a holiday would turn to regard a building completed during his absence. My mortification at appearing as I did in the place where once I was a figure noted for my dignity caused me, consciously or otherwise, powerfully to will that something would happen to rid us of the absurd burden we were carrying. Almost at once my older sister instructed us to turn aside into a lane and there to leave the boards.

It was still a strange sensation that my mind, the mind of a man sixty-one years old, might be used to dominate that of other people.

During the week it required for my father to arrive and to place us at one of the city schools, I succeeded in finding the street and number which had been written on Benjamin Sanford's card. Designedly I arrived at his door just as he would have completed his evening meal. Although over eighty, Mr. Sanford was still a fine alert specimen

of manhood. My interview with Doctor Biggar had taught me cunning in approaching people and giving the impression that I was not exactly the small boy I appeared. An anxiety of even my early childhood was to avoid a depth of voice which would involuntarily manifest itself, but which on rare occasions might serve a desired purpose. In this case I was further favoured in that the man who had entrusted to me the intimate letter suffered from cataract.

Nevertheless at the outset he seemed instinctively indisposed to tell me of that I wished so eagerly to know. But on my side I persistently resisted the introduction of new subjects by an intentional phlegmatic unresponsiveness, while on the other hand I gave my absorbed and expectant attention at even the most indirect reference to Hendrick Charters. So that, in the end, Mr. Sanford followed the line of least resistance and resignedly unsealed his lips.

"He and I were great friends, even from the time before he was twenty. Hendrick must have been twenty-four when he met Sarah Geddings, and not in all my life have I witnessed a man and woman joined so spontaneously and harmoniously in the relation of lovers. I am an old man now, accustomed to the world's lights and shadows, but never since have I known, in any play of human affairs, so beautiful and perfect an attraction as apparently existed between these two.

"Sarah was not merely a dear girl, a loyal and devoted woman, she was one in whom practical spirituality was a sort of fine frenzy. It was in this respect, too, that Hendrick was so essentially her counterpart, for his nature, in its untrammeled state, was also finely attuned to matters pertaining to the soul. Along with this gift there incongruously existed a wilful desire for mastery, and an ambition which seemed to hold nothing sacred or dear. It was almost as though some evil strain of heredity had laid this obsession on him.

"After a number of years of what must have been perfect love and sympathy between them—the years during which the two waited for circumstances to permit their marriage—an estrangement suddenly occurred. Hendrick developed another attachment. Nobody could ever explain it. Seemingly, the woman herself had little hold upon him; in a year they had parted.

"The lady was once described to me by the business man who employed me and who moved in her parents' social circle. This man seemed to think that Hendrick's attentions had to do with his ambitions to acquire wealth. Then, months later, I chanced on them in a public dining-room and myself observed Hendrick in the company of a woman. She was of an attractive—I thought indelicate—type, and, in view of my employer's conversation, I was surprised at the absence in her of any bearing of cultural superiority.

"It was only years afterwards that I came to realize or at least to believe that there had been two different women. In fact it seemed the only solution to account for matters. I had wondered that Hendrick did not return to Sarah after his misadventure; but he possessed that sort of pride which would have rendered impossible an admission of two defeats.

"At thirty, he was wholly immersed in making money. Such friends as he made, I have heard, were trodden ruthlessly underfoot as he climbed the ladder of wealth. Sarah Geddings, as I saw her from time to time, wore her old look of pious beauty. She never offered any explanation as to the quarrel and, so far as I knew, never again breathed Hendrick's name."

"Did you know anything of her family?" I asked for a reason that I could not have explained.

"Never very much," said old Mr. Sanford sadly. "I understood that some of them, her father I think, had been stage folk. The younger brother, of whom Hendrick wrote, was, I know, engaged in that line for some years. He was ambitious but a failure."

"What of the little girl—of whom he wrote as Sarah's spiritual child?"

Immediately I found myself looking about the room, as though for the source of these words, and only after some seconds did I realize that it was I who had asked the question. But why? What was

there, (annoyed with myself, I rapidly thought) of concern to me about the baby that I should worry this poor old man with it?

"Ah!" he smiled, as though nothing unusual had been asked. "That, of course, is recent history, of which I know so little. But how often, my boy, have I wondered, as you seem to be wondering, where and what she is. She would be thirteen or fourteen years old now. I think her father and Sarah Geddings had moved away from St. George a long time before she was born. Yes, 'Sarah's spiritual child' Hendrick called her too, you remember. If you had ever known Sarah, if you had ever even seen her, lad, you could well believe that she would have spiritual children. Such things don't happen of course. At least— Well, I suppose anything can happen at the Creator's will."

Benjamin Sanford's dimmed eyes looked vacantly before him for some time, but I could not decide whether his recital was at an end or whether he was still searching his memory for details. Presently I could not see whether the eyes were open or closed. "And how fervent," his lowered voice came to me again, "how full of the devotion that counts with the Creator, was Hendrick's wish—in his last days —to live again, to live for the purpose of fathering and blessing this spiritual child of the only soul-companion he had ever known. Hendrick always achieved so completely the things he desired. To me at least it was incomprehensible how he achieved

them. I have sometimes thought that the agency was what the modern world calls occultism of some sort."

No lamp had been lit. Gradually twilight had deepened into darkness, and I was content to have it so, for darkness is a great leveller of confidence between age and youth. Mrs. Sanford had not appeared. We were alone in the house. I could just make out the still figure of the old man against the window outline. So long did he now remain motionless and silent that he might have been asleep. Then all at once he was whispering and I found myself sitting up, stiff and expectant at the change of tone.

"I'm so glad you came to me. It's a beautiful thought of yours, old friend—a wonderful dream—so worthy of your old self—that yearning to live again. To go back through life's storms and disappointments merely to undo the wrong, to heal the wounds by making full and glorious the dear life born anew into a little child."

"Mr. Sanford!" I called nervously, in the timid consciousness that I was, after all, only a little boy.

"Hendrick, Hendrick! Where— ? O, was it just — a fancy?"

Then I watched while the old man moved and shuffled to his feet. "Let's have the gas!"

In the flare of the match I saw his trembling fingers turn the key, then the flat spiky yellow flame and the room was blindingly bright. "What in

the world have I been telling you, Arthur, my boy. Come! Before you go, let me give you one of the apples that came in this afternoon. Your mother will be wondering where you've got to. Here's a car ticket; can you find your own way to the tracks?"

As the little four-wheeled tramcar was hauled bobbing and jolting across the city, vacant except for the driver, the yawning conductor and myself, strange new thoughts came to me. What of the little girl?

CHAPTER VIII

REVOLT

AT fourteen I graduated from high school. As my father's leanings were pronouncedly in the direction of academic learning I spent a further eighteen months at the university. The studies covered by the curriculum were again quite inadequate to occupy my days and I became a profound dreamer. Travel was the usual theme and in fancy I visited, I suppose, all the countries of the world. It must have been merely for occupation of mind because I derived little or at least no more satisfaction from my mental wanderings than from life in other forms. There was a dull sense of rebellion too, in that I was perforce living back those five years during which Mr. Charters, retired from his selfish active life of money-making, had tasted, instead of contentment, the shallowness and bitterness of a world without friends.

Repeatedly I tried to make myself believe what a fool I was to permit an obsession to rob me of my youth. Why should I not, as Arthur Burden, be natural and happy like the young people about me? The belief that my personality was other than it appeared was perhaps, after all, the result of mental shocks during my early childhood, and kept alive by subsequent coincidences. I had, for example,

been tremendously impressed by a published interview with a well-known astrologer. "The mind of the infant," he had said, "at the moment of its first facing the stars as an independent entity is as sensitive to impressions and events as a photographic plate. Heavenly and earthly conditions affecting him at that moment determine the whole course of his life."

Who was to tell the effect upon me of that simultaneous death of an imaginative old man? Then, later, the sudden hearing of his name, visiting his house, reading his amazing letter, all had been shocks to my mind from which I had not yet recovered—that was all. *Or was it all?*

The fact is, at any rate, that for five years I was prey to restlessness and irritation. School and college life with their chain-gang method of progress irked me. The welcome feeling that there were big things just ahead to be done could not be called ambition: it was merely an impatience to be rid of the present. I had not even the ambition of a prince who, before he is born, is destined to be king. I had not the smallest plan or even thought for becoming a financial success. Money had no taste. That, presently, I should engage in the battle for it was because it promised to be the field for my stifled powers. The thought of using success for the benefit of others, or even of myself, was foreign to a mind so entirely without hope as mine. Happily, instead of the impulsiveness of boyhood I

possessed the calmness and philosophic forebearance of fifty-five and sixty. This, I suppose it was, that made the years bearable.

In this absence of a full and happy life the conviction of being Hendrick Charters was too strong to be dismissed.

At almost exactly the age of seventeen I entered a stock broker's office as clerk. From that moment, although not what a normal person would call happy, I found forgetfulness of my condition of utter loneliness in the world. The wider aspects of my employers' business at once engrossed me. The country had not yet recoverd from the panic of 1893; railroad receiverships depressed the public mind. It was a time when only men of vision and trained mentality could foretell the future. Here was the first subject I had ever encountered worthy of the thoroughly matured and seasoned reasoning I seemed intuitively to possess.

Ours was the new branch office of a large brokerage firm in New York. The business consisted largely in executing Canadian orders on the larger exchange on behalf of local brokers who controlled the bond and share trading of the city of St. George. Unlike most office boys I never did things without knowing why I was doing them. Consequently I rapidly improved my position and standing and, although ours was a very small staff at first, I was very shortly beyond the "back room" stage of the brokerage business.

Our periodical market advice was sent to us from headquarters, but I developed the uncanny faculty of reading into and beyond this formal letter other and more powerful factors governing the position and prospects of the various securities. The forecasts I voiced independently so impressed our manager that he quickly gained the habit of consulting me when advising on important transactions. Before I had been at work six months he found occasion to send me to New York in order, I believe, that the heads of our firm might see for themselves of what value I might be to the organization.

Without conscious effort on my part the chief partners expressed themselves as impressed. It was in the course of verbal negotiations that my mind worked so unexpectedly. The mere mention of a railway, industrial or municipal security—a name which perhaps I had barely heard—awakened in my mind remarkably clear pictures and instantaneous deductions entirely outside my experience.

"Are you an Englishman, Mr. Burden?" the president asked me surprisedly in the midst of our interview.

"I am not, sir," Arthur Burden answered him, but the reaction betrayed an unexplained annoyance not helped by the president's unconvinced smile.

"Your father or mother?"

"Both born this side the water," I retorted promptly. "Why do you ask?"

"I received my own education there, and your speech several times has reminded me of England and the English schools, that's all."

That Benjamin Sanford had told how Hendrick Charters came out from England at the age of nineteen recurred to me a minute afterward, and accounted for my intuitive hostility.

"At any rate your natural gifts make you extremely adaptable to this business," they finally assured me.

It was inevitable that I should make money. It was achieved so mechanically, so unintentionally as almost to appear accidental. Certainly I did not want money for anything it would buy. Then, one day when I was about nineteen, a use for it came into my head. I could now leave home, live where I wanted; not be mind-tied and cramped any more in the presence of those who estimated me at my actual age. In the city and on the exchange I experienced the freedom of a man of twenty-five or thirty. In business there is not so much difference between men of different ages as between those of different personal force.

When I told my father and mother that the abominably slow street-cars would force me to reside at a down-town club they agreed with little demur, especially as my going was coupled with an offer to defray a year's university expenses of the brother immediately my senior.

Life was now freer, if only for the reason that I was permitted to spend as much of it as I wished alone. I sought no friendships and few, if any, were offered me. Normally, the element of sympathy must have been quite absent from my nature, so that I had no human purpose or interest.

Instinctively I came to regard love and sympathy as weaknesses, for it was while giving way to them that the Charters in me rose uppermost. Although such did not render the domination easy to recognize for, contradictorily, the evil background of his life ever and anon inspired in me instead a cunning, violent selfishness. Thus his personality (as in its natural personal existence) was divided against itself, constraining and bewildering the boy Arthur Burden. If there did exist within me a normal sentiment of any kind it was the ever-recurring pang of regret for something I had left undone. I know now that it did exist, but at that time I was exerting strong effort to prevent its manifestation. I knew that such haunting regrets had nothing to do with Arthur Burden and his nineteen years of existence, and the alternative solution would only bring me back towards what I sometimes thought the great madness.

I had, it is true, given thought to the little niece of Sarah Geddings. Frequently the subject seemed to trap me, particularly during the half-waking moments of night. Perhaps I had caught Mr. Sanford's interest in her. The solicitation might

even have come to claim a permanent place in my mind had it not occurred to me that this too was a part of the unsolvable mystery. According to Mr. Charters' letter I was compelled to accept the child as one of my cares—my first care. Therefore I fought against it, for I was resolved not to go out of my way in obedience to the man who had stolen my body and twisted my life around. The truth of course was that the same cruel selfishness to which Hendrick Charters' life had condemned me was now (at his mental age of fifty-three) thwarting his own last wishes. I have heard discussions on retribution to be effected in a future life, but they have no interest for me compared with the retribution I have experienced for a former life.

Living at my club was another young man engaged in the brokerage business named Warren Syminton. While no man held a real attraction for me, Syminton was one of the very few whom I watched. Several times had I drawn him into conversation, and found myself each time listening attentively for something which never came. On this particular evening we happened to be together in full possession of the smoking room. My casual remarks concerning the movements of the day were, on a sudden, unheard by him. He had become entirely engrossed in something he had read in the paper which lay open on his knees.

Telepathy, second-sight, mind-reading have to me been phrases to avoid. Rather it has been my

striving to be limited to objective thought alone. Extraneous mental impressions, once heeded, crowd on me too impetuously. On this occasion, immediately I took notice of the thoughtful expression on Warren Syminton's face, new and strange pictures crowded my mind. At once I knew that what he had read concerned me.

"There's a funny thing here," he spoke without looking up and in the manner of a man who has discovered information he must impart to the first ear presenting itself. "I've been reading about this Colchester mystery."

"What is it?" I enquired.

"Oh, nothing of importance in itself," glancing back at the paper casually. "Some sort of disappearance or murder affair. It's a name here in connection with it that caught my eye."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. It's the name Geddings."

The experience of seeing Hendrick Charters' person in the mirror and the horse in his stable had been by no means unique. Similar phenomena had, as a matter of fact, been frequent since I had gone into business in St. George. A man in the street, or even a printed picture of a man would suddenly appear to my eyes as somebody else, or at least a greatly changed object. I would be at once conscious of the fact that my sight was deceiving me and by repeating the process of rapidly shutting and opening my eyes and otherwise shaking off

drowsiness I could succeed very shortly in beholding the person or thing in its natural form.

Turning now to Warren Syminton, with anger and wonder as unpremeditated as it was amazing, the eyes through which I looked beheld, standing beside him and glaring vengefully at me, a man dressed as of thirty years ago. He was evidently short in stature, but powerfully set. Without being fat he was enormous. His very arms and neck suggested strength and driving force. Across his vest stretched a heavy watch-chain which he fingered with threatening monotony. The wide bulging face had the lower jaw of a bull-dog, and piercing eyes; a great shock of iron grey hair pompadoured far above his forehead. The apparition was so vivid that I tried repeatedly before I shook it off. Effort after effort to awake, so to speak, from the unwelcome dream failed to remove the hostile presence. Eventually Warren Syminton, aged twenty-seven, sat alone where he had been. But now, at once, I noticed the strong resemblance to the man who had so strangely accompanied him.

"The missing person," he was reading from the paper, "was last seen by one Alverton Geddings who visited the premises in the course of his duties." Syminton was silent and thoughtful a while.

"The name is one I am interested in, although I must admit I've never heard it since I was a lad. My father told me of a Miss Geddings to whom he was once married. A peculiar man, my father.

Never seemed to have thought of marriage until life was almost over. I think he must have been fifty, and the woman wasn't much younger."

"What was there so peculiar about it?" I heard my own voice in its unreal tone, for a multitude of alien clamourings assailed me, and my ordinary consciousness was struggling to prevent loss of control.

"Well, I fancy my father married her from a perhaps unworthy motive. In fact he admitted as much, and it seemed to be a huge regret with him. It appeared," Syminton drifted on like one narrating events to an impersonal audience and largely for his own satisfaction, "that the pater had an old-time business rival named Charters. Charters was a strong man but reputedly unprincipled. Anyway he did his enemies a good deal of harm. After this rival had retired and Marcus Syminton was taking life easier he chanced to meet this Miss Geddings. Charters' name had at one time been linked with hers and, for some reason I never quite grasped, my father possessed himself of the idea that he would be gaining an advantage over his old enemy by preventing the possibility of the marriage."

"How did it turn out?" I asked.

"No good!" he said briefly. "It wasn't the kind of marriage to be a success. Needless to say the suitor had not declared his motive and in that she was deceived. On her side, too, the old affection for Charters proved too strong for her to outlive.

I suppose that was a just retribution for my father to reap. He said it was and he was a very honourable man at heart. They parted after a few years. My father married again and eventually I came along."

"Who do you think this Alverton Geddings is, some relation?"

"That's what I'm wondering. And I may have the chance to find out."

Syminton took out his note-book and wrote something in it from the newspaper despatch. "The dear old dad told me to look up anybody of the name I ever ran across. He said he would never have anything but respect for his first wife. The reason for separation was probably that he took such means to undo the injury. It would have been just like the old man to have said that she was too good for him."

The speaker still fingered the open note-book, evidently searching for something. At length he found it. "The Meccans are holding their convention this year at Colchester. It is to be in May. Our lodge is looking for delegates. I think perhaps I shall volunteer."

For the next two months I plunged more engrossingly than ever into my vocation. The office of assistant manager had been created for me and at twenty I found myself more or less of a factor and with a good deal of control and profitable opportunity in my hands. I resisted steadily any

further interest in Alverton Geddings or anybody else of that name. Nevertheless the forthcoming convention in Colchester must have remained firmly in sight. However much I aimed to avoid the still small voice, it fell out that I contrived towards the appointed time once more to put myself in the way of Warren Syminton's confidence.

"I've decided to take in the Convention," he told me one evening. "I can't afford the time just now really, but that matter I talked to you about in the winter has been on my mind. My father did not leave very many requests behind."

"I expect to be going west myself," I spoke quite to my own surprise. "I have something to do in Colchester and may run across you there."

It was an impulse of which I had not thought myself capable.

CHAPTER IX

SARAH GEDDINGS

IT was in May, 1898, three days after Warren Syminton's departure, that I travelled west. Ignoring the business men's night express I left in the morning. For some reason my mood suggested it. Ever since my resolve to go, rather my surrender to the non-personal influence, I had experienced a lazy contentment. Perhaps it was merely the unlooked-for smug gratification felt by any selfish person committed to his first unselfish act. Or it may have been the relief and restfulness one feels to be rid of an importunist—in this case the solicitor from within, exhorter or imprecator I knew not which.

I experienced a sober feeling of certainty as to the success of my quest, even if Syminton acted speculatively.

A messenger from another brokerage office chanced to be on the train, setting out on his annual holiday. The lad was, in point of fact, older than I, but his manner of approaching me was just what might be expected from an office boy encountering his elder and superior away from home. For days past I had been bored by the wire gossip of the victory of Manilla Bay so I was in the humour to enjoy the boy's talk.

"I'm just going as far as Lynndale," he told me.

"What's at Lynndale?"

"Well, sir," he blushed, "my girl lives there."

"How did you manage to find one, out there?"

"She has a sister, Mary, substitute operator in Short & Sons Office. I was stuck on Mary for a while but another fellow cut me out. I felt pretty bad about it and I was going to make myself scarce but, just then, this sister Nellie came to visit in St. George and I met her at Mary's boarding-house. Mary phoned that she specially wanted me to meet Nellie. And, Gee whiz! sir, you wouldn't be interested in girls, but the country ones have the city ones beaten to a finish. Nellie writes the swellest letters. She told me to come right up to the house when I get there. Golly! but we'll have the good time. I have her picture here, sir, but I don't suppose you'd — "

While he was talking I found myself actually loving the boy. Then came the reaction. Why hadn't I ever thought of having a girl? Why should this young blood take me for a graybeard and choose me as father confessor? Did I look fifty! Then I remembered; I was fifty—fifty-two in fact. A few years ago I was fifty-five and sixty. I was being cheated of youth, that was certain. What then was I coming to?

Although some unconscious fairness of mind had prevented my planning anything in the nature of stealing a march on Warren Syminton I avoided,

in Colchester, the hotel where he was most likely to be.

The city directory listed Alverton Geddings as a meter inspector, living at 243 Counsellor Street. Dismissing my cab in the vicinity, I stood watching the bony horse lumber away over the cobbles. Then I turned into Counsellor Street which, in its treeless gardenless dust, resembled a brickyard, its monotonous drab walls rising from the sidewalks. Surely it could not be the home of anybody who could live elsewhere. There was one enormously long block with doorways in sets of fours, the apartments being up and down stairs and to left and right of these doorways. To my eye, number 243 was exactly like 233 or 253 save that it was the number in my memory. But even as I approached this door there was a quickening and swelling of my heart hitherto unknown to me. It recurred when I walked back past the spot and each of several times afterwards. I refused to enter while under so peculiar an influence.

The following day and the one after that I drove to Counsellor Street, but did not bring myself to seek admittance to number 243. On the exchange I was known for the amount of activity I could crowd into an hour. Wasted moments were an irritation; everything must move forward in the least possible time. Yet here in Colchester I waited quite contentedly from one day to the next to perform the simple act of pulling a door-bell.

I quite expected, for some reason, to encounter Syminton, but he had not appeared. Then, one afternoon I rang the bell. Nobody answered so I came again in the evening. An old man, probably over sixty-five, stumped heavily down the stairs, opened the door to me and invited me up into a tiny parlour. A centre-table on the threadbare carpet was covered by a heavy cloth somewhat resembling tapestry and which trailed almost to the floor.

The man was of course Alverton Geddings, the younger brother of Sarah, the mention of whose existence had drawn me by an invisible thread to Colchester.

"Mr. Sanford," I began, "Benjamin Sanford, once mentioned your name to me, Mr. Geddings."

"Sanford? Sanford?" His pale eyes wandered aloft. "Benjamin, eh! Tell me, what Benjamin Sanford?"

"I mean the boyhood friend of Hendrick Charters, who—"

"Dearie me! Dearie me! Of course! Sarah would have known. She'd have known." He held his thin fingerpoints together as he sat, shortly settling into a mental state in which everything about him seemed to be forgotten. Then suddenly something elastic in his old-moving thoughts seemed to snap, to alarm him. "Hendrick Charters you say. Did you say Charters?"

"Yes, your sister's— "

"Oh-h! Good heavens, sir, where did you say you were from? How came you to me? You

knew Mr. Charters! Ah! That man!" turning on me anew with a weak impetuosity. "Surely, my dear sir, you are a voice from the dead. It was all so long ago, so very long ago; and surely you are not an old man."

"I was born," I told him, "in Bloomfield, where Hendrick Charters died. I learned of him there. Later, in St. George, as I was telling you, I met Mr Sanford."

"Ah, yes, of course! That's it. I thought of Benjamin after she died. He was a link with Mr. Charters—a link which, God knows, I had no wish to strengthen. And I wrote Hendrick. I have never understood what it was made me do it. I think it was the baby's eyes—the eyes of my dear sister looking at me from the baby face, as they always will look. It was Sarah herself compelling me through her little godchild. At the last she had spoken with such strange emphasis the wish that Mr. Charters might know."

The old man sank back exhausted.

"Mr. Sanford had a great interest in the welfare of your child—your little daughter. Is she— "

Alverton Geddings seemed slow to understand me. "But Mr. Sanford, Benjamin," he asked, "is he still living?"

For the first time in the life of Arthur Burden, conscience manifested itself. Mr. Sanford had died some years ago. I had noticed it in the press. The event had been of so little moment to me sentimentally

that it was now necessary to remind myself of it. It had not occurred to me to attend the funeral, as there was then nothing to be gained. Like the other people of my world, Benjamin Sanford had served his purpose. I had never seen him except that one night. No sense of gratitude or love for him had been in my mind: my mind did not know gratitude or love. Had one of my own brothers died the event would have been one of only formal moment. Life to me was not a matter of loving, or even living, but doing. This moment was the first glimpse of the monstrousness of it.

"Mr. Sanford is dead, sir, but I have felt something of his interest in your little daughter."

"My little girl, is it! My little girl. Well, she isn't exactly that now. Sarah was always too wonderful to be just a little girl. She was forty, you see, when I was a lad of fifteen reaching out towards life. So, to me, she is more than herself. She's her godmother as well. Of course you've never known Sarah."

"Which Sarah? Your daughter, or your sister? I want to be quite clear."

"Yes, I forget. Of course you wouldn't know. They're both Sarah. I just say Sarah because—well I can't expect you to understand but—they're both Sarah. They both *are*, don't you see?"

"But the child's real mother, Mr. Geddings?"

"Of course, of course! You'll wonder where my mind is. But an old man is prone to overlook

short memories, and dwell on the long ones. Ann and I married late. We were both over forty when Sarah came. I mourned her, worthy woman; but then, in another year, I had to mourn anew, and my sister's death it was that made the baby everything to me. It was all so natural—that the aunt should have taken the mother's place, and then little Sarah hers."

"Is she here?"

"With me, you mean. Where else should she be?" He smiled long and happily. "She's a wonderful woman—more wonderful year by year. Mr. Connor says he couldn't possibly do without her in the gallery."

"In the gallery?" I repeated.

"Yes, she was a rifle girl at Mr. Connor's Odeon Pavilion. Now she's the manageress there."

"She works in a — ! I'm sure Sarah's very capable."

"Mr. Connor says she's the most capable woman in the city. Sees to everything; seems to have the faculty of attracting just the patrons he wants and getting rid of those he doesn't. All the girls in the Pavilion are good girls since Sarah's been there. It's the tone, Mr. Connor says, it's the tone she gives the place."

"She is employed evenings I suppose?"

"Only three. I have her here all the others." He turned to look around the room, nervously fumbled with his watch trying to read it in the deep

gloaming that was upon us and put it back without succeeding. "Of course you'd like to see her. But—" He made another of his movements of alarmed recollection. "How strange it is, Mr. — Mr. Burden. You come to-night from Hendrick Charters, while just now, within the week, the son of Marcus Symington came here. He talked with me and then went to the Pavilion for Sarah. They came home together. Young Mr. Symington, she tells me, called for her the next day and they went to dinner. She promised him to go again this evening. Sarah never walked out with a young man before. Of course it sets me wondering. She'll never leave me, I know."

The thought went clanging, jangling through my brain. It was as though some ancient bell, its ponderous weight at length crumbling its dry-rotted beam, came crashing through the flimsy galleries of the belfry. "What is it to me," I tried to still my thoughts, "with whom little Sarah Geddings might 'walk out'!" Certainly I have never wished to walk out with her. Of course not! With even the momentary acknowledgment of the thought the hot vengeful clamouring filled my head again. Presumably it was jealousy, but I did not know it then.

"I shall come another evening," I offered, resolving not to come again. "I shan't wait now."

In a minute or two we were down the narrow stairs, and standing before the shabby doors in the brick street. Iron gas lamps were still used in the

old part of the city. Under the first of these the old man and I were saying good night when indistinct voices came to us. Figures appeared forty yards away under the next light.

"Ah! Here she comes now. I knew she couldn't be much longer."

On the instant I realized that again my thoughts were slipping beyond my control. The effort to remain myself was a mental wrench.

While the father was greeting his daughter—and doubtless whispering words of explanation—I turned to Syminton deceitfully.

"Hello! I've been in Colchester three days without running across you. Thought I might get trace of you by—"

"Here we are, Mr. Burden. This is my Sarah."

Everything in Counsellor Street was suddenly gone. Gone also were care, memory and, I suppose, consciousness. It was still night, but such night as surely only the angels know. My telling of it now is not the accumulated imagination of years, but something which verily was. Time, sound, space itself no longer existed. I was standing on a cloud, on a vast plain, limitless, intangible, seemingly transparent, for all about me, above and below me, were stars. The very memory of worlds was no more. It might all have been merely a vision, the flash of nothingness following a death blow, or the lapse of delirium—save for the hand in my clasp. A hand at once fragile as air, firm as a rock. A

hand and a woman's face. I recognized it. The face of the daguerreotype, yes, but something aeons older than that. The features did not stir. In them was no passion, nor doubt, nor age. A picture? The reflection of something previously seen? A picture it might have been but for the living eyes. Eyes which, by turns, saddened, smiled, endured, exulted; eyes which spoke and listened, at once and always. And, strangest of all, in them I seemed to see my own, speaking, answering, and knowing all they knew. Of the affairs of human life in that minute I knew nothing at all, except that this was what preceded and survived life. It was eternity.

"Come, Burden! Get a move on!" These words, and the arm which had seized mine none too gently caused a rapid melting of it all, not unlike the fade-out in the modern moving-picture. "Miss Geddings will know you again when she sees you."

Then Syminton and I were walking, with never a look behind, across the uneven flagstones towards the street corner. For a few minutes I was unmistakably conscious of my face resuming its natural shape, as a wax face might undergo a metamorphosis in a heightened temperature. While one personality was responding to my companion's remarks the other was endeavouring to record on my mind Sarah Geddings' features, before the brief impression should be obliterated. All on which I had to go was the glimpse in the gaslight, the short moment

as I dropped her hand and turned away. The face, while arresting, was not beautiful. There was dignity, intelligence, almost piety, but not animation; wisdom but not light of youth. With great clearness her eyes had survived the dream as though to prevent its perishing.

Of words between us there had been none.

CHAPTER X

CONSCIENCE

THE moment I had control of my own thought I perceived that Symintón was in a state of concealed agitation and I was prompted to ascertain the full and exact cause.

Thought-reading, as I have stated, has never seemed a sufficiently reliable method of gaining my ends. Rather have I depended on the instinctive ability merely to will that the person before me shall divulge his state of mind, should anything in his attitude or my knowledge seem to render it worth while. This faculty had doubtless developed with practice although I never consciously needed to practise it. To the gift I had added, during the preceding months, the art of stopping the narrator at the proper moment. On many occasions a business opponent, pitting his wits against mine, and discovering himself incredibly disclosing his hand, would catch himself up, then deftly turn the discussion and finally withdraw, in the fond delusion that his swift recollection of danger had saved him just in time. As a matter of fact it was the same will-power which started him talking that also stopped him the instant he had betrayed himself. To have allowed the betrayal to become apparent to my

victim would shortly have marked me as a sort of business leper.

"Sarah, you know," Syminton now responded nervously to my unspoken command, "deserves a better position in life than the old man can give her. And—well, as a matter of fact, Burden—Indeed I've—"

"Yes, I understand. It's one of those cases a fellow would like to take a personal interest in, if there weren't always so many things pressing. Ah! There's a cab-stand at last. You go cross-town from here, don't you. Good night! Give me a call—for lunch or when you're free."

As I stepped into my own vehicle and saw him drive off, a look of confident relief on his face, I smiled cruelly to myself. "Very well. Let him think whatever he likes. As a rival he doesn't exist anyway. To-morrow I shall crush him."

With mind unguarded, such inward promptings had always left me prey to selfishness. Then, in the silence of my room, I realized that these words were not my own. They were the words of the being who had overawed my life and who, unless resisted, would dominate it to the end.

The thought lent me courage, courage of unselfishness so new that my whole outlook was altered for the time being. I saw the personality of Hendrick Charters as something to be reasoned with, and against which to assert the independence of Arthur Burden. And forthwith there ensued an

argument, a battle of reasons stranger than anything I know of in life (and yet men, every day, battle for the mastery with their better natures—or weaker natures):

"This boy Warren Syminton, what harm has he ever done me that I should wish to snatch this hope from his hand? He loves the girl, and he spoke first. What have I to offer in myself, I who have never loved anything in my life?"

"But what of the compelling attraction which brought you to Colchester?"

"It is probably an echo of my weird morbid childhood."

"And the vision, the totally unaccounted-for elevation of your spirit?"

"Other men doubtless feel such things. To my nature it was a novelty which awed and mystified. It was a form of the universal sex call which a befuddled old fool of a world still calls romance. I knew a youth at college. . . . This eighteen-year-old amoroso told me of a mountain, moonlight, his Marguerite; god and goddess, forgotten world, kisses, eternal love. A year later he had forgotten her name."

"If Arthur Burden is indeed Hendrick Charters, then he has the right to interest himself in the niece of Sarah Geddings."

"The son of Marcus Syminton has more right. Syminton at least married the woman he promised to marry."

"This impulse, so new and foreign to you, this voice of sympathetic weakness, is befogging the issue. Secretly and apart from it you feel that there is a purpose in standing your ground. You know it. The purpose comes to you, clearly, persistently, like a bell through the fog."

I had no force to resist further: my logic was beaten down. But I had at last stood up before the fire of the enemy, and would do so again. I sought a strong refuge in sleep and in due course was aboard the morning train for St. George, immersed soul and mind in the financial pages of the New York papers, and deciding how I would make up for five days of meaningless absence.

CHAPTER XI

EUNICE FOX

NOT for weeks afterwards—not during the whole month of June—did I give five minutes thought to my Colchester lapse. For one thing the purport of that adventure was wholly foreign to my groove of thought. To dwell on the name of Sarah Geddings, the younger, was to suggest a speculative future, and I felt no excitement whatever as to the coming years. Another's past was my future, and the more remote years of that past (Hendrick Charters' life prior to 1857) was all I seemed to be waiting for. The life of Arthur Burden had no individual interest for me. Sometimes I felt like a bystander, bored at being obliged to watch its progress.

It almost goes without saying that the world bored me. While the United States was going wild with joy over the victory of San Juan Hill it all struck me as merely childish. Such things were doubtless all fore-doomed, as were my own acts. The hopeless muddle between past and future in my life suggested that time in reality had no existence, any more than a foot of space exists. The past was merely a term to indicate things certain, while the future referred to things uncertain. Even in this, people became confused; the one great

uncertainty, humanity's ever-present doubt referred to "another life". What is beyond death? While surely the question, "What is before birth?" is just as maddeningly unanswerable. From brooding on these vital questions the people are saved by the gaunt necessity to gain a livelihood, and to fight against life's obstacles and difficulties.

In my case there were no difficulties, present or prospective. A living came without effort. I had nobody to fear and, as I harboured love for nobody, there was no possibility of unattained hopes. Verily, to me the coming years were as colourless as to a lifer in the penitentiary.

One evening in July I was dining with Syminton. His recent absence from the club and from the exchange must have been suggestive to my mind. Closing my understanding to his ordinary drift of conversation, I placed myself determinedly in that receptive attitude so sure to bring results.

"I've been to Colchester again, Burden!" There was a blush of confusion on his face but he continued. "That Miss Geddings is a wonderful girl."

"Have you proposed to her?" I was saying in reply.

"Not yet, but only because she did not seem prepared for it. I'm going again in a week or so." Quite evidently he had heard nothing of my discussion with her father.

We were soon speaking of other things and so completely did Arthur Burden banish the subject

from mind that when Syminton disappeared again from my field of daily vision, I would not, without reflection, have guessed the reason. Brokers were out of town a good deal during the summer months. Visitors to my office were noticeably less. Presumably Syminton was away a good deal in common with the others. Once or twice I remembered that he had omitted to announce the capture of his quarry.

With autumn everything settled down to the usual routine of stock broking. New issues, flurries and minor excitements engaged attention and added steadily to my bank balances and holdings. One afternoon, late in November, when the exchanges had closed for the day, we received a memorandum from Syminton's firm which disagreed with the record of a telephone selling order sent us earlier in the day. When the discrepancy was shown to me I asked the telephone girl, Miss Fox, to ring Mr. Syminton for me. She reported back that Mr. Syminton had left immediately after three for the uptown gymnasium. After a few minutes he called me from that place and promised to meet me later and arrange an adjustment of the error. We agreed on a quarter to seven, at my office, so that we could then go on together to dinner at the club.

After visiting several stores for small purchases, I occupied the remaining time in a long walk. The sharp chill air gave me a feeling of tingling exhilaration. With a few minutes to spare I came down the

narrow street and turned my key in the street door leading to the outer office. Pausing to feel for the light-switch, I caught sight of a faint illumination on the ground glass, indicating the presence of some person still in my room which was in reality a part of the customers' room. Walking quietly across to the doorway I saw a single light burning over the telephone switch-board just to the left of the blackboard, and beneath it the figure of a young woman, arms crossed before her on the table and supporting her head bowed upon them. She was, I concluded, either asleep or weeping.

"Is that you, Miss Fox?" I spoke softly for apparently she had not heard my entrance.

"Oh-h! Mr. Burden!" The feminine alarm in the words moved me. The head was thrown back abruptly and the expression on her face was quite different from anything my casual glances had ever before discovered in the features of Eunice Fox. "I didn't know that *you* ever came back at night."

For the girl's confusion I felt pity. It was a pity of politeness that seemingly my presence gave her pain. She was not crying, although about the eyes was a dramatic expression which might be said to suggest the shedding of dry tears. To remain where I had halted, in the dark shadows, might have inferred a suspicion as to her presence, so I advanced to where she sat in the small circle of light. Before I could speak again she had for some reason averted her eyes shyly.

"What in the world keeps you here so late, Miss Fox? What have you been doing?"

Any answer to my question would have sufficed, for my speech was intended simply as the obvious question. However, she bowed in silence for some time, so long that my enquiry was given significance. Then, to my amazement, she turned quickly to me and seized my hand impetuously in both of hers. "I've been— I—was thinking about you, Mr. Burden. You mustn't blame me, sir. Of course you can't understand. You— "

Far from wishing any confession of her thoughts I strove vigorously to prevent it. But after a few seconds I discovered myself striving rather to control only myself. From her hot trembling hands there passed through my body a sort of magnetic thrill. It was the thrill of sex. My worldly wisdom recognized it, though the feeling was one entirely new and strange. This person I looked down on, this throbbing body, the arms and shoulders insufficiently clad in flimsy white material which I could see sagging at the throat to reveal her moving bosom—it was, all at once, not another fellow being, not Miss Eunice Fox my employee. It was not merely a woman. It was female. To me the word woman had been simply a term, like ledger or margin-clerk. But, on the moment, I knew that it meant something more.

Ordinary man will remember his first sex thrill. It is something on which he has pondered in advance,

for which he is more or less prepared, probably an occasion of his own contriving. To me it came like an unexpected flash of light to a blind man. I knew no more what to do with it than would the blind man.

Awkwardly, stiffly, my free hand descended on her soft arm, my fingers slowly tightening and kneading in the yielding flesh. Thus we remained for possibly a full minute. Miss Fox had not again lifted her head although, presently, I was conscious of her light weight closer to me.

Exerting an effort similar to that which I had found necessary to separate apparitions from real bodies, I turned away, forced her hands from mine none too gently, crossed to turn on the light over my own desk, fumbled perfunctorily amongst the papers and shortly had gained the street door again.

"Good night, Miss Fox."

At my last look her head was buried in her arms just as I had discovered her.

Syminton met me at the door of the club. "Sorry, old man. I apologize no end. Never thought of it again since I phoned. I'll get around a few minutes earlier to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" I found myself echoing him later that night. An odd command had just been given me, "Guard thy to-morrows!" I had no theory as to the origin of the intuition, but in any event, as I have said, waking visions meant little to me.

"Yes, yes," I assured myself. "That's the secret of my strange feeling. To-morrow!"

It seemed that I was actually looking forward to something.

CHAPTER XII

FEVER

"WHAT," I asked myself over and over during the wakeful night, "What exactly is this disturbance which causes me to await to-morrow's dawn?"

"Woman!" was the answer. To Arthur Burden there was no reasonable doubt about it, my sudden taste for the future had to do with the personality —no, only the person—of Eunice Fox. It was not hope, for hope must have its object, and my heart was not set on anything. It was not ambition or a sudden desire for better things: some uncharted intuition told me that I was more likely to act unworthily. Neither did it suggest any turning point in my life; the glamour, though strong, extended no distance at all. My business acumen revealed this. Was it then whim or caprice? Or could it be that I was to become acquainted with that most-vaunted, illogical and fathomless vanity, love?

Miss Fox sat at her switch-board, presumably as usual, at eight-thirty. What she was yesterday had meant nothing to me, but to-day she was the cause of my attention being divided. Her slender fingers moved with such delicate swiftness that it was sometimes difficult for the eye to follow. Her complexion of transparent paleness was very striking

in combination with the long black lashes and brows almost jewel-like in sharpness of outline. A great pile of jetty hair, which commenced low on her forehead, was parted into twin folds of smooth wavy sheen of almost grotesque extent. The eyes were copper or even lighter and seemed to be perpetually laughing in a sort of humorous conspiracy with sensitive lips which, in their lightninglike changes of expression, seemed to proclaim every slightest shade of the owner's thought.

I noticed this morning (and it occurred to me that the practice had been general) that the various brokers entering the office leaned over her desk rather longer than was necessary to make a formal enquiry. While I was cogitating on this one of the younger floor men, a fat jolly fellow named O'Brien, walked in. Miss Fox was just leaving for lunch. He passed her with an elaborate bow of greeting, then came to loll good-humouredly across my roll-top desk.

"What an alluring little thing she is," he grinned. "Do you know what I always wonder when I'm looking at her?"

"What?"

"If those snappy mocking eyes ever look at one thing as long as five seconds, or if that inviting mouth could possibly stay put long enough to be kissed."

Nothing I could ever remember O'Brien saying before had interested me, but now I sat back defiantly

to extract the thought back of his humour. After a half minute's silence that had begun to be embarrassing, he pushed his hat back, scratched his hair, and finally talked, as though a confession would be a relief. "I know a few of the men who would appreciate her more than you seem to, Burden."

"Why don't you take her, then?"

"Well—" uncomfortably, as though he had been found out already. "Once or twice I did drop her a good hint, but she pretends—"

"Thanks for your opinion. I've recommended her for fifteen per cent. Christmas bonus. I'll change it to twenty-five."

Except during the usual busy moments of closing time that afternoon, I did not happen to meet Miss Fox's eyes directly, and during the days that followed I did not permit anything out of the ordinary to pass between us. Frequently, as she came to lay a memorandum on my desk, or as I might chance to stop by her on my way in or out, her hand trembled or she stole furtive glances in my direction. It was just sufficient to keep the matter from slipping my mind. Had I been, in fact, twenty-one, instead of fifty-one, things might have gone differently, but in addition to my matured caution and any lack of exhilaration at my discovery, I experienced an unacknowledged sense of distaste for my position. Although I philosophically regarded sex attraction as something natural and not

shameful, I quite failed to conquer the conviction that this particular sex attraction was somehow at the expense of a worthier sentiment.

It is probable that the affair might gradually have disappeared from my mind, or that I would have had Miss Fox transferred to another office. But an incident in another quarter was to have a bearing on it.

A week in advance of Christmas I decided, one evening, that it was time to go uptown and visit my parents. Thoughts of home and kindred seldom came to me, but the season's activities on all sides had reminded me of them. I found the family together but their reception of me was as for a quite forgotten member. While I had remained part of the daily circle I had been merely a mystery. Now, listened to and spoken to politely, I was a stranger, in no degree a part of the family plans or confidences. Knowing full well my desserts in this, it nevertheless served to leave me rather painfully conscious of my isolation, so far as human sympathy went.

During the next few days the city was full of Christmas preparations. Even the busy men about me neglected routine to discuss excitedly gifts and parties or forthcoming visits to be made or received. All talk was of parents, children, wives or sweethearts. Whose fault was it that I, the trusted agent of most important business throughout the year,

should not be side-stepped like a bloodless mechanism? Of the hundreds I met and worked for not one would remember me. Not one?

Just after three o'clock on Christmas Eve, and in the midst of the confusion and rush to wind up business, the impulse to join in the merriment seized me. Before I quite realized it I had given the office boy a note to hand Miss Fox. In the course of an ordinary hour, the boy might be called upon to handle many such, so that it aroused no interest in him.

Then I turned to watch the girl's face as she read, "May I take you with me out to Luckhart's Tavern at Back River for dinner this evening?" Without an instant's hesitation she jotted something on the reverse of the sheet and the office boy was on his way back. "Thank you. Where shall we meet?" ran her acceptance.

At the casting of the die my spirits ran to a height which pleased me, if it was only at the realization that such a thing was possible.

Later in the day my cab stopped at the door of Miss Fox's boarding place. In the matter of how to appear or what to say under the circumstances I was quite a child, for certainly I had never undertaken anything so trivial and undignified in my life. But the girl herself seemed possessed of confident familiarity with all occasions and in due course we sat together under the buffalo robes and were gliding over the sparkling snowy streets towards the

new interurban electric railway station. My companion's remarks were just sufficiently frequent to relieve me of embarrassment. My own words were shy and formal, although my hands were tremulously holding the robes in an intensification of the feeling I had experienced that night when we were first alone in my office. The sleigh-bells of other vehicles we met tinkled merrily, and through lighted windows of homes and shops could be caught glimpses of the Yuletide festivities.

The long interurban tramcar was filled with gay parcel-laden humanity. Men who had been travelling to and from town together all year greeted one another for the first time. There were a few children, but in the atmosphere of community companionship it was hard to say to whom they belonged. The spirit of the season was contagious and universal. It was all keen anticipation certain of fulfilment. I too breathed intensely in anticipation.

At the terminus only a few of our fellow-passengers remained and from the platform the last of them soon disappeared. It was already full night and save for the white crispy snow beneath our feet the path to Luckhart's was dark. I offered my arm and at once became excitedly conscious of the clasp of small fingers through my coat-sleeve proclaiming intoxicating nearness.

Although partaken of within earshot of a few other guests, supper proved the first mutual facing of our position. Frankly we looked into one

another's eyes; there seemed complete understanding. Had I been told to state the understanding it would have been impossible, but nevertheless it was there—of the spirit or of the flesh. Many a man and woman are satisfied with less. In the fullness and courage of her gaze Eunice seemed more beautiful if no less female. What her thoughts might be I did not wish to know, any more that I tried to analyze my own. She was thinking of me and I of her, that was enough.

Directly we had left the dining-room the proprietor came after us into the little parlour of the inn to ask, "Perhaps you would like to drive along the river road? I have a very nice cutter." Seeing me hesitate while my eyebrows must have lifted, he added encouragingly, "I could give you a very quiet horse. No danger whatever." Miss Fox and I exchanged a glance, I nodded to the man and in a quarter of an hour was holding the reins of a sedate old horse while we moved slowly under the bare branches of elms and maples along the shore of the frozen river. The silently winding deserted road and the gently jangling string of bells seemed to be leading us to a happy nowhere.

Neither of us spoke for some time. For my part I now felt content in silence. Under the intensity and novelty of my feelings my eyes presently closed while the animal trotted along his own way.

"Isn't it lovely to be here like this!" presently I heard the eager whisper beside me.

"I think it is," I said. "Of course I—well, I don't know what to say I'm sure, Miss Fox."

"Well, suppose we stop a minute," she coaxed, and as the bells became silent except for the one last tremor of sound as the horse stretched his neck forward, she added with childish humour, "and let us listen to the stars."

I smiled indulgently at this, looked obediently upwards amongst the fiery points of light and answered, "I can't hear them—for the beating of my heart."

Then, by some process I have never been able to recall, we were in each other's arms. Mine trembled violently as I held her tightly the first few seconds, until, opening my eyes, I discovered an inch or two away her dancing ones now so willing to look steadily at me forever and that pretty mouth of which O'Brien had spoken. The lips were very still as I brought mine down to them and pressed. I felt then as though joy would never end. Eunice's fur coat had come unclasped, the little gloved hand crept further around my neck, so that, holding her up to me again, I experienced for the first time the warm reality of a soft throbbing bosom against my own.

When we returned to Luckhart's Tavern so that I might pay the bill (I on my part aglow in the contentment of a day well concluded) the proprietor approached us with a liberty I had not invited, to offer with fawning significance,

"We have a very comfortable private parlour up-stairs—nice room and furniture—if you would care to— "

I had turned abruptly towards Miss Fox by way of giving her the opportunity verbally to resent this uncalled-for attention. Instead she answered calmly.

"That would be very nice. I should like a rest before walking to the car."

Dumb with surprise, but recognizing a quickened action at my heart, I found myself following her in the direction the proprietor led us.

Suddenly I felt what I might call a jump of conscience and in that inspired moment there came over me with the distinctness of a tolling bell the amazing conviction that another and disapproving eye had flashed across this drama which was not genuine. Joy it was. Yes, wild uncontrolled animal joy, but not happiness.

CHAPTER XIII

DELUSION

THE day after Christmas I sent Miss Fox an expensive brooch. She understood that the gift had perhaps better not be identified with me.

Although, between us, the ice was broken with a vengeance, I experienced little difficulty in separating her from the position she occupied. With regard to her I saw the future not differently than with regard to other things. A man looks forward to his dinner to-night or possibly next Sunday, but scarcely farther.

I knew Miss Fox's charms were mine for the taking: the element of eventualities was not considered. Control of my judgments was another of my birthrights, the birthrights possessed at the expense of so many other faculties which might have made life human. When, long ago, had come the resignation that my future was well settled, I had concluded that its probable unpleasantness invited no anticipation. Anything having a direct reference to Hendrick Charters alone excited my speculation and references bearing on his life were exceedingly rare. No matter how well known a name might be in a city like St. George, the brief span of thirty years was apparently sufficient to obliterate it.

Mr. Charters had left behind no family name or monument of worth-while achievement. In leaving himself to me, a resentful legatee, it was his punishment indeed that the set of his soul was to be opposed. While his later and weaker resolutions for good fell impotent on my rising strength, his remoter and stronger background of selfishness found fertile soil, so that instead of his battle being won it was merely joined, against odds well-nigh overwhelming. Not only was his surviving personality itself of two minds but the well-doing Charters' only vehicle for achievement was the organism of Arthur Burden who, like any man devoid of hope, seized upon and abetted only the baneful in that old-life record. Thus was Charters' traditional hatred of the family of Syminton an unquenched flame ready at any moment to fire the reckless brain of Burden.

The winter was a long series of meetings with Eunice, usually at her boarding place, which presently she had changed for a much more pretentious district. I well remember, at the latter place, the deep short chesterfield which she dubbed "The Affection Nest". Long hours I spent there in full possession of the alert and mocking eyes and the always meaningful lips to which O'Brien had so unsuspiciously drawn attention. On one of his later visits this man had hinted to me confidentially that the affair of Eunice Fox had been noticed by some of the brokers. I think he expected me to

reward his information, although he should have known by this time that, whereas I received and demanded confidences, I gave none in return.

Frequently it would happen that I had dined and settled for the evening before thinking of Miss Fox. One particular night, after expressing her gladness at my unexpected arrival, she explained that some other people were occupying the small sitting-room. I suggested a theatre and, as it was not our fashionable house nor any major attraction, ventured to get seats in a box. It so happened that we occupied it alone, and the following day more than one of the brokers spoke to me about it with knowing smile. Although I tried to be short with these visitors one man pursued the subject long enough to remark, "One thing, Burden; she was the finest-looking and best-dressed woman in the house."

The incident brought to my mind that Miss Fox had of late been displaying a wardrobe which must be rather expensive Of course I knew her salary and had in fact already wondered that it permitted such desirable surroundings as her new residence seemed to afford. It was not altogether agreeable to me that one caller at my desk should have simperingly remarked on my close acquaintance with her and then hinted that Miss Fox was newly in the class of women of fashion. My conscience forbade my quarrelling with this man, although it seemed odd that the affair should have become public property. Other than the theatre

incident, I had been careful to avoid appearing anywhere with the young lady, but in some unaccountable way the Luckhart's Tavern visit had become known and this particular resort, I was annoyed to learn, had not the reputation of being a "nice" place.

When, one evening in March, Eunice boasted to me that a young dentist she had lately met had proposed to her, it did not occur to me to show resentment. Again, probably a fortnight later, it came out in conversation that a certain youth in the hardware business, named Oreland something, had been in love with her since she was a little girl, and again I evidenced nothing but formal pleasure. On leaving her that night I laughingly discussed these men in turn, making a play of helping her decide between them.

"Don't!" And, frowning suddenly, she whispered, "Im going to tell you a secret."

"No, no!" I urged. "I'm not worth it."

"Yes, I must! Listen!" As at the moment her bare arms were tightly about my neck I was perforce obliged to listen. "I like you better than either of them!"

The sidewalks that night were, I remember, sloppy in the spring thaws, but as I walked home the only thing in my mind was this new complexion of affairs. True, I had made her no promises. It had not occurred to me that she heeded the future any more than I did. That I gave her no confidence

should have been her cue to place no trust in me. What, notwithstanding all this, she might have been thinking all these months had not been my concern. She was, I had concluded, the kind of girl quite clever enough to play her cards safely.

But my business principles (selfish and hard as they probably were) stood the test of formal and legal honesty. I must assuredly now do Miss Fox justice. Whatever my lack of intention, the fact apparently was that she had come to entertain expectations: admittedly not altogether without cause. How, after all, was she to know that I was a man over fifty, having as his background only the less impetuous and romantic ages of sixty and seventy. The undeniable fact, too, was that there was nothing legally or sentimentally to prevent my marrying Eunice Fox. Up until to-night I had never felt curiosity as to her thoughts. She must now let me know them explicitly, so that I should decide exactly what were her claims on me.

By the following morning I admitted to myself that she was entitled to an offer.

CHAPTER XIV

INTRIGUE

HAVING worked myself to the decision, I must needs have the matter settled. As a day or two had been my range of expectancy with regard to Eunice it seemed unnecessary, even with so important a matter, to increase that limit. A note from my desk to her seat informed her that I would call the evening of the following day. The touch of formality might, I trusted, be of warning significance.

During the free evening I set myself to turn the whole affair over mentally. To think of Eunice except when I saw her was a new experience, and with it now came new reflections. The girl herself had never been considered by me as a thinking entity. She was a living body, an allurement. And yet, as it seemed at last, she did think. I myself had expended no thought on her, only feeling. To me she had meant diversion, delight, a respite from my bedevilled existence. Perhaps I had better begin to reflect. At fifty a man's love-making has generally grown to be foolish. Life will not permit him to voice with innocence the lavish and extravagant affection of eighteen and twenty. Attempting to do so, he passes as ridiculous or untruthful. It recurred to me this evening that, twelve or

fourteen years after I had been born, when obliged to attend children's parties or gatherings of school graduates, I had engaged in one or two silly passages with some girl or woman. It was in fact one of the very few actions performed without restraint which failed to attract attention as something unbecoming to my years. My later knowledge of human affairs makes this clear. The flirtatious efforts of a boy of twelve are in fact so similar to those of a man of sixty that, disguise the appearance of the one and the other, and the passer-by would be puzzled to know which is which.

What, then, of this love-making, at fifty-one? The old fool does not, of course, realize that he is an old fool. I had caught glimpses of feminine eighteen being, not wooed, but urged by fifty, and the spectacle was always—I winced to admit it—ridiculous.

Also, on reflection, it came to me as remarkable that such beauty as Eunice's should have been surrendered to me so cheaply. My deliberate manner of movement, together with the somewhat heavy VanDyke I had cultivated on entering business gave to me a mature appearance, and certainly not one calculated to attract admired young beauties. My mental age called for concealment of any animation I might feel, I had no enthusiasm for the pursuits of youth, and the tiny wrinkles still discernible around my eyes and mouth fitted me for old bachelorhood rather than a lady's man.

Although these deliberations puzzled me they did not suggest any misgiving as to the outcome of the approaching interview.

The "affection nest" had been prepared as usual and I occupied it long enough to study carefully my companion from a new viewpoint. It is not clear as to how it came about, but the unexpected mention of a familiar name plunged me not only into my quest but, as it were, right through it.

I had been looking in another direction, mentally framing words I was about to use. Eunice was speaking, though my attention had not for some time been actually on her voice. But, on a sudden, I perceived that she had stopped abruptly ". . . . Warren Syminton." Had I really heard the words? Yes, and in fact it was precisely at their utterance her speech had ceased. Shifting my look quickly in her direction I caught the girl frowningly biting her lower lip, in her eyes a decided feminine fear.

Deliberately I rose, fetched and placed a chair to face her at close range, and willed that she give me her thought. While she stared at me, which she did for some time, in a futile struggle to withhold confession, I fell to thinking that this strange faculty of mine had perhaps little of mystery in it. A strong-willed man is in reality nothing more than one perfectly confident in his own ability. My relatively advanced years had given me such a preponderance of the knowledge which is power that my interviewer must nearly always have instinctively felt it. Then,

to find himself or herself suddenly and compellingly confronted by that power in portentous expectation, reduced quickly to a threatening attitude of attention, and being already unnerved by some slip of speech or action— Why! the victim of my design was made to feel as though already betrayed. To remain silent would be an admission of guilt. He must talk, if only to relieve the tension. So he talked. The rest was merely a variation of the trained detective faculty of extracting as full a confession as I deemed necessary.

"We—" the first word came with a difficult swallowing. Then, for a few seconds, her face lighted, she smiled ingratiatingly. It was a final rally, a momentary resolve to escape, or to change the subject before the unrecallable words were spoken. But my stare was inexorable. The smile vanished and defeat darkened her features as she sighed and looked resignedly at me again. "We owe one another to Mr. Syminton."

Had she announced that we had been bought by Beelzebub, and succeeded in making me believe it, the effect would have been the same. "He wanted you to be—to be interested in me. Six months ago he talked to me about it." This, I perceived, was no ordinary disclosure, to be used for financial or business advantage. I must have the whole story this time, trusting to imagination for nothing.

"What did he say?"

"He said—that I was pretty, that I had the gifts to attract you, and the advantage of being near you. He told me that he thought that if you were interested in some girl it would be good for you."

"And that I was well off, and could give you a home and position?"

Her nod of the head gave assent.

"You have talked with Syminton since?"

Again she resisted a second, but presently spoke. "I do of course see him frequently, in your office, but he told me it would be better if we did not appear to be acquainted. Sometimes he used to telephone, and sometimes," she seemed now to be glad to tell everything, "he sent me a cheque."

"What for?"

"I told him how we were getting on, but that you had said nothing of marriage. He advised me to get a better place to live in—and to entertain you—and to wear better clothes. I have often wondered at Mr. Syminton's interest, but surely it was very kind of him."

It had been only by continual effort that I held myself in check and Miss Fox in subjection. The factors at the back of all this were pregnant with suspicion for me. But I must first dispose of the present situation.

"Then you have never loved me, Eunice." She tried to protest but her troubled look told the

truth. "But you would have married me, because I am making money."

"Did you ever ask me to love you? I might have if— "

"If you had not loved Oreland already."

"O, what right have you!" she burst into crying. "Why must I tell you everything. I have given you at least as much as I have taken."

"But you deceived me. You deceived me that first time we ever spoke together, that night I found you alone in the office; you deceived me again the last time I was here."

"Very well, I did!" With new boldness she faced me. Her confession was at an end and her natural spirit asserted itself. "You got as much as you deserved. You have shown how shabbily and feebly a man can pursue a girl." As she turned to scolding I was affected not at all. My business, so far as she was concerned, was ended. I was now occupied by a much weightier resolve.

"You must not speak to Syminton again of this."

"And why mayn't I, if I wish to?"

"Because, to begin with, it will do you no good. And," I paused to lay proper emphasis, "I will know every word you say to him." She looked up at me to make rebellious reply but in another moment was afraid. "You know me well enough now to be sure that I mean what I say."

As I turned and passed out of the room, she had collapsed face downward in the little chesterfield,

apparently exhausted by defeat and fear. Another man would have gone to her at least with words of regret and farewell. But the malevolent Hendrick Charters, at that moment so fully on the shoulders of Arthur Burden, was not any other man.

Walking down the street in the direction of our club I felt sure that Warren Syminton would not be forewarned.

CHAPTER XV

UNMASKED

IT was not yet late; Syminton would be in. For some reason he had been haunting the club every evening for weeks. Yes, there he was, in one of the card-rooms reading. Nobody else was about.

I sat down and engaged him in conversation, at which he seemed pleased. At that time, and for ten years afterwards, the men of my sphere always were pleased when I volunteered myself. Arthur Burden was looked on as a power, as one whose opinions were worth remembering and whose mind was in advance of his years. Only a few days earlier a man of forty-five had said, "I'm always the gainer when we talk, Burden, and only wish I had something of value to give you in return."

To-night I talked more freely than usual, engrossing Syminton's attention with themes that would be of interest to him. His appreciation was genuine. While he gradually edged forward on his seat, suspecting nothing, I was studying him for the best moment for a surprise attack. Then, in the middle of one of my speeches I stopped, went silent like a disconnected ticker. He leaned forward still more expectantly, the better to catch my first words when I should resume.

"What about this girl, Eunice Fox?"

It came like a bullet, shooting naked fear into his eyes. It seemed to require a few seconds nevertheless to re-adjust his mind and shape his lips to speak.

"You mean, that girl—your employee?" He smiled nervously, but as though glad he had thought of smiling. A smile was natural and permissable.

"I mean *your* employee."

"Well, now, Burden—What am I to take from—"

"You know perfectly what I mean. What's the plan?"

He turned on me a weak and mild suspicion. Mild suspicion would be the obvious and appropriate thing.

"Come! Out with it! I want the whole thing."

His look now was pretended resentment, but he was retreating rapidly.

"You talk like a man who already had the whole thing."

My further replies to him were wordless. Slowly I brought the fingers of my right hand up to my face, curled them into a hard fist under my chin, and gazed at him in unflickering and cruel bitterness.

"I take it that the young lady has told you everything she knew." He sighed long and resignedly, very much as Eunice had done two hours before when she realized that the truth must come. His note of injured innocence just then was also the natural and appropriate thing. His head was bent forward: without raising it he glanced up at me

several times from under troubled brows. He was doubtful if resistance would be worth while. At the back of my frown of amusement was a labelled patience; the thumb of my closed fist slowly pulled at my chin to suggest that the patience might not be very permanent. "I'll admit it. There was a reason," he commenced. His tone was that of a pleader whose reason would justify him. "It" hasn't, as a matter of fact, existed now for a month or more. My only idea, lately, has been that you and Miss Fox might after all get married.

"Before that— Well, you remember that girl at Colchester, that Miss Geddings. In a friendly way I spoke to you of my reasons for going there, but it was my affair just the same. You've never mentioned what it was that brought you to Counsellor Street, Burden, but I might as well tell you that your appearance proved a highly disturbing factor—even more disturbing than your presence generally is here in St. George. She was a weird creature, Sarah. I'll tell you about it, because I happen to know that you had never seen or heard of her before—or since. She's only about twenty-two but—yes, mysterious as hell. Good, remember! Beautiful character, but too deep, too remote for me. Wise as an angel—and about as far removed from things ordinary. When I had been to Colchester half a dozen times I had never got an inch farther with her. Don't know for the life of me how it was—sort of invisible sword business I guess.

Before that night when you turned up I quite fancied it was merely a matter of making up my mind. And I decided right then, but it was immediately afterwards that I felt the change in things. I couldn't explain it: I can't explain it now.

"Look here, Burden!" A sudden curiosity turned him from the confessional tone. "It was mighty queer your being there. Why did you stand holding that girl's hand for five minutes, like a man in a dream? And then never manifest the slightest interest in her again?"

I had no word for this, merely suggesting by a nod and a momentary raising of the eyebrows that he keep to his story.

"When I felt sure that it was your coming which had changed things for me I was desperate, and furious with you because you regarded her as a mere incident. Of course I wanted her more than ever, and there seemed one way surer than others. I must be able to tell her that you were married, or linked with another woman."

Syminton looked dejectedly at the carpet as though wondering where to take up the tale next. "Eunice let me know what had happened between you the night before Christmas. I went to Colchester then, offered to marry Sarah (who would have prevented the declaration), and to provide a good home for her father. As in my heart I expected, she said "No" and shortly afterward mentioned your name in some indirect way. This too I rather

expected, and was ready to tell her of your affair. But for some reason, when I came to the point, I couldn't do it. Just remember that, Burden, there's something uncanny about it. Those invisible swords which had been repelling me seemed somehow to hold me back from myself also. My announcement might give her pain and I couldn't do that. I wanted to but I wasn't—wasn't strong-willed enough to do it. I just answered her questions about you and came away. But I kept going back to Colchester, though the more I went the more I realized that I wasn't a big enough man to be her mate. I hated you, without your knowing or caring. At last, one day when I was there—it was the happening of a month ago—I blurted out something to her in my desperation and she let me know how your visit had cast a shadow over her, which made it impossible so far as I was concerned. I was furious and heedless and I disregarded her sensitive nature and told her all I knew about Eunice Fox and you."

"What happened?" I silenced him

"I don't know. Honest to God I don't know! She gave me one unearthly look—as though I had confirmed some superstitious fear—and left the room instantly. When I came the next day Sarah and her father had gone—got away bag and baggage. Neighbours told me that nothing had been seen of either of them since the evening before. They must have moved out in the night."

"You don't know where they are?" My face must have been afire with a fearful rage which had come upon me and the cause of which I only partly recognized. My fist was up and my whole attitude probably expressed a murderous determination. Syminton looked at me and sprang back as though he had seen a ghost. "I tell you," he whimpered, " — you — you — you — " and all at once he did not seem to know who I was. "I tell you I don't know anything else."

For some time I could not have understood where I stood or what I did. Powerful numbing surges of emotion swayed me this way and that. One moment I would feel myself conscious and trying to insist that the matter must be dealt with fairly and dispassionately, then would follow a vanishing and melting of everything about me and again I would emerge into consciousness; but a different consciousness, one in which I saw the situation vengefully, violently, a life-and-death matter. The last I can remember of it I was looking towards the huge chair into which Warren Syminton had sunk in his helplessness. And there I saw with perfect clarity, beside the fashionably dressed young broker, that short and powerfully-set man dressed in the style of 1868. His huge bulging face was bowed in defeat, the high gray pompadour was just as I had seen it almost exactly a year ago.

Then I found myself walking along the club corridors towards my own room. I avoided the

gaze of the night man cleaning the floors because, momentarily, I had the feeling that my features, the features of Arthur Burden, were masked as those of another.

While I was undressing my intense thoughts were of Sarah Geddings. Through the mind of Hendrick Charters I was thinking of her in her late twenties; and my recollections were bitter that she was gone from me; that I had forsaken and lost her. Then I pictured her in middle life; her mistaken marriage with Marcus Syminton; her old age when she ministered to the little baby—before and after birth. Then, as she was brought up by Alverton Geddings, seeking a living in Connor's Odeon Pavilion, and finally as she stood before me in the mean gas-light, from which she lifted me, ethereal, old-souled, but everlastingly youthful.

" 'Which Sarah?' " I heard myself asking again of old Alverton.

" 'Of course,' he had explained in his feeble way, 'you wouldn't know. They're both Sarah. I just say Sarah because they both *are*. Don't you see?' "

Without knowing how, I had seen.

CHAPTER XVI

TOTTERING

TREMBLING hands opened my morning's mail. Mentally and physically I was a sort of shell of myself, racked by a haunting night, a night of desperate spiritual conflict. Like an automaton of habit I had dressed and somehow arrived at my desk, eventually getting through until noon by the same agency. Thus other people did not know at once what had happened; that Arthur Burden the strong-willed, the self-controlled, the man of icy calm had, at a blow, lost his grip, his will, his very personality. The several envelopes before me reading "Arthur Burden, Esq." rallied my ideas. Even then it was only for a few minutes at a time that I could realize who Arthur Burden was supposed to be. During the first hour I gave no orders and adopted an attitude to repel interviewers. Wishing to get the attention of the girl at the switchboard I searched my brain in vain for her name. Even the face and figure were strange to me, except that I felt somehow that she should not be a stranger. It was not unlike the elusive sense of recognition one has on seeing for the first time a person whose printed photograph is familiar.

I rang for the office boy and spoke an order, whereupon he gaped at me with opened mouth,

and finally withdrew after a deep bow as though something extra was due to a new and strange master. Presently he returned to explain that he must have heard me incorrectly. Would I repeat my instructions? Having no recollection of these I waved him away. It appears that I had asked him to get me a quotation on a stock which had not been listed for twenty-five years. Moreover I had spoken in an entirely foreign and very deep voice. The same thing occurred several times during the morning, the two or three brokers thus addressed opening their eyes incredulously or suspiciously as they withdrew.

An hour earlier than usual I left abruptly, without informing anybody, although the hour of my return was highly indefinite.

While the voice of Hendrick Charters had come to me in a mental way and been strongly present in control of my thoughts on many occasions it had not before made itself heard by others. This thing of appearing as two personalities would never do. Presumably the mental faculties of Arthur Burden were so exhausted that the other mentality assumed fuller control and thus the voice manifestation came rather by accident.

For days I did not venture near my usual haunts. Seeking the concert halls for entertainment became my pursuit. When the theatres of St. George were exhausted I visited the outside towns. I knew that it would be highly dangerous to meet the people

whom I knew. The betraying voice continued to slip out, as it were, when the thoughts of Hendrick Charters overflowed from my brain. I consciously submitted to it, as one might compromise with a person determined to break in with unwelcome suggestions.

It was not until much later in life that I studied the causes of these things and wondered if possibly it was the case that, since birth, I had been a complex of two persons; that the father influence which watches over, inspires, guides and often overawes a boy was in fact born within me. In childhood the will of the father controls and commands the conduct of the son, so had the powerful driving personality of the worldly-wise Hendrick Charters dominated mine. Then, even as the fledgling's new feathers render him gradually independent of the parent warmth and eventually able to spread his own supporting wings, so might the soul of Arthur Burden have grown stronger, while inexorable time weakened the power of the other.

In my boyhood I had never felt the inspiration to resist the master influence, but now came the challenge of manhood. The spirit of independence, so often called rebellion, which usually manifests itself at fifteen or eighteen, came late with me (due perhaps to the strength and imminence of the father hold), but it had come. When, at the exposure of Syminton's plot against me, Hendrick Charters had arbitrarily assumed command, Arthur

Burden rebelled instead of submitting. In the clash the stronger influence prevailed, Arthur Burden was felled and, as in any other first conflict between father and son, the son was held in subjection until a truce was arranged on the basis of compromise.

It was a fortnight after quitting the financial district that I ventured there again. First, I would drop in to see O'Brien; he would warn me of anything necessary relative to my absence. O'Brien was reported engaged for a few minutes, so I waited outside the ground-glass partition of his private office.

"But how do you know we'll see him back at all?" It was the voice of Fairman, another broker, which came to me over the partition wall.

"Oh, Burden's just a little bit eccentric, that's all," spoke O'Brien in reply.

"He certainly acted like it that day. I only hope he hasn't gone bughouse. It seems to me, though, that all these fellows like Burden and Pillsbury, the chess wizard, are bound to have their minds affected eventually. Their brain must be—well, there's an abnormal development there somewhere."

Hastily I fled the place. That evening old Mr. Garner, our branch manager, spent two or three hours with me in response to my appeal.

"I think it's just a rest you need, Arthur. And you know how convenient it will be just now. While you were in the office I got into the way of

doing practically nothing. But still, you know, so long as the New York people keep me here as manager, I must prove up occasionally."

Mr. Garner was very good about it all. He had even thought of a very suitable place where I might go. "A quiet homelike resort where you can do just as much or as little as suits you," he described it. One of the proprietors of this place happened to be in St. George and would take me along with him if I decided to start at once. Mr. Garner recommended this, as it would relieve me of all arrangements.

Two days later I found myself settled in a lakeside establishment where were found other men who needed rest. While highly intelligent, they differed from the ordinary city broker type. The place was not a hotel, in the sense of accommodating the ordinary traveler, and I found the atmosphere surprisingly conducive to the seeking of companionship. The views of those about me sounded not only interesting but somehow familiar.

A youngish man who had lost a beloved son was convinced that this son's personality accompanied him at all times. Frankly and good-humouredly he disassociated himself from the well-known type of insanity in which the patient suffers from the delusion that he is some king or emperor. "My son and I had grown to be almost one person," he explained, "and the destruction of his body in a runaway accident cannot possibly have separated

our spirits, for the simple reason that physical violence has no power to injure spirit. I've never in my life been accused of being irrational. I like coming to this place merely because there are men here who have time to be interested in such things."

Another of my companions apologized for his lack of interest in ordinary subjects. His wife had died a few years previously. She had been all that he had and his mind, he told me, had passed on with hers. All that was left to tenant his body was the veriest relic of his real life. "It is contrary to the divine will," he said, "that the disintegration of any human body should be hurried, so I go on living, although I shall be glad when I join her completely, rather than go on maintaining the present useless routine of communication between the worlds of free and prisoned spirits."

Perhaps it was a hunger for novel ideas to occupy my thoughts that I found myself more or less accepting their beliefs. The discussion turned one evening on criminals. "This theory of a criminal class or criminal inheritance is wrong," argued one. "The constitutional criminal is not to be considered as a person, but two or more persons." "Should he be punished?" asked another. "That depends on whether the criminal is the author of his crime. Of course a criminal—murderer for instance—should be sentenced. That is the only safety for society. But a special court of psychology should then sit on the case of every condemned murderer, establish

whether he acted with criminal intent or at the behest of a control. If the crime is foreign to the character of the prisoner the state clearly should not punish the innocent because the guilty is incorporeal."

Then, one quiet noon-time, sitting close by the telephone booth, I made a discovery. The steward was evidently ordering the day's supplies. "Well," his raised voice asserted to somebody at the other end of the wire, "you may have sent it out but it never came up to the sanatarium."

Sanatarium! That was it. The mysterious unspoken word of the whole plan. Kind old Mr. Garner had insisted that he did not share the views of O'Brien and Fairman, nevertheless he had, in the polite verbiage of the day, 'placed me in a sanatarium'. He thought I was crazy, and who was to blame him? Not I. Who indeed could have reasonably denied it?

Well, if I was crazy, why should I go on resisting? If Hendrick Charters had something special to say let him have his say. Arthur Burden had now regained himself sufficiently to snuff out the influence so far as bystanders were concerned. Why should I not hear his counsel submissively? Let the dangerous suggestion come, be what it might be. Almost at once I was repeating, "Stop everything and seek Sarah Geddings. She is my counterpart, in this life as she was in the last."

The next instant I was at peace with myself. Within me was no more conflict, contradiction, opposition. I was content to be Hendrick Charters passing under the name of Arthur Burden. There was no more distinction between them than between a man's Monday and Tuesday personality.

CHAPTER XVII

PURSUIT

ALTHOUGH it seemed that all railway lines ran to St. George I used junction points to avoid that city on my way to Colchester. That St. George was the home of my parents mattered not, nor that it was the scene of the surprising success which had created me somewhat of a figure. All I was conscious of was that it had put upon me the blot of Eunice Fox. That, instead, it had put upon Eunice Fox the blot of myself must have been clear had I possessed one true persuasive friend in life.

In Colchester I stood once more looking along the grayed brick walls of Counsellor Street. The door of 243 was shabbier than ever; its cracked and blistered paint I clearly remembered. A heavy woman of forty clumped down the stairs without pausing to adjust her colourless dust-cap, and looked the disgust she felt at the discovery that it was not the boy with the meat. No, she had never heard of Alverton Geddings. "I never bothered to ask who the last people were. I know that the rooms had been vacant for near three weeks and were awful to dust."

At the Odeon Pavilion, Mr. Connor listened to my enquiry with some agitation.

"You don't look like the fellow either," he eyed me doubtfully. On my assurance that I was not

Syminton his resentment had become less. "I've always thought that young fellow knew something about Sarah's going, though he wouldn't talk. No, I'm sure I don't know where they travelled. Sarah just turned up here one night as we were closing to say she wouldn't be back. I'll never be able to replace her either. She pretty near made this place what it was." Reluctantly I was departing when he called, "Just a second. There's one little girl here who was especially broke up when Sarah went. Here, Amelia!" he spoke to the girl selling cigarettes.

On hearing Sarah's name this girl was all attention, stopping on the instant her violent gum-chewing. "I cried when Sarah said good-bye so she gimme this address in Chicago to write to. She aint never answered mine yet."

When I arrived in Chicago and sought out the street indicated it was only to find house-wreckers at work demolishing the building which had contained the number I wanted. For some days I prosecuted enquiries and exhausted clues that proved to be worthless. I chanced on a female employment office and there the name Geddings was registered. Yes, the woman in charge, peculiarly enough, remembered her. "I would of liked to give her something all right, but she was too serious and old-fashioned some way for the jobs we got." The assistant was listening interestedly so I appealed to her in turn. All that Sarah had ever

spoken to her was the request for a reliable laundry, but she knew the one she always recommended.

Amongst the hundreds of intervening customers to the laundry Sarah Geddings had been remembered here also. A clerk who was passing as I enquired stopped to say that he had forwarded some unfinished work, so the address would be on file in the express book.

Thus I followed on and on, Milwaukee, Duluth, St. Paul and, by midsummer, had arrived in far-off Winnipeg. Once more I was in possession of definite information. It had more than once occurred to me that if, as seemed only too likely, the Geddings were seeking to shake off anybody following, Sarah would have resorted to a change of name. Here in Winnipeg I found this had actually been done, although the detective faculty I had acquired by this time was not long in establishing the identity of those I sought in the description of a feeble old man who had established a month ago in what was known as the North End with his daughter, the daughter whom nobody ever seemed able quite to forget.

Then the alarming information that Alverton Geddings had died shortly after his arrival. I sought out a clergyman who would have conducted the burial service, realizing that he would be an important link. I thought it well to preface my interview with a substantial gift to a church enlargement fund he had started. He was a mild-mannered

Christian who needed no bribe, but it was my way of securing favours.

"Yes," he informed me, "the people were, I think, known by the other name, but the young woman said that she wanted now to record her father's correct one. I brought her home here afterwards. My wife and I would have done anything in the world for that girl somehow, but she just kept repeating quietly that she was going away."

No, there was no address. Nobody in the city, he felt sure, would have an address. He was almost certain of this. Miss Geddings had said that there was now none in the world left to her who would ever want her address. "Her going distressed us very much at the time, but her resolve was unalterable. I might in fact almost say that it was something more than definite," the minister looked into my eyes in a meaningful way and I noticed tears in his. "I don't like to think of the tone in which she said finally, 'I'll be going a long way off.' "

"You don't think, sir— " I was trying to appear calm, but further words refused to come. The same blinding waves of uncontrollable emotion overwhelmed me and I felt the tight choke of suffocation.

"That's what I mean! It sounded like it, but the girl was a highly spiritual type. She impressed me, in her quieter moments, as the sort who needs

only the spur of ambition to make some great success in life. But she was a mysterious young lady, most mysterious."

I sat a few minutes facing the clergyman, and the end of my search—the fruitless end.

CHAPTER XVIII

PLOT

IT was a morning in early October that I reappeared in the brokerage office adjoining the St. George Stock Exchange Building. Brokers' afternoons were their comparatively free time, although it was necessary, in the mornings, to be on hand early.

Instead of his private room, Mr. Garner had been occupying my front desk, which was the natural centre of activity. He had been coming down half an hour earlier than had been his former custom and altogether he looked very tired indeed following the entire summer with no break whatever. He shook hands gladly and shortly rose from his seat as though to leave me in charge, the while heaving a sigh of relief, if not final relief. During the day he hovered constantly about, unable to conceal his anxiety as to the proper conduct of affairs.

A week earlier I had written him confidentially suggesting that a position for Miss Fox be secured elsewhere. I had been blushingly aware that such a request would require no explanation. This morning no reference was made to her absence. The city brokers had apparently been informed of my return. In unusual numbers they dropped in during the day, keen to have a look at me but none of them equal

to the risk of a discussion. "Glad to see you looking so well, old man," was the usual greeting, while the caller pretended an air of preoccupation or hurry.

Mr. Garner quickly reassured himself as to my sanity and, on the evening of my second day, finally left things in my hands and announced his intention of going for a holiday. As agency manager I had never been more completely myself, and in a remarkably short time had regained entirely my old position of confidential advisor to various important groups and interests. As, at the moment, the war situation in the Transvaal was approaching a crisis, there was again opportunity for the astute calculation which Hendrick Charters had acquired in his busy life, and which undoubtedly was sharpened by the dual viewpoint my second personality added to the accumulation.

While my personal problems and the summer's experiences with their heart-breaking termination had left an indelible mark on me, no bitterness was permitted to show in my general manner, which, as a matter of fact, was growing somewhat brighter. The memory of my actual meeting with Sarah Geddings was still very strong. More than once there came to me, at about the hour it had occurred (which I discovered in this way to be shortly after eleven) a feeling that she was present. It happened particularly when my mind was free of ulterior designs. Once there seemed to be a voice, a thrill

felt rather than sounds heard, and words were not intelligible.

Warren Syminton's firm now conducted its New York business through a rival agency, doubtless to relieve him of the embarrassment of encountering me. While my mind was much too old in philosophical reasoning to permit the quality of hate to block my own progress, I still harboured a sense of righteous indignation towards him. It lurked in the secret recesses of my brain as though held in leash by a wise cunning and a deadly patience. That Syminton had had any connection with my recent mental lapse he had not disclosed, so it was natural enough that, from time to time, I should hear mention of his name. One afternoon two men arrived at my desk at the moment when I had been called on the telephone. While I was thus engaged in conversation with our out-of-town customer one of my visitors, lighting a cigarette to occupy the wait, gossiped casually to the other,

"Do you happen to know her? Syminton's *fiancée*?"

"I don't think that I ever remember meeting this girl Grace, though I knew one of the elder sisters. The children were all born here in St. George and I imagine that Frank Fenchurch himself has made a great deal of money since he came here."

Hanging up the receiver and putting the instrument aside, I glanced up with welcoming smile at the two, while poising a pencil above my pad as

though to indicate that I would postpone making my note until they stated their business and departed. Certainly there was to be no suspicion that the casually-heard information had unsealed those secret recesses and released my resentment towards Syminton on a definite course of action. That I intended to strike him sooner or later was a foregone conclusion. Here was the opportunity to which I was driving blindly.

"I can't make my wife see any good reason why you refuse to come up and look us over, Burden," the genial O'Brien said to me a few days later. He must have read a sign of yielding for he added, "I guess you had better say 'Yes' this time. We'll promise not to embarrass you with a dinner-party. Just *en famille* to-morrow, say at seven?"

Although making some attempt to fill a place at men's meetings, I had steadily avoided the city's general social life, and had, in consequence, probably inspired curiosity in various quarters. With a show of resignation, I now agreed to accompany O'Brien, who was, I could see, anxious to exhibit his new home on Mountain Hill.

Mrs. O'Brien struck me at once as a woman of decidedly easy charm for one still in her early twenties, also I conceded the justification of her husband's pride in wishing to display his home. Both host and hostess evidenced the keenest anxiety that I should enjoy the evening, and in fact Mrs. O'Brien's cleverly introduced assumption that it

was to be but the forerunner of others was no more enthusiastically offered than received by me. I had quite decided to take an interest in society matters, as soon as the proper opening presented itself. This, I had discovered, was the suitable opening.

In my friends' anxiety for subjects of discussion it needed only a glance or smile to direct their conversation and to anchor it presently on the subject of Syminton's recently announced engagement.

"Oh, yes, we're all excited about it. Grace and I were three years at school together. She's positively the sweetest thing. Warren's a fine fellow of course, but he's scarcely five years older and somehow I believe there should—"

"Come, now, dear," O'Brien interrupted good-naturedly, "you mustn't bore people. Just because I happen to be ten or twelve years older than you does not establish it as a state of perfection."

"Yes, but you know yourself, James, that the modern man of twenty-five is little more than a boy. A woman can't have proper respect for a man till he's thirty or more. I think I would have preferred it if Grace had met some man like Mr. Burden," and she laughed as though intentionally to expose the match-making propensities of young matrons.

Her innocent mistake as to my twenty-two years suited my purpose extremely well.

"You don't think I'm too old to meet her, then?" I smiled.

"No, indeed!" Mrs. O'Brien's eyes opened wide in pleasure. "I'm certain Grace would be flattered at the suggestion. And I," with just a fleeting blush of pride in anticipation, "would be most happy to be the means. Because a girl happens to be engaged to one man is no reason, I'm sure, why she should take no interest in another. Especially," beaming on me anew, "when he happens to be of almost province-wide reputation."

I succeeded in bringing other names into the conversation and we discussed all in turn. Nevertheless I felt I had said just sufficient that, following my departure, it would recur to my hostess that the one tangible result of the evening was this half understanding that I consented to meet Miss Grace Fenchurch.

CHAPTER XIX

GRACE FENCHURCH

WITHIN the week there was brought to my desk a femininely inscribed square envelope. Mrs. O'Brien asked the pleasure of my company at dinner to meet Miss Fenchurch, her *fiancé* and two or three friends. It so happened (or perhaps by design) that my written acceptance or refusal could reach her only a few hours before I was expected, so it was not surprising to hear a coaxing voice over the telephone in support of its owner's invitation. "We're depending on you so!" it concluded. My deeper interest in the matter concealed, I replied, "In view of your delightful welcome the other evening, I suppose it would be ingratitude to fail you now."

If, on crossing the threshold of the O'Brien's drawing-room that evening, I experienced any thrill of anticipation it was the thrill of calculated revenge. That, in effecting it, there would be a breach of vows, the sacrifice of friends, and deep injury to an innocent person or persons, was quite aside from my aberration.

To a man of my brief social experience a certain hesitation or absence of poise would have been forgivable, but beneath the deadly calm of my resolve and that ever-present but invisible weight

of years, my entrance was probably one to inspire an air of mystery, which under the circumstances meant confidence.

The hostess effected the introduction with gracious informality and for a quickly passing second I looked directly into the eyes of the woman who was to occupy so large a place in my future.

When I had turned my glance again to my hostess, to utter some formal remark, the entire impression I retained of her friend's person was that of two fathomless wells of transparent violet light. The crown of golden hair with its short curls at the temples, her cheeks and lips of pink perfection and a splendid necklace of emeralds glittering on the white breast, even the tall gracefully-moving figure itself, had for the time no existence for me. I had seen nothing but sympathy-compelling eyes and in my tumult of surprise was wondering if such appealing eyes ever existed before. Only one opening glance had they given me, but it was as if on a stormy midnight, a flash of lightning had revealed a new and pleasant pathway.

Verily here was something unexpected. A new —a wild and new—desire for unselfishness seized me, there was a literal swelling of my heart as the spur to goodness surged in my every vein. Never had I felt so strongly the imminence of my two souls. It was as though the benign Mr. Charters, not powerful enough to still the old clamouring hatred of Syminton, had still struck a blow for freedom,

by creating within me an object of devotion, a will to serve, so that, in this at least, good might come out of evil, a blessing out of a crime.

The glory of her violet eyes was before me as I turned towards Mrs. O'Brien, it continued while I was bowing to the others, one by one, and even when formality was over and I had opportunity to engage in conversation and to search the farther corners of the room. When I took the extended hand of Syminton the expected embarrassment of the moment had been entirely forgotten. There could be of course, under the circumstances, no need for word of assurance as to the inviolability of the secrets between us. In any case, now, his face was to me merely the face of a man, of no more interest than a portrait.

Then, as I continued to look into the shy fluttering depths of my enduring vision, I slowly read the truth. Syminton was their presumable owner, the licensed male creature who looked his fill under their mysterious surface, some day to know the deepest guarded secrets of their passionate sensitiveness.

Presently we were all moving, then were seated, eight or ten of us. Uncertainly I saw before me the white expanse of linen, glass that glittered as though in a fog, drooping blurs of colour that were flowers and, close by my hand, supported on an invisible stem, a circle of yellow wine. Everything I could see—dishes, guests, the wall-paper, the forms moving silently around the table—seemed wavering

in indistinctness; everything but the smooth bare shoulder at my side and the finely held head of Grace Fenchurch. The eyelashes moved swiftly, were still a moment, and were again stirring nervously. Conversation was only a murmur of noise until the lips I was watching moved and spoke, their owner continuing to gaze across the table.

"So, at last, people are going to have a look at you, Mr. Burden."

"Yes," I turned full to her, "those who do look at me."

The challenge could not be entirely refused and once again our eyes met, once more secrets baffling solution lured me, from far beneath that surface of violet.

Presently the features of Syminton, across the table, were clear. I noticed that he was trying to gain her eyes, and failing. I watched the other men present try and fail. Within a minute my trained and weathered old mind reached its conclusion. First of all, I was not jealous of Syminton. That I would ruin his plans was another matter. In his desire to possess Grace he had, it is true, my opposition, for I was subject to a sort of fine frenzy, a valiant determination that neither Syminton nor any other man should possess the full confidence of that glance. In her eyes, which I perceived she gave frankly to women alone, lay the utmost fears and desires of her feminine soul. She was apparently unwilling that these should be read

by those who could read. Why, then, should any man be permitted ruthlessly to peer through the veil? I would be her protector, forever! Not only had I no desire to rend this veil of the temple of her body; I would maintain the holy of holies inviolate.

We spoke from time to time. Not trifles, table talk, gossip; every sentence gave and brought understanding.

"And you think you comprehend women?" she said almost under her breath.

"No, not women. Woman," I replied. "Women are a species; woman is a being. Yes, I know woman, when I meet her: of women I know almost nothing."

"In your case, Mr. Burden, I think that woman will always be certain that you comprehend her." And again the slumbering fascination of her eyes swept me, this time a very perceptible moment longer.

But soon she was moving, others were moving. She had stood up, and was gone. The five men sat down again. There were cigars, the tinkle of glasses, the fizz of a soda-syphon. I listened and spoke, hearing nothing and remembering nothing. The quiet notes of a grand piano met us as we crossed the hall. Three or four women were talking together, Grace Fenchurch in the back of the large room at the piano and facing us. I went straight to her and stood looking to where she sat, across the

low polished surface of the instrument. Her reading of the music would provide ample field for the attention of her eyes; I wished only to study her face. Instead of continuing, however, and to my amazement, she deliberately folded up the sheet of music, changed the air to something she could play by the sense of feeling alone and looked up frankly and long into my face.

"Mr. Burden, I know that all the women are in awe of meeting you, thrilling to know you but afraid —from what they have heard. You are reputed to be deep, terribly wise, and altogether too powerful for just one man." She stopped there, a childish smile playing about her lips, while I found myself suddenly compelled to refuse her wonderful eyes, the eyes which my intuition had told me were, to me as a man creature, a forbidden sphere. I was looking instead at the emeralds gently rising on her bosom, when she spoke again. "But I am not afraid of you, Mr. Burden." She paused to sigh, I thought. "And that is the more remarkable because I am afraid of the ordinary man—afraid, I think, as the birds fear the hunter. When first you looked at me I knew that you comprehended me—and that I might as well be natural. So—other women may be just as afraid as they expect to be, but I—I am not afraid."

Returned to the lonely silent deadness of my own quarters at last, I saw again, through closed eyelids, the gently thoughtful azure depths, and, even then,

I sought to prevent myself gazing within. There was no experience of mine, nor anything in the life or philosophy of Hendrick Charters, to tell me that fluttering hunted women's eyes, like the rare eyes of Grace Fenchurch, belong only to women of hypersensitized animal instincts, at once so strong and so alluring that, in the modesty of their souls and the purity of their breeding, art strives continually to screen what nature proclaims. And nothing there was, in my life, nor in the innocent life of this girl, to tell us that the only man whose eyes she can invite and instinctively trust are those of the man who, for her, is of a neuter sex.

CHAPTER XX

ADVENTURE

MORE than half my life has been seeming or actual unreality, but I always look back on that six months between February and August of the year 1900 as the superlative of error and wrong action.

Although declining to be socially exploited by Mrs. O'Brien it was inevitable that I should encounter Grace Fenchurch from week to week. Our regard for one another was as misunderstood as it was thought to be clear, as dangerous as I believed it safe. In addition to my own misconception of her nature I must own to a motive as blamable as it was meriting of its swift retribution.

Viewing our worldly life as a moral system, and witnessing the vast deficiencies of reward and punishment, there is undoubted room for an extra-mundane heaven and hell. Hendrick Charters, however, had elected for speedy trial and sentence of serving his hell on earth. Hell for me has been fighting against character and discovering that character is not something to re-fashion at will, but an accumulated credit or debit balance, either to be enjoyed in peace or to be extinguished in suffering and tears.

In the abandon of her admiration for me Grace was utterly unable to distinguish between the reliance a girl reposes on a man twice her age and the pure attraction for a mate. To my unnatural mind it was enough that I should remain her master, and, in the process, rob Syminton of what he most desired in life. Wilfully I blinded myself to the honesty and intensity of his affection. Always I knew that Grace Fenchurch regarded herself as mine. In one particular only I recognized the debt of conscience: I repeatedly intimated in my conversations that marriage was something not for me.

As winter passed and became spring the topic of the sensation-hungry world was the development of the South African War. Professionally and otherwise it was on the lips of my fellow brokers. The sensation of war had been stimulated by the American affair with Spain, so that men now discussed the battles as though they had been a sort of pantomime of history. Especially, I recall it, we were proud of Canada's participation in the campaign, while visitors from the United States were perhaps envious of our exciting events and our part in the demonstrations at the relief of Ladysmith and other victories.

Late in May, James O'Brien told me that he had promised to accompany his wife to Toronto and there remain with her until she went to northern Ontario for the summer. O'Brien, who was a former

American, hoped that some important war event might transpire during his holiday, so that he might witness one of those scenes of war enthusiasm which read so well in the newspapers. He suggested that I accompany them; the trip would be only a matter of a few days.

It was a grimly propitious moment for the proposal. The national detective agency which I had employed at considerable cost in my effort to locate Sarah Geddings had just sent me their final report and advices that they were now obliged to withdraw from the case. I had experienced another dangerously unhappy night at the news but, recalling the unfortunate consequences of last year's encounter with Syminton and the Fox girl, I had resolved on prompt action to banish the subject from my mind. This, I concluded, could best be accomplished by new interests which would crowd my attention, as it were. So this prospect of fresh scenes and activities was appealing.

O'Brien seemingly could not have realized the unfairness of concealing from me the fact that his wife had already invited Miss Fenchurch to holiday with her.

Whenever, in my conversations with Grace, Syminton's name was mentioned she sighed uncomfortably but always concluded by bestowing on me a brave smile. At this particular time some trivial quarrel had separated them, and the evening I unexpectedly met her at the O'Brien's discussing

our travelling arrangements, she failed so much as to mention the name of the man who was still, I believed, her intended husband.

It was the fourth of June when our party arrived in Toronto, and the following day James O'Brien's hopes of being witness to a popular upheaval of feeling as the result of war became reality. The degree was beyond both our anticipation and our belief. News had arrived that British and Canadian troops had occupied the enemy capital of Pretoria.

It seems to have been true that, for some reason, this city of Toronto had, up to now, failed to celebrate the military victories to the extent that had been the case elsewhere in the Dominion. However this may be, it is true that the great city, at the fall of Pretoria, lost its reason and sense of proportion to an extent which it has never been my lot to witness anywhere on earth. Workers everywhere deserted their posts and thronged the public places, where they were joined by the general populace in one vast orgy of excitement. It appeared that the city, in a single hour, had a trebling of its population; streets echoed to a mob pandemonium which completely disregarded ordinary custom and propriety as though these had never existed. Windows on the principal streets were alive with humanity and colour, banners and flags seemed to have taken the place of walls and sky. It was merry-making gone mad. Pavements were a litter of confetti,

talcum powder, and the wreckage of toys and flags which the surging crowds flung and crushed in their passage, or smashed on one another's heads. Carts and anything handy were broken up to prepare bonfires at corners. Ordinary means of transportation had almost ceased.

As, by evening, it had become impossible to get meals or service in the hotel, James suggested that we set out in search of a possible dinner. Within a few blocks, and after being a dozen times gathered into the surging irresponsible mob, we were suddenly separated from one another by the advance of a grotesquely-dressed mock regiment of young men which penetrated the crowded thoroughfare like a huge battering ram. Instantly the idea took hold; other regiments were formed by nondescript groups of men and some women. I was hopelessly lost for the moment but, feeling sure that O'Brien would see to the safety of his wife, pushed my way excitedly up and down in search of Miss Fenchurch. By luck I found her, jostled and very much upset, in the doorway of a jewelry store.

We tried to make a way for ourselves but the crowds had now become so boisterous that we were only hurled this way and that with little idea as to direction. It was folly to seek information by enquiry, as none were serious enough to listen. Darkness only brought a greater frenzy. The fires were lighted and the incessant explosion of fireworks added danger to the night. Being quite ignorant

of the side streets as a means of escape, we were carried about aimlessly for some hours. Street cars no longer ran on the downtown streets, and every cab we saw was crowded with revellers. At length we came to a cross-street along which I saw what looked like a tram-car moving slowly. With difficulty I managed to get Grace aboard, only to discover that the conveyance was a bus and in charge of a gang of youthful law-breakers of both sexes, running it for their own diversion. My attempts to explain our position were greeted with hilarity, and with good-natured insistence we were compelled to remain where we were while the vehicle was driven more or less aimlessly, far through the city, round many corners until it was impossible to guess our whereabouts.

It seems, on this lurid night, that some evil influence forced us continually to the centre of the stage. Our experiences could not well have been typical of any modern city however mad, but rather that we were caught like fragments of cork in the vortex of a shifting whirlpool.

At a signal, or the scent of some counter attraction, the pirate party deserted their capture and we got to the sidewalk of what should have been a quiet section of the city, but now disturbed by near and far explosions of fire-arms and small roystering parties, presumably on their way home from the general carnival down town.

Our hats were gone long ago, our clothes torn, and our general appearance such as to commend us only to the roughest element. A lurid glare and unmistakable murmuring far over the roof-tops suggested the position of our hotel, and there we started to walk. Once again we were obstructed by a fenced line of railway, a deep ravine, and the forbidding walls of a large manufacturing industry. I tried calling at respectable-looking residences with the request for a night's lodging for Grace. At several places the inmates refused to believe me, and when at last a man offered what I had asked Grace clung to me in terror, insisting that she must seek Mrs. O'Brien with her last ounce of strength.

After following the car-line for miles we came to what looked like a small residential hotel. The place was fully lighted and, although deserted at this hour, there seemed to be somebody in charge at the desk. Closer inspection showed the man, who sat in a propped-up-chair, to be in a drunken sleep from which it was impossible to stir him. Hearing a low murmuring from the end of the long hall, I left Grace, now almost completely exhausted, in one of the rotunda chairs and went to investigate. The interior of the large ornate room I entered, probably the bar, was a cloud of smoke and jangle of unsteady voices from which I promptly withdrew.

"We must look for a room for you anyway," I said and helped Grace upstairs. Several bedroom doors were open so we soon found one I deemed

suitable. The state of general disorder in the rotunda was also apparent in the upper halls where we found a litter of paper streamers and cigar-ends, while even the bedrooms showed that they had been occupied by crowds of people some time during the night.

Everything seemed quiet now, however, and the men in the bar-room were probably too far gone to cause further disturbance.

I went to rummage through some of the other open rooms in the hope of finding something which would make Grace more comfortable after I should have left her. Returning shortly, I found her in a state of fresh agitation and fear at my absence. She wanted me to promise that I would not leave the hotel, but I explained that it would be more proper if I tried to make my way back to the hotel where Mrs. O'Brien was, so that she and her husband could come for her in the morning. I felt that if I could only get Grace settled under the strange conditions she would be more content to remain, but as she continued to protest and all my coaxing was insufficient I was, in the end, obliged to make her lie down.

It must be remembered that I had never, in any sense, been in love with this girl, even had I not been now to so great an extent on my honour. There are in every man's acquaintance certain women who, though doubtless quite womanly, do not for some reason hold for him any mating attraction. The

mature age from which I was receding made the condition much more normal in my case. Ever since that first evening I had seen her, Grace Fenchurch had been to me more like a daughter. Instinct to protect her was perhaps a passion, the more so because her beauty and her rare type of mentality rendered her constantly in danger.

With the relief afforded by her easier position and the now undisturbed surroundings, it seemed an appropriate time to leave her. In fact I had gone so far as to instruct her as to turning off the light and bolting the door from the inside, when we heard sounds as of a heavy vehicle being driven to the door. There were noisy voices and in another moment a great clattering up the outside steps. The building was suddenly alive with noise.

At this time of the night, parties of celebrators had seemingly hired, or taken, hotel busses or express wagons and driven from place to place with no other object than that of creating disturbance so that others would be compelled to keep up the celebration. Listening, I perceived that there was a certain regularity, or gang order, in the movements of the new arrivals, and soon became aware that the whole party, which proved to be about twenty men and women, was on its way upstairs.

Grace heard it too, and was immediately hysterical again. In the confusion of the minute we did exactly the thing which should have been avoided, by rushing together into the hallway.

The next instant I recognized the catastrophe of it. The none-too-sober roysterers at once made us their target. Our appearance and the situation generally was such as to stimulate their sense of levity only too well. Promptly we were surrounded, embraced, and kissed by men and women indiscriminately. They swarmed about us, past us, in and out of the room where Grace and I had been, their gestures and remarks (although undoubtedly meant with no wickedness) being such as to shock us both beyond expression. The characteristic shyness and fear in Grace's violet eyes was intensified ten-fold. Turning from it all, she buried her face on my shoulder. To do our visitors justice, they melted away quickly on perceiving that the pantomime so highly entertaining to them was in fact a matter of suffering to others.

After this I could no longer expect my companion to remain alone. So we left the hotel as quickly as possible. Almost the moment we were in the street, however, I saw that she could not possibly walk any distance, and, as the disturbance inside had subsided as quickly as it had commenced, we came back to the large leather chairs in the rotunda. Grace moaned and shuddered constantly until she had cried herself into a brief sleep, and, in the ghastly dawn, I found myself left to my own thoughts.

The night's experiences, I greatly feared, had amounted to a shock from which she would be long in recovering. Also, it was not reassuring to

me to realize that the infatuation she had felt for me had, according to her own confession, become now one of utter dependence.

After many fruitless efforts to get any response from cab-stands, I finally rang one from which an attendant answered. He promised to call me back as soon as there was a cab available. An hour later the bell rang and I heard his welcome voice again. It was, however, a long time afterward that the promised carriage came lumbering up the deserted sunlit street, and it was seven o'clock when I tapped on the door of Mrs. O'Brien's room and handed over my charge, with no attempt at explanation, to her weeping, exclaiming friend.

CHAPTER XXI

MARRIAGE

"OH—come in!" I managed to raise my head from a pillow of crazy dreams, and groped to unlock the door. "What time is it?"

James O'Brien did not answer. He crossed the room solemnly and raised the blind to a bright noonday. I saw by my watch that it was half past one. As he seated himself at my bedside his face wore a look of intentness of which I had never known him capable.

"How is she?" I asked at once.

"Not too well, I'm afraid," as he stared suddenly in another direction. "We've had a doctor, but he says the trouble is purely emotional."

"Emotional?" I repeated stupidly, but from my waking mind came the half answer to my wonderment.

"The Fenchurches are a finely-bred family, very high-minded. Grace unfortunately is very high-strung as well."

"Yes," I considered slowly. "I was afraid that the shock would be a bad one, in her exhausted condition."

"It's not that—alone, Burden. There's something else; a whole lot more."

"Oh, indeed!"

It was not my nature to manifest agitation.

"Syminton is on his way here."

For a minute my resolve to be Grace's protector was snuffed out by the Hendrick Charters in me rising in resentment of Syminton. "Thwart him!" something seemed to command.

"What the devil's he coming for?" broke from me.

"We telegraphed." O'Brien had become almost hostile for some reason. "You think *you* had a bad night, but let me tell you that Rose and I. . . Well, I suppose we got panicky. At six o'clock this morning we sent a wire that we were afraid an accident had happened Grace."

"Wired Syminton?"

"No, you idiot. We wired Mr. Fenchurch at St. George. But he'd gone to Rochester so his other daughter apparently called up Syminton before forwarding the message. So the two of them are coming.

"Grace is in a panic. We don't quite understand it. Weak as a cat." Between sentences O'Brien dropped his head till it rested on his fists. "We're not sure what it is. We don't know what to do about her. It's bad—bad! Maybe if—if that hadn't happened last night she'd be steadier."

"Does she intend to—?"

"See Syminton? Of course; she's got to see him. She's engaged to him, isn't she? But she's in love with you. You know that?"

"You mean that you know she is?"

He looked at me without even nodding. "Well, O'Brien," I had no time to choose words. "I'm not exactly the marrying kind. And I'd be afraid I was not sufficiently good enough for her."

The moment I had said this, knowing that it was not the truth but an evasion, I became prey to confusion. Also, at the first actual thought of marriage, I recognized within me that dreaded warning of soul conflict. Gathering every reserve of my independent strength for it I determined to forestall opposition. I would defy the prompting, if it was only to prove myself a free-will agent. The process was a mental taking of the bit between my teeth.

"But, man alive!" O'Brien was exclaiming impatiently, then, more quietly, "Better go and see her I guess, hadn't you? Nobody else'll say you're not good enough."

As I came alone, to Grace's bedside and saw how anxiety and sleeplessness had dulled her eyes, I confess I passed completely under the power of my passion to guard and protect her at any price. Never would she need encouragement and protection as she did now.

"Have you had a good sleep?" I asked sympathetically.

"Not when I found this awaiting me."

The white trembling fingers close to me slipped under the pillow and gave me the yellow paper:

"Please expect me at the Queen's Hotel at seven-thirty this evening. Warren."

"You are not pleased that he is coming?" I asked simply.

"Or why should I have run away from him?" she sighed and turned her face wearily towards the wall.

"You are not afraid to have him come?"

"Yes." It was a whisper. "Listen, Arthur! I haven't told anybody else, but it wasn't a quarrel as you thought. I told Warren that I could never marry him. When first he wanted me he did possess an appeal for me. I thought perhaps I loved him—though it was a kind of fear too. And he never really had the mastery over me. I don't think he had my faith, not the perfect faith that casteth out fear, like—" She paused nervously and then, evading her thought, "I never got into the way of giving Warren my confidence somehow. And now that—that he'll demand it. You see I didn't tell him why I didn't want him. Oh, I can't, I can't tell him things. All about coming away! About you!—and about last night! He'd never understand and—I don't want him to understand. He'd claim the right to fight for me. Warren's a strong man; he knows so terribly earnestly what he wants and he simply won't be turned back, unless—"

My resolve to shield her encountered its final test. Why, after all, should I hesitate? Sarah Geddings (though the very name sounding through

my brain caused a revulsion of mind and body) might be nothing more than the embodiment of an old man's vision. Even if I could ever find her she would in all probability have nothing to do with me. She had already shown such intention. Certainly it was not with any idea of mercy for Syminton that I hesitated. He should suffer as I intended. Verily I did not love Grace Fenchurch, as a lover should, nor desire her. In marriage with her I saw little more than a blank calm; but did people about to marry generally see any more? Certainly she did not want me for anything but myself. She had more money than I had. For that matter so had Syminton.

And there was another new and powerful motive inspiring me. That incubus astride me, which had stirred so violently at the moment O'Brien had announced Syminton's coming, and which immediately thereafter had threatened tumult at the thought of marriage to this girl, was now convulsing my whole mental effort. It was as though I were faced with an old-time conqueror of my right of action. I wrestled with the influence, not so much because confident of the wisdom of resistance but rejoicing that, in the strength of my coming youth, Saul would at last overcome the angel.

"If—" I hesitated, reaching greedily at a possible compromise. "If you told him you intended to marry somebody else?"

Grace lay back, without speaking, her eyes closed, but the long satisfied sigh which followed a second's irregular breathing bespoke her reaction to my offer.

Another instant and there clanged in my brain a sort of fire alarm—alarm of fire that would continue breaking out in its endeavour to exhaust me, unless immediately and completely quenched. An "engagement" was impossible.

"When does your father arrive?" I asked.

"Very soon I think. Almost at once."

"Grace," my tone was measured to reassure her, "will you let me make it possible that you will tell Warren, at half-past seven to-night, that I am your husband?"

Her feminine sensibilities were shocked at my impetuosity. There were demurs, objections, urgings to postponement, but in the end she had no soul for objections. And presently Mr. Fenchurch, governed always by his daughter's wishes, was giving his somewhat bewildered consent.

So it came about that, within a few hours of my waking on that hectic June day, I heard a clergyman in an old-fashioned square-towered church a short distance off Yonge Street pronouncing Grace Fenchurch my wife.

Following seven o'clock we all waited together in the O'Briens' room. When Syminton's card came in the two ladies went down to see him, Grace bravely insisting on saying what she had to say herself.

Less than ten minutes later they stepped again from the elevator and passed the spot where we three awaited them. Mrs. O'Brien, by a glance, warned me not to follow into the room. Watching Grace as she passed, I realized that she was acting on the very last ounce of her nerves, with a collapse just ahead.

After a few minutes a bell-boy came up to the door and helped O'Brien remove his things to another room.

"She's absolutely all in," he whispered when he rejoined me. "Rose is keeping her under her own eye for the night. The best thing we can do is to look to see where Mr. Fenchurch has gone and then slip out somewhere by ourselves."

Syminton took his dismissal virtually without a word of reply and left Toronto by a later train, Mr. Fenchurch returning to his interrupted conference the next morning.

Towards noon of that day Grace sent for me. She was surprisingly bright, and in fact almost the personification of hopefulness and affection. My response could reach no higher than a smiling calm. The moral triumph of yesterday (the overcoming of what had been my master spirit) left me now with the reaction of an indescribable sense of depression, a weak sensation of horror almost as though I had committed patricide. The accomplishment of my triumph over Syminton was already a shallow victory. From the future, both immediate and

enduring, I shrank from thinking, and sought hopelessly to escape.

At seven o'clock we four were dining together. It had been decided that we should go along as we were for a day or two until Grace felt like discussing plans, and the various problems suggested by the name of our own city of St. George. We were talking at the minute of something else when my name was called by a page boy just outside the dining-room door. It was a telegram from the head of our firm in New York. Important events were taking place in a group of stocks which lately had been our particular interest and it was imperative that, as Mr. Garner our branch manager had become ill, I return to my post instantly. A train for home would leave at 9.30. Assuredly, I must take it.

Without time to analyze my motives for it, I summoned all my will power to convince the others that I should go alone. To win Grace to this course I used subtle arguments which seemed to come to me without effort, almost as the wise sayings of my childhood. "I'm afraid you're right, Arthur," she volunteered. "There is something objectionable —something I couldn't endure—about pursuing Warren back home." With mixed feelings I had heard her confess that she still liked, but more greatly feared, the man. "Let me go on with Rose as we intended. It won't be so long."

On leaving I kissed her. Hours afterwards, as I lay sleeplessly listening to the clicking rails and the momentary roar of a culvert or bridge, I was thinking of that kiss. To Grace it meant undoubtedly a kiss of contentment and suppressed passion; to me it was the kiss of formality, of affection certainly, but also of despair.

CHAPTER XXII

AMAZEMENT

JAMES O'Brien returned to St. George a week after I did. I shall never forget my feeling of strangeness when he greeted me, "Well, I saw our wives safely aboard the Muskoka steamer." Our wives!

"Oh! Yes, yes. Thanks very much," I recovered myself. "Grace—was she herself again?"

"Practically, yes. But—You've had her letters, haven't you?" Then, at my slow nod and look of preoccupation, "You're addressing her at Bala, I suppose?"

"Well—yes. Yes, that's the place I've got on an envelope here in my pocket." I wondered whether I should explain that the envelope was addressed to Mrs. O'Brien, begging her to see that Grace was well looked after and not exposed to any risks. It had never occurred to me to write to Grace herself. In a minute or two James had discovered that I had not yet spoken to anybody of our marriage. Nor could I explain how this was.

"But you'll have to go up and see Mr. Fenchurch at once, won't you?"

"See Mr. Fenchurch? Yes, of course, I should have thought of that. Thanks, James, I'll go this evening." Unconsciously I reached for my pad as

though noting a luncheon engagement. Then, looking up, I caught the look of puzzled wonderment on his face. "Grace will probably expect it?"

"Doubtless." The irony in the speaker's voice was natural enough. I must teach myself to realize matters.

Mr. Fenchurch, a keen iron-gray athletic type of man, received me cordially. His honest hands on my shoulders held me at full length while he regarded me with amused approval and reflection of that tenderness he felt for his daughter. I wished very much then that I could have reciprocated his enthusiasm.

He smoked two or three long cigars while tendering me a father-in-law's advice. The recital bore the imprint of previous rehearsal and I thought of his other married daughters. Its chief interest for me was the implied cataloguing of the failings and weaknesses which a modern young man was apparently assumed to possess.

"Contrary to the expectations of the average bridegroom," he told me, "his wife's nature and her tastes as to the intimate relationship of marriage do not correspond with his own. Women, especially a young woman, is a creature of extreme moderation, of moods and seasons." I thought of the lurking fire in those fluttering violet eyes and of my own aged and mellowed views, my tastes curbed forever it seemed by contact with Eunice Fox. "You will want to retain your wife's love,

Arthur," he continued, "and I want you to retain yours for her. To accomplish this the best motto I could suggest for you was my own, 'Always mine, always thine.' " Then, following an impressive silence, "You know what I mean, don't you, my boy?"

It was only after leaving him that I realized he had never mentioned Warren Syminton.

The following day O'Brien was to speak casually of the marriage to some of the brokers. Needless to record, the news at once became public property and I prepared for and rather dreaded the siege of formal congratulations. It never came. Many of my daily visitors omitted mention of the subject, and those who did speak of it used the telephone, stopped me in the street an instant, or rushed over for a word while somebody else was waiting at one side for an interview. The evident desire to avoid discussion brought home anew that, for me personally, men felt no friendship. Through it all Syminton's name was not heard. Was it, I mused, that an announced engagement was so light a thing, or was it that our mutual acquaintance, sniffing at the disagreeable ending to the drama, merely withheld comment as protection to the cheated hero?

As the O'Briens' friends the Fairmans were still in the city we spent one evening and a Sunday afternoon at their home. It was a surprise to learn that Doris, the twenty-year old daughter, was only

a stepchild of Fairman, because, between the two existed an attachment very touching to observe. At once I felt my interest strongly drawn by them. Doris herself somehow reminded me of Grace.

"He's a perfect old goose over her," Mrs. Fairman laughed. "My solicitude for Doris's social life and my anxiety as to her surroundings at the university are never sufficient. Daddy must always be just like a clucking old hen over her."

"At night, when we're alone in the study," Fairman confided to me, "I suffer keenly until I hear the front door close on her for the night. She always runs in to me where I am sitting, curls herself into my arms, lays her head on my shoulder, and narrates all the events of the evening or of the whole day if she hasn't seen me. I suppose there will be another Heaven somewhere, Burden, but in the meantime I know the feel of Doris's cheek against mine."

Fairman's happiness lent me a new taste of hope. Later in the night I wrote Grace the first real letter she was to receive from me. The endearment was profound, its expression reflecting my genuine tenderness for her. Fairman had, in short, proved how an affection outside the family relationship could become whole and absorbing. Unconsciously he had reflected my own heart. Misgiving had been at the bottom of my hesitation to be frank and natural with Grace; now I would give free rein to what was really my very worthy passion. This was for

me a glad discovery, a precious accomplishment on my life's path. It was the signal of dawn for which I had blindly yearned, a vague promise that the long night of Hendrick Charters' cold selfishness would pass. I was no longer in unhappy anticipation of the re-union with Grace. I would indeed embrace her with affection and warmth—the affection and warmth a father bestows on a returning daughter.

The last weeks of June were dry and hot. The Fairmans had left for the north. Mr. Fenchurch and his other daughter were also to be away for a few weeks. One morning O'Brien stepped in earlier than usual and unfolded a letter from his wife.

"The girls are commencing to worry about us," he said. "Been reading about last week's heat wave I suppose. Rose wants me to promise we'll go away for a few days—to Cranport or somewhere. Monday's Dominion Day and we might as well stop till over the Fourth."

My own letter, received that morning, had been of the same tenor, and although no thought of further holiday had occurred to me, I agreed to fall in with a plan which seemed to have general approval. Cranport was almost the only resort within striking distance for those obliged to remain in St. George all summer. We went down by the night train and by the following noonday, as the two of us sat enjoying the shore breeze, I thanked James for having insisted on the trip.

"I see here," he read from a newspaper advertisement which had caught his eye, "that there's a company playing 'In the Palace of the King' to-night. It's probably one of those scratch-together summer stocks, but what do you say if we try it?"

I glanced at the page over his shoulder and read, "Eglington All-Stars. Cranport Three Days Only. To-night 'In the Palace of the King'."

"Never heard of them!" I commented, "But if you want to go I'm agreeable."

It was towards the end of the first or second scene that I discovered my attention powerfully drawn to one of the female characters acting a lady-in-waiting. She had not yet spoken any lines. The all-day fresh air had left me drowsy, so that the consciousness of something unusual worked upon me only slowly. Then, from my sleepiness, I was startlingly aroused. The lady-in-waiting, who had retired to stand at one side of the stage, had unaccountably changed form. In a moment I was sitting bolt upright, my teeth were tight closed in a sort of angry disbelief, and I tried, as of old habit, to blink myself out of a fresh hallucination. But this time, in spite of the terror which was causing my arms to tremble, I realized that I did not want to be free of the phantom. There, directly before me (we were in the fifth row) clearer than the first picture I had seen of it, was the girl of the daguerrotype. It was the full figure, tight sleeves and wide flowing skirt of sixty years ago.

"Watch out, Arthur, I'm not rubber!"

In my agitation I had pressed an elbow against my friend's ribs. Turning a moment to apologize and noting the look of surprise on his face I composed myself in the seat so that I would attract no more attention. Looking again towards the wings at the right side of the stage I saw—the one who, I knew, would be there. My long search through the Middle West had been in vain, but here, by sheerest accident, I had found her. "Yes, I remember, too," I was trying to keep my mind in control, "that story told me by Mr. Sanford that her father and other members of the family had at one time or another been stage folk." Sarah, then, had taken up the old strain.

Through the remainder of that scene and the next I followed the progress of the play only to note entrances and exits of one character. The acting in general had not been good. Could it be, then, that I merely imagined the superior merit of the lady-in-waiting role? No! A woman behind me was whispering to her escort, "That girl taking the companion part, she's good anyway." At once the man replied, "Isn't she though! I find myself looking at her even when she's doing nothing." There were other whisperings and indications. At the end of the third act the lady-in-waiting had her best lines and I found myself thrilling with pride when the play was halted by one of those spontaneous outbursts of applause for individual

effort. As the curtain fell there was prolonged clapping. The first call revealed the entire company, the second one the four chief actors, finally the star. The applause continuing, the management could only experiment until finally the lady-in-waiting appeared alone. The result left no doubt as to the origin of the enthusiasm.

James O'Brien had been quite as demonstrative as any in his approval, while I remained silent. Nevertheless, when Sarah's eyes had swept the house in a manner to betray her pleasure and surprise, they rested deliberately and unmistakably on me. The spectacle of the one solemn and embarrassed face in the audience brought to her eyes, I thought, a look of pity or pain.

Sarah Geddings was still not a pretty woman. Her eyes were wonderful in expression and feeling, the poise easy and dignified, but the face in repose was care-worn and unyouthful. " 'Twas her pathos that got us, I think," James repeated to me later when describing the vision of her which seemed to remain. It was in fact to James that I was indebted for my own impression, because, from the moment the curtain rose until it fell and blotted her from view, I had seen nothing whatever in the whole theatre but the same face and eyes which had appeared to me in that realm of nothingness under the flickering dusty gas-lamp in Counsellor Street.

Perhaps she had not actually recognized me. I would in any event see her immediately after the

play. She must not evade me tonight. The allurement of love during fifty years of Hendrick Charters' life and the twenty-two of my own was drawing strangely at my heart. This awful mystery which clutched and weakened my soul whenever it recurred: the thing must be solved.

Then, before I knew what was happening, an usher was at my side and placing in my hand a note. It was unsealed and bore no address. Unfolding the paper I read, in a hurried feminine hand,

"The minister in Winnipeg, to whom I wrote in thanks, told of your visit there. I wanted to avoid you forever, but conscience—or what it may be—whispers that I have not been wholly just.

Sarah."

For the minute of reading, my ninety-two years of life had left me quite unprepared. Error and wisdom, suffering and doubt all vanished and were gone. I was at the beginning, standing on the threshold. Love! Love greeted, acknowledged, fulfilled! It was as though, in that one triumphant moment, my spirit on finally-found pinions of youth, rose into the ether of infinite freedom.

Then, as when the eaglet, unknowing of his bonds, feels the sudden sickening jerk of the chain on his claw, my swelling bosom sank and was faint.

Grace! Marriage! "Always mine, always thine." Here was punishment, the ghastly counter-revenge contrived by Fate on behalf of Warren Syminton.

What though a mutinous army of thoughts and protests besieged my brain: had I not proved to be the master of myself? Could Arthur Burden not be noble as well as commonly honest? Grace, loyalty, honour. This pious thought, perhaps the first of my selfish life, was to seal its future years.

Giving myself not one moment to reconsider, I scribbled on the reverse of her note,

"My bride returns to St. George in a fortnight. We will hope to see you whenever possible."

Signed and in the hands of the passing usher, I sat motionless as stone, mentally measuring the moments until she should have read. To James' nervous enquiry I pleaded that we seek our own quarters, even with the play unfinished.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOST

MIDNIGHT, Wednesday's dawn, noonday and afternoon—the hours passed in a monotony of cruel torment. Again and again James O'Brien sought particulars of the trouble until he did so mechanically, as I mechanically reassured him and pretended to forget.

It was late Wednesday night. I had induced James, protesting, to leave me. Somewhere under my coat of piety was the blood red urge of rebellion against life, the spark which sooner or later would spread fire and danger. I would allow myself to remain near her a little longer. A miracle might happen. *How much longer?* All at once a suspicion brought my brooding to a halt. I looked at my watch. Eleven forty-three. In a moment I was frantically searching the telephone book. "Main 441! Is that the theatre! Is the company—They *have* gone, *already*. The which? The midnight for the West."

I was somehow in the street, boarding a moving cab, bribing the driver to gallop his horse to Market Street station. It was two miles, but he thought he could make it. Then, the draw of the East Harbour bridge jammed. Men shouted to one another across the streak of black water. After

two or three minutes that maddened me the span moved. Now it was swinging shut. It locked. Why don't they raise the gates? Half a minute, fifty seconds. Nobody comes. Look at the stupid men carrying the heavy iron capstan bar out of the way. Why does a busy modern town give this employment to such infernal idiots? At last a leisurely devil is walking towards our end. The gate opens. We have lost four minutes.

Market Street Station had no policeman, no steel fence guarding the train platforms. I rushed through and over to Track 3. A man was just removing the train sign. "Yes, sure she's gone. Don't you see them red lamps down the yard?"

Gone! I stood where I had halted, alone and unnoticed. The few people about drifted away. My chest rose and fell heavily like a sea from which the hurricane has just swept on. "Gone!" I repeated. The red dots grew less, twinkled indistinctly and disappeared. With their fading faded my desperate purpose. For twenty minutes I had been a reckless lawless pursuer. I would have shocked the world, thieved or deceived if necessary, to gain her. But now, once more, I remembered, "Always mine, always thine!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HOME

WHEREAS other men might share grief by a recital of it, I must bear mine alone. In self-protection I had acquired the difficult faculty of expelling from my mind at will any undesirable thought, and it was this alone which enabled me to endure the days which followed return to my desk.

Although the passing of age was imperceptible from day to day, I had the unmistakable feeling of approaching life's high noon. Not as others approached it, from the thoughtlessness and buoyancy of youth, but backwards from the desolate old age of my care-laden childhood. That I was in reality marching one way physically and the other mentally was already apparent. Human activities which, fifteen years ago, seemed pure infantile vanity had now become more interesting matters. Certain types of people whose characters and motives I had at one time been able to interpret immediately now required a longer time to know and understand. Also, problems which in Bloomfield solved themselves as though intuitively seemed now to demand mental effort. I was, in short, a less efficient and experienced man. The tendency had been expecially noticeable during these five years I had

been in the brokerage business. In the course of reading I had come across the case of an early intelligence somewhat similar to my own. Sir William Rowan Hamilton, born in Dublin, in 1805, was adjudged the first mathematician of his day when he was but seventeen. By his fourteenth year he was conversant with no less than thirteen languages, in his sixth year he had mastered Greek and Latin. Although Hamilton lived to be sixty his outstandingly brilliant efforts took place in the first thirty years.

These and other philosophical reflections concerning the riddle of my life now came with more frequency and intensity and warned me that I must more carefully play a part in order to conceal a condition which, if known even now, must bring on me overwhelming notoriety.

During the two weeks before Grace's return to town I occupied myself in the search for a suitable home. To O'Brien, with whom I was in daily contact, so active an interest seemed gratifying if at the same time amusing. When he expressed his interest in the selection I finally made I was careful not to invite his personal inspection. It was a house built for two bachelor owners of an art emporium who had recently sold their business and gone abroad. It was a small place completely furnished and I was to have the option of renting or buying. My plan was to have it completely ready, to the details of victualling and a servant,

for the occupation of Grace immediately on her arrival in St. George. My zeal in contriving matters and my anxiety that nothing should spoil the plan really helped most in diverting my mind from the embarrassment which I expected to ensue when we should settle down.

"Your father," I whispered to her aside while we were still in the railway station, "will insist on our going home with him for dinner, but I am sending your trunks direct to our new home as I would like to have you there at once rather than anywhere else."

"I'll go of course!" she returned, at once full of trust. "I'm so glad we're not going anywhere else."

The old look of alluring timidity in the violet eyes had changed; the glance was brave and understanding. I found myself meeting it as frankly, then stooping and looking closer. Yes, certainly it was very childish and unafraid. Could it be—my heart swelled in gladness at the promise—could it be that she had come to recognize the parent-and-child attitude? No. There was soon a look of fleeting mischief, a glance of—how should I know it but I did—of desire, of excited anticipation. "I've wanted you, every hour of the twenty-four I've wanted you so!" she was murmuring under her breath while we were stepping back to join her family.

By common consent Grace and I had a cab to ourselves and, as Rose and James O'Brien were

coming to dinner, we were a procession of three carriages up to the Fenchurch place. Amongst the party could be felt the tingling jollity one expects at a wedding breakfast, but Grace did not forget my words and at half past eight she announced:

"Oh, but I'm dying to get to the new house and inspect those man-made arrangements."

"And change everything around!" laughed her sister.

The drama of our passing from under the paternal roof that first night must have been apparent to all. Grace lingered at her father's kiss and wept when he made reference to the dead mother. Adieux all round were said amid queer excitement. Mr. Fenchurch finally clasped my hand heartily while his grip, his look and his "Good-by, my boy!" was intended to recall our talk together.

The summer night was pleasant indeed as we made jogging progress in and out from the glare of the corner lights beneath the heavy dark of shade trees. As the carriage rode gently over the stony and rain-rutted streets, the driver on his box mechanically and sleepily waved the broken end of his whip on the unresponsive back of his horse. I was holding Grace's cool little hand and talking busily about our living room. "I want it to be the one thing in my house to remind you of the great home you are leaving," I whispered as we came to a stop.

It was a pretty building of dark red brick, the gables facing two streets. Ivy covered the space

between the windows of the lower floor. I had telephoned the English maid that she might go for the evening when we arrived, so, after opening the door and curtesying prettily to her new mistress, she demurely left.

Other than the kitchen and entrance space the greater portion of the lower floor consisted of the drawing room with an alcove in the rear. Electric light had recently been installed and, at my turn of the switch, the whole place was revealed. In gay admiration Grace exclaimed:

"How perfectly wonderful! Oh, I'm going to be happy, happy, happy with it all!"

As she stood there in her becoming summer clothes, hat in hand, her smiling attention flitting from one object to another I had time to admire anew the dignified girlish form, the pile of golden hair and the curving lips that moved in smiling expressiveness of her thoughts one upon another.

"What a girl you are!" I could not resist murmuring joyously to myself; then, with a gulp of realization, "If I might only make you free again—with a lover, happiness and motherhood still possible." "And you shall never know what you have cost me," I continued to address her mentally. ". . .what an ornament to a home! How proud I should be that you are here. . . What a terrible injury I've done you. I can never atone but I shall try to love the things that you love, the women, and the men, that you love," for, all at once, her future was very

dear to me. "Fairman makes Doris happy and—"

Grace had turned quickly and put her hands on my shoulder. "You've planned all this, for me? Why, Arthur, I couldn't have imagined it. You are a real husband after all."

And what had I just been telling myself! For the minute I had been fool enough to fancy everything was understood and ourselves settled in harmony and contentment. That momentary dwelling on the word husband, the rise of excited colour in her cheeks, and the sudden quivering pressure of her hands had undeceived me. I had a feeling of guilt, both for what I had just been thinking and for what I was about to do.

"Come along then, I must show you your room." And without venturing to glance at her again, added, "May I run ahead?"

A hall extended from front to back of the upper floor. The space which should have been three rooms was divided into four. The one overlooking the garden I had planned for Grace, its door immediately opposite that of the maid. At the further end of the hall was my own apartment, the most remote of all, facing the street.

At the blue hangings and wall-paper Grace again exclaimed in delight, but when her eyes swiftly took in the other furniture, there came a hollowness in her words of approval, a sudden descent of spirit. I could feel it, while I struggled with the huge strap

of a trunk, could feel her looking speculatively at the one dressing-table and the single bed. Her continued words of interest, in their pretended warmth, seemed to accuse me. My involuntary glance in her direction revealed a gentle frown; in momentary silence her lower lip was drawn in by the small teeth.

Presently I had completed my task, the trunk top came open and I joined my attention with hers in mock fascination at the feminine articles within. Finally, risking no further pauses of talk, I interposed;

"Now don't you want to come and see my room?"

"Yes, of course! Where is it?"

When we had walked the length of the hall and entered she occupied herself almost at once laying out the things on my dressing table, lowering the bed-head bracket and other womanly solicitations. Least of all was Grace a meddler but the activity gave occupation to a confused mind. I talked, but without expecting her to respond. My hand mirror she breathed upon and polished with her handkerchief, rearranged the neckties, which were strung carelessly through a little hoop, so that the gayer colours came to the front,and ended playfully, "You'll have to get a little dash of colour here and there, Arthur. It's all lovely, but—Well," looking up at me courageously above her emotions, "just a little bit oldish, for you. See what I mean? A young man like you will be more cheerful with things

—well, not too precise, too set. We're not forty yet, you know."

"No, Grace, I suppose we're not." My sigh just then was impossible to suppress, so I essayed to end the ordeal. "Do you feel like going down to the veranda for a little while? It's still warm up here but it will be cooler soon, if you want to retire."

The small veranda overhanging the garden had a rustic cushioned seat. As Grace mechanically drew her long skirt aside and sank to it I was at once relieved and depressed. For to-night embarrassment was probably at an end but the impulsive girlishness of half an hour ago was gone. Grace was somehow a year older. As we talked now there was a painful tone in her voice, an involuntary abruptness to her brief sentences. The trailing note of pleasure was gone. I laid my arm about her shoulders and fancied they trembled. When, at last, she began to speak freely it was not to her husband but to Arthur Burden, the mysterious figure of the stock exchange. "You must be wonderfully clever," a cold emphasis on that word, "clever man. The brokers all talk about you on the smallest excuse. They say that you just divine things that others take a week to see. Rose O'Brien is sure you're going to make a great name. She seems very proud of knowing you so well. I should be proud of you too."

It was then that I knew how well she had understood. Her thoughts, already, were turning from what she herself felt to what the world felt.

"I think I am tired now," she concluded, speaking lightly. "I know you'll tell me to go to bed."

Darkness happily covered me while I framed the words to reply, "Why of course, dear. I expected after your journey, you'd be even more tired."

Only the small light from the hall guided us through the living-room, where I stopped her and kissed her tenderly. As she reached the stairs I called out, "I'm going to read a little while, but if you're asleep I'll try not to disturb you as I pass."

As quickly as I could I reached for the security of my chair. "I am on the bridge at last," I breathed heavily, staring hard and unseeingly at the open newspaper in my hands. "The crossing may be hard but there are no longer any dangers."

Mounting the stairs half an hour later I passed her tightly closed door, entered my own room and was winding my watch from unconscious habit and placing it under my pillow when I chanced to notice her arrangement of articles on the dresser. "Yes, I suppose things are fixed and set with me." I paused to look around. "How did those two coloured ties happen to get there at all?" A gift no doubt which, from disuse, I had forgotten. "She is right, my ways are not the ways of a bridegroom of twenty-two. How sedately I walked up those stairs just now; how carefully I grasped the bannister." But during the succeeding hour, while sleep was coming to me like a troubled and belated tide, and after casting back to old events, I remembered

that I was certainly less solemn and heavy-footed than ten years ago.

Then another strange thing happened. As my eyelids closed for the hundredth time to rest my worried sightless staring into black space there came a faint stirring and a rustle at my bedside. Distinctly I felt a movement of air as a soft touch on my forehead. Doubtless a night wind through the room, but dramatized by the simultaneous receipt of a greeting. Nothing was actually spoken; it was as if the words, the phrase, had been thrown into my memory and left there to be gone back for, picked up and read—deciphered gradually, for I felt somehow as though I were having it from one who had first received it vicariously for me. But with the reading came the tone, inflexion and feeling of my soundless visitant of months ago.

"Peace! Peace to thy valiant heart!"

CHAPTER XXV

TRIAL

AFTER a moment or two around the garden I came in to breakfast and faced Grace across the table. Her smile was staid and calm. I thought there were touches of powder showing under the blue eyes. They did not glow nor twinkle as they had done yesterday. She turned with slow, almost matured, politeness to the coffee-pot as though glad to have a diverting duty. Several times I spoke but perceived that she found it hard to listen. It occurred to me that perhaps this first meeting across our own table was an occasion to which she had looked forward with some feeling of joy. I felt then like a thief.

So it went, day to day. My absence in the city, the receiving of her father for dinner one evening, my own parents another; the O'Briens and other intimates who called and invited us to their homes; many things to be bought and planned. Intrusion was the last thing of which Grace would be guilty, though I saw the little kindnesses of her hand daily on returning to my room. The English maid looked puzzled glances at us from time to time. Commonplaces of talk became easier, from their very necessity.

It was a fortnight after Grace's coming before another evening found us at home alone. Rain had been falling so that we remained indoors. I read aloud to her while she occupied herself quietly. After she had retired, with her usual calm good-night, she called me up to help her with some tradesmen's accounts. Using her dressing-table as a desk we sat side by side while I explained the use of figures. Although I enjoyed doing so I shortly perceived the impossibility of keeping her mind on the subject. I playfully put my arm around her and whispered comfortingly, "Don't worry, you'll learn all about it in time. Forget it for to-night and have a nice long sleep and bring those roses back to your cheeks."

As I stood to go she turned impulsively and put her hands about my neck. "Arthur, why do you always leave me? Am I not your wife?"

Slowly I removed her arms, kissing either hand slowly, as I realized the situation. Often had I rehearsed words for it but preparation failed me. It was like being tempted by a beautiful daughter who did not know who she was and must not be told. I would have picked her up and carried her about like a child to soothe her agitation but knew that it would not be safe. It was not merely that I was more than twice her age. It was not only that, to me, Grace was the being who had taught me human sympathy and fatherly affection, and then been cast accidentally on me as wife. That which held me rigidly back was—I suddenly knew it—the past,

the guilty sordid past of Eunice Fox, and—although I had never dared tell myself before—the future, Sarah Geddings. Between these two my wife's allurement as a woman fell before me innocent and unthinkable.

"My dear," I struggled huskily to explain the unexplainable, "my dear, dear girl, don't ask me that. Of course you are my wife. I am your husband, if unworthily. I want to look after you and to love you always, but I am not—not an ordinary man, Grace. Some day I hope that things may be better and happier."

How matters mended themselves after that God only knows. But life did become better; there seemed to grow up between us an understanding of silence.

I had prayed about it. My shrewd old mind had always recognized the need and the power of prayer: not the addressing of images in a church, or the belief that an angel hovers over me to bear away requests to heaven, but an opening of my mind to the promptings of the inner soul spark which exists before and after the body and which makes us one with the Infinite. If a man wished to employ electricity he would not look longingly and effortlessly towards the clouds where electricity has its origin, rather would he seek the telegraph office. I found comfort in the simplest of daily prayers, "Lord, give me courage to serve Grace, my business and the world outside."

She grew in time to look at me from the violet depths of her eyes and to regard me with a new and different frankness, a frankness of pain to be sure but also of faith that, whatever I was holding back, it was not an unworthy secret. "I think I understand, Arthur, my wise friend!" she told me once. "If you had scorned my infatuation it would have perhaps been harder, but better. You did not want to marry me; you did it only because—because I was determined that I would be yours. I must be content."

Like a hurt child, a beautiful bird whose voice is stilled, she would accept the lot that was hers.

Then, one memorable evening, the thing occurred which I might have known would occur.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANNUNCIATION

OUR social pursuits quickly became the tastes and whims of Grace. Acquaintances she liked became our friends, restaurants and summer gardens the whereabouts of which I should probably never have learned became our haunts. Whereas, in the theatre, little but drama and mystery had ever attracted me, we looked forward, with the return of the season, to comedy and the lightest of light operas. It seemed the least I could do for Grace and it suited me.

In cultivation of the Fairmans alone I exercised an influence. The love of Fairman for his stepdaughter Doris held a fascinating interest, and we could always count on her presence. Not only did the girl take naturally to her father's friends, but she apparently required that he approve hers. If he was to be out it was nearly always to accompany Doris. Even to her class dances he was inveigled. Young men attentive to the daughter swiftly learned that the way to favour was through the father. This full measure of faith as between parent and child seemed indeed the ideal for which I longed.

A curious revelation came to me one evening at their home. It was the birthday of Doris, and Grace and I were invited to dinner along with three or four

college students of each sex. Fairman had arranged that his surprise gift should arrive just as we rose from the table. It was a gramophone, then a comparatively new toy in private houses, and at once there was a clamouring to hear it. From their cots upstairs two children visiting the Fairmans clattered impetuously and irrepressibly down to share the excitement.

"You must stand so you can look right into the horn," cried somebody and, as the horn inclined upward from the machine, the children demanded to be lifted into range. Most of the young people had already sought companionship in the upholstered window-seats and seemed content to remain, but Doris came to sit on the high arm of her father's chair. A youth named Carl Strong hovered near, taking advantage of her preoccupation to devour her with his adoring eyes. Leslie, the older child, had come to me with hands outstretched to be lifted to a table-top. When the music began I was standing with my arms protectingly about the little night-gowned figure. As the child's rapt wonderment grew the tiny arms came tighter around my neck while her cheek pressed closer against mine. A flood of sudden warm affection came over me and with it the realization of the nature of my love for Grace. The smooth confiding warmth of the child's cheek lent me a peculiar rapture. It was, even as Fairman had said, as though there was little else to be desired in the world. It was the

same rapture I wanted to feel with Grace's head nestled childishly against my own, except that this one was free from doubts and misgivings. Glancing a moment beyond the wide happy eyes of Leslie I noticed Doris roguishly kiss her step-father, and it came to me strongly that, were Grace the figure in my clasp instead of little Leslie, my reaction to her kiss would have been exactly that of the smiling Fairman. Carl Strong's eyes had seen and at once I felt regarding him a feeling of indulgence and sympathy; a critical and exacting sympathy, but approval of his attitude none the less, approval that he should be a worshipper of Doris.

Then followed the queerest impression of all. My look wandered to Grace where she stood alone close to the horn, her back toward the rest of us. Mrs. Fairman had the younger child Fred beside her. In their fixed intentness everybody else in the room seemed somehow paired. There were significant whisperings from the window-seat, Carl Strong waited his chance, Leslie and I breathed happily together. "Why," it struck me, "is not some young man paying attention to Grace? Doris has the devotion of her father," my thoughts ran loose, "but she has also the companionship and the love of young people. Why isn't Grace being invited to dances, being the center of a laughing group, being devoured by the eyes of some handsome boy?"

The music ceased, there was applause, a babble of voices, and I was awake to the silly thoughts I had been

encouraging. Grace was a wife, a married woman; how odd to expect people to suppose her my daughter. But several times the fancy recurred while the clasp of little Leslie's arms was still on me, the innocent velvet of her face against my cheek. I kept turning to Fairman. My feeling for him was of almost passionate fellowship. Each time my eyes sought and found Grace, I read on her face the look of resigned happiness, a patient mask to an unexpressed sense of loneliness. I winced at this as would any parent who turned from the healthy care-free children of others to recognize in his own some serious shortcoming, a defect perhaps for which the parent was responsible. "If only the wrong could be righted," I murmured hopelessly against fate, "or if even the present position could be made happier by clearing away the doubts."

My thoughts returned to Fairman's recital of the delight with which he sat up for Doris's return after an evening or a day away from him, of how she ran to him and, safe in his arms, bubbled or sobbed out her secrets.

It was a short time afterwards that Mrs. Fairman invited Grace, Rose O'Brien and another friend to attend a musical event. "It's to be a hen party," Grace had told me. "We're going to an afternoon tea together, dine in the city and then go up to the hall for nine o'clock." Grace had laughed cheerfully when speaking of it and I had greatly rejoiced with her, for glee had been all too

rare. "The cab will drop each one of us at her own door," she added, "so you needn't worry at all."

The evening found me in a state of restless excitement. I had planned that dinner at the club would shorten the time of waiting, but instead had found myself home even earlier than usual. The lonely meal and the sight of Grace's empty chair were productive of many sighs. I wanted her there, but still more I wanted her to enjoy herself. Although the whole plan had been painstakingly made clear to all of us I found myself telephoning both Fairman and O'Brien to confirm it and to enquire whether either of them had possibly heard from the ladies since they started.

At half past seven I pictured the party dining at the Vandervoort and wondered what they would be ordering. They always had lobster at those places. One of the broker's wives had contracted ptomaine poisoning after eating canned shellfish. I remembered perfectly the husband's account of the sufferings from the disorder, and worked myself into such an apprehensive state of mind that I was forced to think of something else.

Grace had laughingly emphasized the feminine nature of the occasion but I saw in imagination the dining-room of the Vandervoort, my wife's table surrounded by those stag parties for which the place was noted. Almost certainly some of the jolly bachelors would know her, and she still possessed that timid illusive beauty so enticing to men. If

she would only accept attentions! With this thought I paused and at once fell to brooding, growing resentful and impatient that Grace was perhaps falling behind other girls. Every young woman wants gallantry, clever compliments, secrets whispered into her ear.

At eight-thirty I knew they would be getting into a cab to go to the hall. Mentally I traced their progress through the various streets and to where the railway lines were crossed at Kentwater Avenue. I thought of the accident there last year. A cab had been struck by a shunting engine and dragged a hundred feet along the tracks, the occupants missing death by a miracle. Perhaps the same thing would happen again. I allowed myself to suffer agonies, for there was something uncanny in my remembering it just then. The enamelled iron clock on our mantle-piece struck nine and nine-thirty, and no word had come from the hospital. I was a fool to waste my evening this way. They were simply enjoying themselves at the concert. It would be over in an hour. For the twentieth time I started reading the evening paper, but the first sweeping glance across the front page caused me to lay it down. There was sure to be a report of an accident like the one on Kentwater Avenue last year, and I could not stand it just now.

I found myself wishing for Grace's mother to be with us. We might have reassured one another. Grace's mother was not even a memory to me,

but what would she be like if I did know her? What sort of mother would I like for Grace? Another moment or two and I was dreaming in earnest. Yes, the spirit of motherhood lived in the profound darkness of those black eyes. How supremely wonderful she had appeared that night in Counsellor Street. Any woman who had been so devoted to a father could not be otherwise than a splendid mother. Sarah had that virtue along with all the others written in her marvellous features. Then, as though passing to a dream within a dream, "And she loved me from the first moment I saw her when she was nineteen. How had I ever, ever bartered that supreme happiness, with its priceless promise of parenthood, for the winning of money and ambition. No wonder the world shrugged and turned away from the dwarfed soul of Hendrick Charters."

"Happy be, Beloved!" came the soft mental murmuring I was not to comprehend till minutes after the accompanying light brushing of my lips had passed. "What sweet contentment even I enjoy in conjuring up so great a loyalty."

It was the striking of eleven that opened my eyes. I stared about incredulously, trying to bring past and present together, and finally, with conscious blinking-away effort, forced out the past, and in that instant realized that the soundless voice spoke not to me but to that Hendrick Charters I had just now been.

The discovery was not disturbing, but I could no longer be still, and kept going to the window

or making absurd attempts to read. The solitary stroke indicating half-past eleven. "Ah! She'll be here any minute." During the next quarter of an hour I had opened the front door several times to look up and down the street. Grace would laugh if she could see me! More than once I had put on my coat, the last time saying aloud. "I've got to do something. If she must smile she must. Something has certainly happened to that cab. I'm going out anyway."

After pacing up and down the block above and below the house there came a distant sound. Wheels? Yes. I hurried back to our corner. There it came now, under that farther light, the lumbering one-horse hack. Like a shamed school boy I hurried back into the house and settled myself into the largest of the easy chairs in the spot where, all day, I had been picturing myself welcoming her home. The newspaper was opened wide in my hands as though it had my whole attention. The carriage had now stopped. What was that noise? Only the driver closing the door. Grace must already be standing on the sidewalk. "Good night, dear," came Mrs. Fairman's voice. "We must do it often now." The wheels were moving again; Grace's step on the outer stairs. My heart thrilled with joy. Now she was at the door. It was unlocked ready for her. She was inside, calling my name. I wanted to run to her, but instead managed to call out in cheery welcome, "Come along in and tell me

all about it." Turning the shade of the reading lamp to dim its light in a thick curtain I awaited Grace in the partial darkness. When I opened my arms she came quickly up to stand at my shoulder. Impulsively I gathered her on to my knees and insisted that she settle herself there in comfort as I meant to hear every detail.

Diffidently at first but with gradually increasing enthusiasm, she told me about it. There had been a real adventure, too. A pair of Rose O'Brien's bachelor friends dining at the Vandervoort had asked permission to join the party. Mrs. Fairman had then been responsible for inviting the young men to accompany them to the musicale. It seemed, after all, that there were to be a number of men there. Guardedly, then with less timidity and finally with eagerness, Grace confided that she had enjoyed the young men very much indeed. At length the end of the adventure was reached, after many goings-back for forgotten or confessional details. But Grace did not stop. She drifted on amongst memories of the past, the beaux, the flirtations and the fantastic dreams of maidenhood. Incredible as it may sound, I am convinced that, in the sweet lonely darkness of that hour, we had completely forgotten that, legally, we were man and wife. Smoothing her hair and silently stroking her round arm, I listened with closed eyes to the girlish confessions that seemed to bring us together and heaven so near.

Finally, from the depths of my wandering contentment, I must have spoken. There was silence; even at a time of long silences it was too long. Grace's limbs had stiffened in my clasp. There was a low, nervous, alarming cough, and she was all at once on her feet. She stepped, half fell, across to a second chair. Yet only partly alive to what was happening, I watched her bury her face in the cushion-back and heard her sob. Then, slowly, almost laboriously, I succeeded in recalling the words I had spoken. "Yes, yes, my dear little girl," I had said, "we must find you a good husband. How about one like Carl Strong?"

What indeed had I done? It was but honesty of soul, but the terrible thing was that I had spoken it. I felt the impulse now to go to her, but what could I do? Denial would be utter cowardice, explanation impossible. I felt desolated. Numbness held me in my chair even had I the will to act. All that I had wished her to know (but feared for her to know) I had stupidly told her. Was it fate? And what would she do now? The sobs were long and deep. I could only watch her, and suffer with her. After a long while the moaning grew all at once quieter and stopped. My eyes opened as she turned again toward me, dried hers, and regarded me searchingly, but no longer despairingly. There must have been something compassion-inspiring in my face for her expression became soft and patiently

restful. In the semi-darkness we seemed to be reading one another's inmost thoughts.

She rose, in a motion as if leaving the room—a tentative declaration of leaving the room I understood it. From my seat I turned yearningly towards her, opened my arms once more wide and spoke a single word. The next moment she was in them, her arms about my neck, her warm red lips at my ear. "Forgive me, my good wise friend. I understand—I understand everything now."

So, curling peacefully and childishly within my protecting arms, she listened with me while the clock on the marble mantle struck out the midnight hours.

CHAPTER XXVII

ZENITH

GRACE Fenchurch and I had lived under the same roof for five years. Our friends probably credited me with being an ideal husband. Grace was given anything she wanted. My devotion was constant. I had no bad habits or counter-attractions. That, as a husband, I was essentially a failure was the vital secret which she was much too loyal to have disclosed. Naturally our method of life brought its embarrassments; each time we travelled and during our summer vacations special arrangements had to be made. Particularly would difficulties have arisen on those occasions when we were entertained as house guests in other cities had not Grace herself assumed the initiative at such times in her tactful way. Although she never knew in what manner I was so much older than I seemed, she came graciously and quickly to accept it. So thoroughly did she adapt herself to the condition that, oddly as it eventuated, I grew to find myself the embarrassed one.

At the time of her marriage a keen-witted joyful girl of twenty-two, she ripened very rapidly in the ensuing years. A secret burden will age even a man, and in Grace's case the constant necessity for being on guard to prevent betrayal seemed to bring

maturity to her mind and strength to her face. Those all but dampened fires stirring in the depths of her violet eyes ceased somehow to suggest a maiden's unknown fears, but impressed the beholder rather as currents of reserve power. The childish mannerisms so often found in a pampered girl before marriage had all vanished and, in short, the womanhood which had been delayed was achieved with a rush. Grace had developed ten years while five were passing.

On the other hand my own life, it may safely be said, had become ten instead of five years younger. Even at the time of my marriage I had been feeling old age recede. The process is more difficult to describe than that of departing youth. I suppose it was simply that the thoughts of age, one by one, fell away from me. The self-suggestion that, as my twenty-third year went out, I had become forty-eight instead of forty-nine was doubtless a powerful factor in my consciousness. At twelve years old, when I was actually sixty, I had been drawn by men of that age; now, in Arthur Burden's twenty-seventh year, and when life and buoyancy and gathering enthusiasm told me that I was forty-five, I was no longer ill at ease amongst men and women of forty-five or even forty. Often indeed had I paused to reason out this powerful, if in the past unwelcome, conviction that I was advancing steadily towards youth. The lifetime of Arthur Burden was plainly a fact, it admitted of no denial.

Yet, somewhere within me, born outside my identity and before its existence, I felt this invisible compelling force pushing me forever against the current of time. For what purpose, who knew?

During recent years, however, such thoughts had troubled me less. My early life of cheerless solitude, of brooding over my friendlessness, and the hopeless mystery of it all must have had a tendency to hold me to that old age which was my birthright. But events had galvanized my soberness. I had sought and crossed the path of Sarah Geddings with its disturbing consequences, Eunice Fox had wakened me into a sort of second childhood of sex, and finally Grace had come to bring to my hard mind the balm of affection, the hope for the welfare of another, not to mention my entry, through her, into the social sphere of youth. Naturally I made up, as it were, for lost time.

Our ages were drawing closer together. Whether or not this might in the fulness of time have shaped matters otherwise I cannot feel sure. Events were destined to intervene and to render such decision unnecessary.

Certainly the presence of Sarah Geddings in my mind could not be called hope. Something like her presence (not actually her presence) still came to me at moments, particularly moments of dropping to sleep, as might have come the visits of a watchful parent. I sometimes wondered if these dreams—product of the sleeper's brain—were a reflection of

the past or of the future. The belief that we two would, some time and in some life, meet, amounted perhaps to a superstition with me. But any intention of pursuing it in a practical way never had a place in my mind. Loyalty to Grace was the only concrete worth-while thing life had brought me. The only domestic content was content of her.

When Fairman's daughter Doris was suddenly engaged and married Fairman was the gainer by acquisition of a son and the realization of cherished hopes for a daughter's happiness. In the confidence and dependence Grace rested in me I had come to think of myself as possessing a daughter. But what had I to hope for? I could never acquire a son. One way or the other failure or heartbreak must be my lot. The joy of having Grace come home alone to me was seldom realized for, like Doris, she always wanted to have me present, even on occasions when I might not share the entertainment. For these days I had my reward in eager confessions, probably whispered to me in the cab going home. Perhaps the adventure of a man confiding his own love affairs, or some woman had asked advice concerning impending trouble with her husband. And there were flirtations. How we both enjoyed them! In the waltz it might have been that some handsome man, overcome by her lovely presence, had stolen a kiss, premeditated or otherwise. "Oh, I knew perfectly well he was going to," she laughed one night after a particularly enjoyable ball. "I repulsed

him the last time he tried, but to-night, when he was asking me to dance, his eyes were perfectly honest about it." And when I ventured a word of advice, she whispered back with fearless candour. "Yes, dear Arthur, I'm afraid I did like it. He's a fine man. I could let him love me, were it not that everybody would be so shocked."

Still another time, when we were speaking of the O'Briens, "James is a perfect old dear, and it wouldn't do any good to tell Rose what an incorrigible spoon he is." Then—it was one spring when I was urging the advantages of the same holiday resort we had visited the year before—she made me a confession of another sort. "It's on account of that Mr. Palliser. I'm afraid of him. I suppose it's an absurd fear but some way his eyes tell me that he knows all about Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Burden. Of course that wouldn't matter so much but," and there was scarcely an instant's pause, "he wants me. He says he'll have me. He told me everything, that night we walked on the pier together. He's waiting to meet us there in August. I won't go."

And so, in these and other ways, the artificial relationship of father and daughter became established.

Confidences were never urged, or even invited, and sometimes I speculated on the possibility of there being the one important secret which even a daughter does not confess. From the Fairman home,

Carl Strong, the student, had vanished and, when the man favoured of fate appeared, Fairman was kept in the dark until the matter had been settled.

About this time, too, another significant event in my inverted course of life was to occur. Throughout my childhood the words judgment and deduction had for me almost no meaning. That the solution of problems would come into my mind was as natural to me as that, to another boy, he should eat when hungry. It was this entire absence of hesitation in reaching a decision that had so impressed the heads of our firm in New York. With them, then and afterwards, and also with the brokers in St. George, my pronouncement on a business matter carried the seal of authority. Although disagreement was sometimes expressed, subsequent events always had sustained me to the last detail. Suggestions that I be utilized in the larger sphere at head office were continually being made during my earlier years, and my refusal was based on objection to facing the distasteful sort of notoriety which had embarrassed my childhood. Inasmuch as it is human weakness to over-estimate the capacity of infant or other prodigies, I gained, at twenty, a reputation for sagacity which probably would not have been considered phenomenal in a man of fifty.

However this may be, it is true that, during my late twenties, the attitude towards me had undergone a change. Was it perhaps merely the case that faith in myself suffered from the belief that

youth was succeeding age? The advice contained in my weekly market letters was still eagerly sought but it was less daring than formerly. On certain matters I hesitated to commit myself at all. Without doubt my unusual mental powers were on the wane.

In the summer of 1905 President Roosevelt had called a peace conference between the warring nations of Russia and Japan. On the fate of this gathering hung the future course of various domestic and foreign securities. After careful consideration of all the contributing factors I declared myself quite without belief in any success attending the efforts of Mr. Roosevelt. My weekly letter warned our investors that the conference would certainly fail. Then came the decision, the complete agreement and triumph of Mr. Roosevelt. The confidence of my wide circle of readers had received a rude shock. Of course all writers of stock letters were at times astray in their prophecies. As a matter of fact several stock-broking men had committed the identical error I had made on this occasion. But my failure was something different. Newspapers and the man on the street would forget in future to refer to me as "wizard". Henceforth I was merely an experienced agency manager.

It was not perhaps that I really knew less this year than last, or that my brain grew incapable of holding experiences of the past. Rather it may have been that the accumulating spirit of youth

disregarded caution, encouraged extremes of reasoning and alienated confidence by ill-considered lines of action. Also, while other men valued and revered the past, it was something I sought to shed altogether, something which, in many ways, I hated.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DECADE

I AM now looking back on events from the year 1914.

Commencing with the time I had read the words of Professor Murray in his private memoranda I had kept a note-book in which were detailed with some minuteness the various phases of my mental growth, or regression, or what it might be. It had seemed to my always judicial mind that this was something I owed to science. The volume was a small but thick book bound in good leather, its covers secured by a heavy nickel lock containing an ingenious device by which the proprietor's key, ground to his own design, could shoot the bolt and secure the mechanism against any other key. It was an arrangement well suited to my secretive mind. Information was noted yearly, monthly or oftener. This hard black book was to me at once confidential friend, father confessor, and tireless receiver of my inmost thoughts. Undoubtedly it was at times the safety-valve of reason.

From the year 1908 to 1914 the tiny key lay in my pocket, its barrel filling with dust and lint. Of these years there seemed nothing to relate. Extreme loneliness of mind, a state of depressed ambition, and a heavy yearning of the heart served

as a counter to the days of youth being added unto me. As already related, my early years of Hendrick Charters' vanishing age had held in check the mental growth of Arthur Burden; later, during my seven years' companionship with Grace, I had not only overtaken but had even got in advance of the tide of my life.

Then, when the end came, when I was awakened, heart-broken and resigned, from my dream, I sat down quietly, as it were, for the years to overtake me.

How well Grace had become a daughter to me I can never forget. But even a daughter must grow, develop and dream, and finally worship other gods. The season of perfect trust and fondness was longer than I deserved but at last it came to an end. The bubbling spring of unsparing confessions was all at once stilled and, instead, a succession of sighs and unseeing silences. With undiminished affection she sought, almost daily, the comfort of my eager arms; nobody had taken my place as loving guardian, but some absorbing interest, a momentous doubt had lifted its ugly wordless head between us.

There were many thousands of people in St. George who by class or circumstance would be forever apart from our lives, but that we should from time to time encounter Warren Syminton was inevitable. The reasons in my heart for shrinking from re-acquaintance with him did not apply to Grace, who frankly acknowledged him as fellow-guest when circumstances required it. From her

discussion I gathered that she even found some of the old sweetheart charm in the now much-sought bachelor. Then suddenly she became timid of him. Not wishing to deprive her of any pleasure, however slight, I ventured to tell her by implication not to mistake my silence for disapproval. But she heard me with absent-minded attention and merely smiled. Immediately she joined in my avoidance of the man, and of Warren we spoke no more.

A year later had come the blackness of 1907 into the financial complexion of the nation, and troubled men everywhere sought the trust and sympathy of wife or loved one. When credit had again supplanted panic such men and women were of necessity closer for the trial. Though I saw less of Grace during the tense, over-wrought weeks, she was always ready as staunch help-meet. Indeed I marvelled at the insight, the force and logic of decision which she brought to bear on the vexed issues of the hour. She had never attempted independent study of business questions, she had never before taken men's affairs as her own care. Something in the intensity of the crisis had evidently brought it about.

At the conclusion of that troubled year, and as though a declaration of trust in the coming of 1908, men's playful spirits were to the fore more than usual at New Year. Cities from one end of the country to the other seethed with dinners, balls and wild demonstrations to welcome in at least a fabricated creation of hope.

DECADE

The formal opening of the first unit of a great hotel in St. George was being celebrated in dazzling brilliance, and excitement was tensing towards the great hour. The details of that evening are gone from me but I remember a bell tinkling the warning of midnight, the call for the revellers to gather. I looked round anxiously for Grace. Notwithstanding my customary lack of interest in dancing and Grace's participation in it, I generally knew exactly where she was at a given moment. I had watched her disappear, a minute or two since, down a carpeted hall leading to a ladies' cloak room. She had not returned. She would be late for the culminating event and would be sorry; I must seek her out.

The preludes to reckless pandemonium were already apparent. For example I met with a playful but vigorous resistance to my leaving the room, and only after explanations, insistence and difficulty did I succeed. In the comparative quiet of the passageway rumblings of the impending outburst followed me as I sped towards the cloak-room entrance. Even the young lady attendant, I noticed, had deserted. But the opening boom of midnight would be upon us any instant and I must find Grace without delay.

The better to make my voice heard I drew aside the curtains before speaking her name. At the same instant a clang from the main corridor of the hotel sounded and the whole universe seemed to break into din. My anxious "Grace, Grace!" was drowned

out. Most especially did it seem lost on the ears of the pair I beheld before me, standing in the small space left by the maze of furs and wraps. Grace, my wife, with blissfully closed eyes and upturned mouth lay unresistingly in the arms of Warren Syminton who, I perceived, was engaged in bestowing on her a passionate kiss for each clang of the great noisy gong without.

Only the father who has lost a daughter to another can realize my feelings as I stood there clasping the curtains and leaning inertly against the side-post of the little door. It lasted for minutes.

This, then, was the real source of my wife's sympathetic grasp of the stock exchange panic in October. What was it that reminded me, on the instant, of a chance remark of a broker on the amazing cheerfulness and courage with which Syminton was standing up at that terrible time. This was the whole solution of the daughterly sighs and silence. Before me was being enacted the re-birth of passionate love, the great healing of the great wrong.

At length, a smiling pride of happiness on his face, Syminton's hand moved from its support of Grace's waist to tilt her head upward, trying to coax her eyes to open and meet his own. In her contentment she seemed loath to move her lids, but smiled childishly as though aware of his purpose in the gentle swaying of her head to his fingers.

Something inspired the man to glance in my direction. Instantly his attention came from the eyes he was trying to coax open to mine. He uttered a sound as of a brief groan, his face hardened to a defiant thundercloud and his muscles seemed to stiffen in a fearless defense. Another second and Grace was looking at me also, but in that second I had no concern whatever as to Syminton. Shrewdly, searchingly and with less than a flashing suspicion of doubt, I watched. Now! This moment! my fate was in the balance. The success or failure of my years of affection and care. Then my breath came involuntarily, in a glad gasp. I looked again to make certain. Yes, it was beyond mischance, quite beyond. Triumph! In that single, confident, loving and unafraid blush there rose up about me the whole bountiful harvest of my trust and love. Like a child (and in love we are all children) she had blushed to find her great but innocent secret torn open. Never had her face looked sweeter, purer, and there was no distrust in the brimming, mysterious violet depths, no sense of guilt, shame or regret.

Slowly I turned to Syminton. His defiance was manly, honest. We faced one another for many seconds, and each second was long. The shade of amusement must have crossed my features as I detected the reluctant acknowledgment of rebuke he received from my look, and which mellowed his sternness and finally banished the short-lived return of instinctive suspicion.

Now she was moving, Grace my wife, the maiden, standing again on the threshold of life. No longer could she resist the joyful impulse of the limbs that would have sent her forward to me.

"Arthur, O, Arthur, my— " she was coming to me with arms ready.

I raised an arresting hand, a sudden sternness in my whole attitude. Much, very much, of the routine of the future might depend on what was done and said—and left undone and unsaid—to-night. Motioning her to change her direction, and at the same time pointing commandingly towards Warren, I groped amongst littered chairs to find a seat. For a minute, two minutes, three, I sat in silence, a silence electric with rapid thought. A hand over my eyes, the better to shut out the emotional sight of these two, to shut out all the emotional world, so that I might be alone with legal phraseology, with the law's requirements, so that I could visualize the future of my beloved ward. "No collusion!" I warned myself sternly, "no collusion! There must be no condoning, reconciliation, forgiveness. The only safe way will be no communication whatever. It does not matter what my opinion or wishes are; the judge will ask for the facts. The fewer facts the better. Words—any words—we could use now must be construed legally into an understanding. Utterance is the treacherous ground.

Finally I stood up, looked again at the two, a look to imply that I had decided. Deliberately my

forefinger crossed my lips. Stepping forward I raised my wife's hand, firm fragrant whiteness, pressed it fervently to my cheek and, after a second or two, placed it in the clasp of Warren's strong palm. With a last smiling, meaningful look into Grace's eyes I left the room.

It was the last time I saw her for eight years, but, in the ultimate stillness of the following night, there came to me another far echo of that night in the gaslight of Counsellor Street, the longed for, almost the expected, consolation,

"Thou hast done justly at last."

CHAPTER XXIX

DIVIDE

WHEN, within one brief hectic week, we saw Europe plunged in awful war it was as though a cry of "Fire!" or "Earthquake!" had reverberated through the world. It was a time for deep reflections, great actions. Members of widely scattered families wrote fervent impressive letters; old and almost forgotten friendships were renewed. Watching the warring peoples at their ruthless murder, the thought of terrible possibilities came to our country swiftly donning armour. With us it was a time to put one's house in order, to make peace with one's God and one's fellow men.

Women swarmed home early from summer resorts. Social events in St. George instead of ceasing, however, became the frequent discussion-ground for the war and its revolutionary effects on us all. The smallest excuse was sufficient for gatherings of any sort. No matter what the announced occasion the meeting became a gossiping place for world events. It included even stern old men who had arrived at a settled phlegmatic time of life.

Grace Syminton, now a prominent hostess of the city, planned a reception in honour of her youngest sister, fresh from an interrupted honeymoon in

Germany. People were apt to forget social niceties. Mrs. Syminton amazingly invited me. Still more unexpectedly I was prompted to instantaneous acceptance, for an undefined stirring toward a fresh resolve had come to me also. Those daily happenings of mighty events abroad had inspired us at home to grapple eagerly with our perplexities and courageously to face, and even to seek, new problems. How natural that I should have confused this unguessed prompting at my conscience with my fervent wish to be near Grace again.

"What a culmination to our curious history!" I smiled inwardly. "Will our tiny world of curiosity-mongers, even amid the great excitement, let the incident pass?"

Following that New Year dawn of 1908 I had left St. George at once. From abroad I had communicated with my lawyers. Then a full year of wandering. In the early spring I went walking or cycling in Lancashire, from one to another of its infinite variety of hamlets and towns. Forests of chimney-pots, village greens, roaring Manchester, all were blessedly diverting, and the never-ending swarm of strange people was soothing.

Now, as at all other crises of my life, the personality of Hendrick Charters was strongly upon me. To-day I would firmly resolve to be myself, to-morrow I would be addressing an inn-keeper with strange words. At home and amongst friends the fence of a sanatarium would have once again

enclosed me. But here, as months succeeded one another, treading the walls of old Chester, mazing through lumbering historic London and peaceful walks by sylvan lanes and hill-tops and the blue-girt coasts of Kent, what booted it that I was not a rational character!

In due course there was handed me a DECREE of the *High Court of Justice, Chancery Division.* It happened as I sat on the veranda of a hotel of unpronounceable length of name on the Lake of Lucerne. Also there came a letter from my private solicitor in which he summarized the legal process by quoting from what was doubtless one of his ponderous yellow-backed tomes, *ONTARIO LAW REPORTS, 1889* "The High Court of Justice in this Province has jurisdiction, where a marriage correct in form is ascertained to be void *de jure* by reason of the absence of some essential preliminary, to declare the same null and void *ab initio.*"

My prompt precautions of that momentous New Year dawn must have been inspired by press reports of foreign divorce courts, for us now as happily unnecessary as non-existent. "Application for stay of proceedings," the lawyer concluded, "was not filed in view of your presumable concurring desertion."

Desertion of the being I longed for more than anything else on earth!

When it was safe to do so I returned to my old desk in St. George. Only less than my longing to

be near Grace was hers to have me near. Of course it could not be; the eyes of the town still peeped. Christmas greetings from the first had safely passed unnoticed in the multitude, then birthday notes. Precious to ourselves, these were unmeaning formalities to others, almost impersonal if known.

But now Grace was braving public opinion and precedent. I was to appear as a guest in her home; would stand before her and clasp her hand; look into the loved eyes. And a hundred people would watch.

As the day and hour drew near I became doubly and trebly glad, for the opportunities and tests the meeting would afford. Suddenly I had the urge to go about and to meet people again. By following the recent strange prompting to new and bold endeavour I could perhaps shake off forever the influence of the man who had haunted my life. Also, I was now thirty-six years old. Grace was the same. It was the point in our lives when we would meet with this condition equal. I was exactly half the age of Mr. Charters when he died, thirty-six in name and in mind. The knowledge lent me a stimulating advantage; I might for once appear with unguarded naturalness before my fellows.

In front of the old house of Marcus Symington, built during the later years of his prosperity, were lofty iron-paling fences separated by an arched gateway of wrought iron supporting a great lamp at the apex. The red sandstone house was plain, of

two stories, a rather long flight of steps leading up to a stone porch jutting from the face of the building. I could see a liveried man-servant standing in the doorway. Dividing at the gates, the driveway circled a flower-bed and was now filled with automobiles and a few carriages. Chauffeurs idly smoked cigarettes or talked with one another, the two or three coachmen sitting in aloof dignity on their boxes seemingly conscious of their superior lineage.

It came suddenly to me, the instant I was under the arch, that I was subject to a peculiar and powerful excitement. Literally I did not know whether I was walking or dreaming, for, with astonishing clearness, there swept before the eye of memory scenes of my past life. Then followed scenes presumably of the future—a future I knew yet did not know—swift clear glimpses of places in St. George, or New York, or my native village of Bloomfield, peopled with men and women for whom I possessed a haunting recollection. Especially of a woman who smiled expectantly: I knew her face so well. But her name? So many things had happened since.

It all took place in the brief seventy-five yards of the half circle from the gateway to the stone steps. Between this illumination of the past and riddle of the future the surroundings of the moment all at once had no meaning. The chauffeurs must have whispered their wonderment, coachmen turned on their boxes to stare, when a presumable guest entered the grounds, circled the driveway without

even looking towards the house and passed out again under the great lamp.

Normal consciousness returned to find me heaving like a man just escaped from a terrible death. It was not a fear I could analyze, but certainly some power not my own had conspired that I should not enter that house. All that evening, alone in my old room at the club, I was baffled by it but the only thing of which I could be certain was that the personality of Arthur Burden had been submerged when my foot touched the gravel driveway and had been picked up again as I regained the street. The black note-book was unlocked and the facts recorded. From past experience I added this sentence: "My life is about to experience a fresh turn. Is it—somehow I feel it is—a thing of which I should know already."

A day or two later the afternoon post brought me a note from Grace, fearlessly chiding me for breaking a promise. Only a personal apology would do so I seized a walking stick and boldly set off up-town. Once again I got as far as the circular flower-plot. It was half past seven and just growing dark. Instead of going up I stopped. It was not, this time, any commanding voice of inner consciousness but one coming in low sweet song from an unlighted window at the extreme east of the building. In an ecstasy of old feeling revived I made my way under the heavy maples and amongst the low tailored shrubbery until I was close under the

window. The Symintons had children, girls of five and two. The mother was singing them to sleep and, like an outcast soul who had stolen an hour of his lost Eden and its heavenly music, I listened. An immovable lump was in my throat, the tears on my face were disregarded. As a child I had not wept; tears had probably never come save on Grace's account alone.

It was not the children (I did not feel relationship for them) but just the clear pure tones I knew so well and every rise and fall of which carried me back through life's dearest years. My whole being was clothed in tenderness for her; such natural unaided fullness of emotion had never come into my life before Grace was there. Was it that the sufferings of old age had left me doubly capable of it now in middle age? Whatever it was it belonged to Grace.

Her singing crooned away a moment and then, softly at first, it was renewed in the words for which I was waiting, the song which she had sung many times to me. It filled me with apprehension somehow, that song. Grace, the woman whom I had given to another; and yet it seemed that the mere sound of her voice could claim for her the old unforgettable place in my life. Was this the sort of womanly appeal I had unconsciously been hoping for during the last fortnight? Was there a sort of fate about it, or was I possibly confusing her with another? While living under the same roof with Grace I had not known this yearning.

With the final line of the song I was aware that Grace had come to the window, adjusted the blind slightly and tiptoed away. A light noiselessly popped on in the hallway beyond and in a few seconds disappeared again. Mrs. Syminton would now be downstairs again and ready to receive a a caller.

During my abstraction my fingers had been holding a sharp spiky object. I noticed now that the point stuck into my forefinger, and the sawlike edge was wearing the skin of my thumb. The object was one of the long shoots of a plant three or four feet high, the plant I had accidentally sought as a shield for myself against anybody looking from the window. But now it suddenly rose before me like an ominous cluster of quivering swords between me and the house of Grace Symínton.

Impelled by that unknown sense of danger or error, I slunk out, once more a stranger, under the now glowing lamp of the arched gateway.

CHAPTER XXX

DISCOVERY

A FEW days later my perplexities were removed. I was preparing for bed at the time. The evenings of late August had become chilly but I was manifesting an objection to departing summer by sitting in a heavy dressing-gown and refusing to close windows. The evening paper was being re-scanned, more than anything else to occupy time that I knew would otherwise be spent tossing sleeplessly in bed. A heavily-shaded reading lamp at my elbow was the only light. My vexed spirit would not permit me to read long at a time so, laying down the paper, I gazed absently into the darker portions of the room. "What is it?" I asked myself half aloud, "this disquieting conjecture flitting around me all day long like an evanescent uncaptured moth, always just beyond my reach and comprehension?" My eyes closed as though seeking the answer that way, when I was suddenly answered, the eerieness of it sending a sharp thrill from my shoulders down to the soles of my feet, because for years I had not felt that presence so akin to Sarah's.

"Thine own love!" the message had been. "You well know she is the quest of your life. Why do you assume her dead or unattainable?"

Whether it was actually a command from another, or merely a soundless call from my other nature I cannot to this moment state. Of its awakening me to life there is no doubt.

Fourteen years ago, that night in the theatre at Cranport, I had suffered heartbreak on account of Sarah Geddings. Then, with the responsibility of making Grace happy, I had banished the other, removed her entirely from the realm of womanhood as it were, creating her some sort of saint theoretically existing but unattainable.

Whatever the origin of the message revealing the possibilities of all this to me, it happened that I had ample opportunity to consider its wisdom and timeliness. Stock exchanges everywhere were closed as a result of the declarations of war; the little unofficial trading presented no serious barrier to my absence and I went to New York practically at once, there to prosecute my enquiries for the woman of whom incredibly I had failed to think as a living person of my own generation.

At no single moment during the many weeks of my search was there even a glimmer of success. Theatrical employment agencies, official lists and directories, actors' organizations and societies of all sorts were combed with thoroughness. Sarah Geddings' name appeared nowhere; nobody seemed ever to have heard it. I had hoped that the Cranport engagement of the Eglington All-Stars would have been a starting point. "June 1901?" exclaimed

a kindly secretary of one of the old-line booking agencies. "There are always high-sounding companies trying out summer resorts. The title, as well as the actors, are sometimes picked up haphazard. One such company that I knew of actually employed, in good parts, an ex-elevator man and a couple of young women secured through local advertising." He suggested that Sarah Geddings might have been such a one and never had herself registered as a regular professional. When I insisted that her people before her had been stage folk and that therefore she would have found no difficulty in being placed, the man merely shook his head. "I am afraid that what you call influence goes a very short distance in the theatrical world. I think," he concluded, "you may rest assured—after the search you have made and that we have made for you—that there is no such actress of fourteen years standing on the American stage."

With the resumption of the New York Stock Exchange in December I was peremptorily summoned to our chief offices in Wall Street and ordered back to my post at St. George. It was somewhat of a shock to compare the brusque command with the marked degree of deference these same men had shown me during the years when my branch made money rapidly. The fact was that my abilities had ceased to be of an outstanding quality and that I was retained chiefly on account of my long service and one-time ability as a profit-earner.

So far as Grace was to judge I simply had not found the courage to respond to her invitation. On my own side I was thankful for the warning of the cluster of quivering swords that August night. I could not return to her now. Dwelling by her side with my enigma latent and impersonal would be one thing, now that it was a gnawing secret desire would be quite another. I could not expect her to understand. As for the world or anybody else in it, the sharing of my secret was unthinkable. Under these circumstances my awakening to the realization that worship of Sarah Geddings was in fact human and earthly, with its subsequent hopeless disappointment, must assuredly have brought unhappiness unless other occupation of mind was provided. This I found in local charities, war relief societies, and, with the popular financial appeal of 1917, unofficial war work and victory loan campaigns.

I was even led into activities of a more purely social nature and, here amongst people I had known (in some cases their children), it was brought home to me that my influence in this sphere also was waning. The days when I carried weight as a shrewd prophet of financial events seemed now to belong almost in another existence. I had expected that, after crossing the meridian, the age of thirty-six, I would be more of what I appeared naturally and would interest people more keenly. The truth however is that a man growing younger year by year presents anything but a magnetic figure.

There is always charm about the woman who gives the impression that she is growing younger in spirit and body, and an old man is genuinely congratulated on retention of strength and thought, but the man in middle life whose ways grow younger and younger is generally making a fool of himself in one way or another and in any case is looked upon as more amusing than interesting. While my business associates and fellow organization workers matured their judgment with the advancing seasons and looked out upon the world through eyes that grew wiser, I was always shedding last year's experiences and responsibilities and growing less and less serious.

Unhappiness was, however, quite banished from my daily routine. I trod the streets as a philosopher whose ideal has not been realized but in whom the spring of youth finds joy along the way even though it may be indefinitely deferred. The future did not mean the same to me as to other people, for in one sense mine was the past, a matter of slipping farther and farther into the early life of Hendrick Charters. The term hope had something of a blank sound: of my final end I had always refused to think.

One afternoon, towards the end of the war, I arrived tardily at a meeting of the Central Committee of the St. George Red Cross Society. Halting in the entrance-way to dispose of my raincoat I moved warily as, from the ordered conversation within, the meeting seemed to have convened.

"Really, I sometimes think," a woman was speaking with conviction, "that the war must have gone to his head. His youthful cheerfulness becomes almost flippant."

"Yes, I've noticed it," replied the chairman who in reality, as I now realized, was holding back the meeting for some late-comers. "It's rather odd, too. He was very much the same way ten years ago, before that trouble with his wife. After he returned to St. George he did seem more like the ordinary man, but now, lately, he has lost that soberness of thought again."

"You might be surprised to know," and it was a retired bank president who spoke, "that this same man who'll breeze in here amongst us in a few minutes was, as a youth, the dourest and most solemn-faced creature you ever saw. Wonderful brain though; twenty or twenty-five years ago we all looked for his becoming a Napoleon of finance."

"One thing we must say about Burden," laughed another, "he's seldom late for meetings."

Noiselessly I took up my coat again and stole outside.

An epidemic of influenza darkened the gladness of the Armistice. Although the nursing of its victims was supposed to be fraught with unusual risk there was that quality in my life just then which prompted me to take it as a grim delight to expose myself at every opportunity. Living, it is true, had grown to be a not unpleasant process,

nevertheless the prospect of performing something heroic on the chance of defeating the sinister encroachments of childhood and ultimate what-not was rather welcome to me.

By an irony of fate I failed to contract even the mildest form of the scourge, whereas Warren Symington, surrounding himself and family with the most elaborate precautions, was seized by it in its most virulent form and died about the middle of December.

Inevitably the event brought me back into Grace's life. From the Hendrick Charters influence came no obstruction to the re-acquaintance as would once have been the case. It was as though he were now content to be admitted to my brain, and on Burden's side was the growing confidence in the rightousness of the old man's resolve and the cumulative belief that, in a crisis, Charters would be best qualified to command. But for a long time there had been no crisis.

Even before Grace's instinctive cry for sympathy reached me I was preparing to go to her. The marriage had been supremely successful and the widow's grief continued with little abatement for two or three years. Without my comfort, she was fond of telling me, the blow would have been unbearable. A woman will make better progress with a doctor of whom she has a great opinion than under the advice of one eminently more capable but who is without her personal favour. Grace's

inordinate faith in me was in reality born of her own appreciative heart. She, at least, was blind to the fact that Arthur Burden was by no means the tower of strength she had once married. However the esteem of others might lessen, time had no effect on her belief. I turned eagerly and gratefully to so loyal a nature and became a constant visitor at the large sandstone house which, in affluent circumstances, Grace retained. A new feeling grew up between us, a feeling of inter-dependence in which I alone recognized that she had become the leader, I the follower.

It was in 1922 that she yielded to the suggestions of friends in England to remove there to give her daughters a couple of years at foreign schools. Her word of parting farewell embarrassed me; it was something to the effect that separation would afford opportunity for both of us to examine our hearts.

With the children, and with Grace through them, I maintained constant correspondence and when she and the little ones were to disembark in America just before Christmas I permitted nothing to interfere with my journeying eastward to welcome them on the dock. Our return to St. George was a joyful re-union and the celebration of that holiday season seemed to lack nothing in its wholesome pleasure.

It was weeks afterwards that there crept over me a sense of discomfort, mild at first then more persistent, so that I must needs artificially induce

myself to resignation. Our absence from one another for two years had not been merely that of people viewing life independently, for we had in reality, during the time, drifted four years apart. Letters had not been enough to prevent dissociation of ideas, and while Grace's thoughts had followed their own line, mine had sought other avenues.

In February, I celebrated my forty-seventh birthday. Grace would do likewise in September. Although in truth she bore her years remarkably well, my own cheeks bore the ruddy freshness of a college graduate, a certain timidity of speaking almost proclaiming the boy. Strangers seeing us together for the first time made remarks unconsciously personal. Old-time acquaintances, though reduced to bewilderment and non-committal smiles, tactfully accepted matters as they came. Our own personal St. George was beyond surprise.

Grace herself was taking for granted that our lives from week to week were working out the plan natural to those beyond their season of first love. On her side there was a natural and becoming absence of young sentiment; with her, impulse had given way to logic, excitement and speculation belonged to an earlier day. In my failure adequately to respond was a certain reluctance to expose the boyishness of my own ideals so sharply out of tune with hers.

In order to maintain some sobriety of mind I joined more energetically in public and social matters.

My own service club was building a summer camp for crippled children, and I became chairman of construction. The wives of the committeemen were to be hostesses at the official opening. "I suppose we'll ask Mrs. Syminton to officiate for you, Burden?" the president noted as a matter of course. In fact it was decided that Grace should read the address of the occasion. I had planned to spend each afternoon of the final week out at the camp, and the evenings in committee. On Monday it happened that Grace telephoned just as I was leaving the office for the railway station.

"I'll expect you of course in my box at the Rexford, Arthur," came her soft voice.

"To-night?" I said, "The Rexford? You know what this week is going to be like for me, dear. I hadn't figured on any theatres until after Saturday."

"After Saturday! But you know the season closes with this engagement. You— Why you must be joking: you haven't forgotten what it is. St. George doesn't get an artist like this very often." In truth my responsibilities connected with the camp had shut out everything else. I hesitated on the chance that it would not be necessary to declare my ignorance. "She's been the talk of New York and Boston. Even the papers are wondering how St. George secured the attraction over the heads of bigger cities. Surely we should show our appreciation."

"Well, I'm just rushing for my train now. Shall I telephone you at six?"

"But, Arthur, you'll hurt me if you don't come. It's an old friend party, the O'Briens and the Fairmans—even father has promised me."

"Very well, Grace, you'd better count on me," I assured her, for my time was dangerously short. "But if I come it will be only for you, not anybody else."

Things were distressingly behindhand at the camp. The carpenters had not finished the tent-house floors, the water connection was not working. My afternoon was so filled with various orders and details that I had to bring the plumbing contractor back along with me in the train so that I could find time to talk to him. We got in twenty-five minutes late and, as I was casting about to decide where to dine so that I might still make the committee at seven-thirty, I recalled my promise to attend the Rexford. Although the meeting was opened on time I was obliged to excuse myself after a few minutes. The somewhat obvious annoyance of my confreres served to worry me while I was dressing at the club, and in fact until I arrived at the theatre.

Slipping into the box only a few minutes before eight-thirty, the audience presented a curious scene. Everybody in the crowded house appeared to be deep in the reading of a printed folder which had been handed out by the ushers. Even Grace herself scarcely took time to welcome me. Her other guests

were absorbed in their folders. Settling shortly to my own I discovered that, instead of a drama, we were to be entertained entirely by an artist named Cara Eltsa. The printed matter before me seemed to be largely a collection of quotations from newspapers, notable public men and even some stage celebrities.

"As an impersonator," said the New York Times, "it is not sufficient to say that Cara Eltsa reigns supreme. She has raised the art of impersonation from the realm of mere entertainment to the plane of historical inspiration and illumination."

A Western university president was reported as announcing, "Until I had witnessed Miss Eltsa's performance, I had never appreciated, I had never known, and certainly had never seen—as I have now assuredly seen—the famous women of history."

"No wonder," as I glanced a minute at the vastly engrossed rows of people, "that the smart population of St. George is in a state of excitement. Evidently I've been asleep to public events." With sudden interest as high-pitched as the rest, I turned back to the cover page. "THE INCOMPARABLE CARA ELTSA" proclaimed the large type, "Amazing, Amusing, Horror-inspiring but Always Bewitching. The Woman of Forty Faces and Voices. Mistress of Human Emotions."

I could no more have stopped reading than I could have stopped breathing. On the back page was more that I had not read.

"The stage has more than once proclaimed," so ran the comment, "the woman whom youth will not forsake, but here is she seemingly wooed by the god of perpetual youth, a veritable woman brought back to girlhood. And such girlhood! Nobody even guesses the age of Cara Eltsa. In her own winsome inscrutable manner she has said, 'I am at least old, O so old! in the art of keeping secrets'."

"A noted voice culturist says, 'Miss Eltsa has been credited with speech in at least a dozen different voices. My own personal observation leads me to believe that she is actually endowed with two, but these two are so remarkably different in their tonal analysis that she is able to combine and blend them in a great variety of results."

There was a significant pause in the music. From our box close to the stage we could hear the signal of a small bell. The orchestra conductor raised his baton, there was a drone of sound from violins and the curtain came up. To the expectant audience there appeared a rather commonplace man and woman talking across a table. They discussed in dialogue the power of women in past ages, the types personifying the history of women to-day, and woman's dominant place in the future. The language was dignified, almost allegorical. At the conclusion, and to the accompaniment of restrained applause, the curtain dropped. There followed an excited pause of two minutes, then the orchestra flared up and dropped, while a cornet pealed a

triumphant salute, the echo of which was drowned almost immediately in thunderous applause as the curtain rose quickly to reveal a woman in glittering imperial loveliness. The bright shimmering garment enveloping her hung shapelessly, yet was pleasing to the eye. Her slightest movement or glance seemed to suggest a consciousness of unguessed power and artistry. The tall slim shoulders bowed slightly, then, without moving even her head, her almost startling eyes swept the house from wall to wall and from floor to roof.

Everything about her, even this thrilling beauty, was different than it had been twenty-five and twenty-seven years ago—everything except those unforgettable eyes. All of heaven and earth vanished from my consciousness and memory. The sum of all created things became on the instant embodied in Sarah Geddings.

CHAPTER XXXI

JEOPARDY

IT is the year five twenty-seven!" the rich clear girlish voice came like a swift penetrating needle of sound that sank to the remotest corners of the vast auditorium. Its cadence thrilled me as nothing in life is ever likely to thrill me again. "In Constantinople, capital of the Roman Empire of the East, dwells a passionate-eyed girl, namelessly born, shamelessly thrown upon a merciless world in a profligate age. She has lived in the lowest stratum—nay, in the very cellar—of society. But events have moved swiftly. The glory of the heavens opens before this girl. The Emperor, the austere Justinian the Great, has seen her, and in his look, history is about to be made. She stands—kneels—before him. He has just asked her to become his wife, to be the mistress of the world."

There was a twinkling of lights off and on. In what seemed to the amazed audience a moment, there appeared before us Theodora, the girl of the streets, in her garish dancer's costume, kneeling on a rich velvet cushion, gazing rapturously but proudly into the face of an invisible Emperor, pledging her fealty, bravely appealing against the degradation of womenkind of the day. Before our comprehending

and delighted eyes there lay bare the soul of that brilliant valorous queen and counsellor, until we saw for ourselves why the names of Justinian and Theodora rise to-day above the forest of petty tyrants of antiquity.

With the applause dying away I still stared dumbly into the lowered curtain.

"Why, Arthur," Grace touched my arm as though concerned for me. "I never remember seeing you so absorbed in anything before."

"But, Grace! Don't you understand? Haven't you recognized? It's Sarah!"

I heaved a great sigh, while slowly becoming more conscious of things about me. Then, shivering affrightedly, I talked, laughed, anything to stop those confused noisy hammerings in my brain. The secret of twenty-five years had been amazed out of me. No retraction was possible, no explanation.

The evening went swiftly, excitingly forward. Sometimes I could feel Grace looking at me; even in the darkness I felt it. But when I sought her eyes they always avoided me. The others of the party seemed to know that something had happened. Musical numbers appeared between the impersonations, for which I was glad, because it was a time in which my understanding must have respite, or break under the torrent of emotions. During one of the more tragic poses a number of women hurried or were helped by their escorts from the theatre. Then Cara Eltsa acted a village gossip.

In a few brief seconds I traveled back forty years of time and was listening again to the old meddlers in the rectory at Bloomfield. But the sad wonderment, the suppressed scorn of that old childhood were lost in the humour and the pathos of human frailty so livingly re-created.

We were at the final curtain-call, repeated and repeated again. The tall, slightly swaying form of the artist came and went, and came once more. The slim shoulders stooped acknowledgment while the large eyes, now a glittering hazel in the near glow of the footlights, swept appreciatively into each remoteness of the great building. Last of all, a second, perhaps two, before the falling curtain had swallowed her, all smiles were suddenly blown from her face, the shoulders and the whole beautiful figure were brought sharply erect, the wandering eyes became fixed and riveted on our box, on me.

Facing her, I trembled, then continued to look as though our eyes still met through the opaque screen. The nearer occupants of the pit turned to stare at us, but soon we were all busying ourselves with the scarves and glasses and there was no talk of the incident amongst us. As we moved slowly through the press of the brilliant lobby I could hear myself, inanely as a ventriloquist's doll, emptily echoing the prattle about me.

Happily it had been arranged that Grace's father would stop the night with her, so that we were not to be driving alone. The chauffeur sat by himself

in front, the three of us together in the wide rear seat.

"It's a relief to get where it's a bit cooler," remarked Mr. Fenchurch, "but I wouldn't have missed that for a whole lot."

"No indeed," came Grace's tactful aid, "I don't think any of us even thought of it's being hot." Then, as we swung in under the high lantern and circled to the stone steps, "We're sorry, Arthur, that you won't come in. But of course it was very good of you to come at all."

I mumbled something, just enough to prove how unpardonable was my stupidity and lack of control. "Won't you let Bolton drive you to—wherever you are going?" Grace added kindly, and the momentary hesitation shamed me anew. She had started to say "to your club", but she couldn't say it. To lie, even for once and indirectly, would have been to contradict our whole life together. Yes, even in what must have been her keen sense of hurt, she would say nothing which would seem to be accusing me. She must have thought where I was going—have known it.

There is only one hotel in St. George where celebrities go, the now long ago completed New Trent, where, eighteen years past, I had left Grace in the keeping of Warren Syminton. It was probably a mile away. The night was still and close; soon the perspiration collected on the leather band of my hat. But I preferred walking; I needed it for I felt myself

about to face the crisis of my life. The absurdity and uselessness of forming any plan of action or of rehearsing sentences was at once plain to me. That, when the climax came, I would pass under the influence and dictation of the older and stronger force within me was as certain as the fact that this greater force had made a boy out of an old man.

By the time I turned into Fortesque Avenue my nerves were entirely composed. The break in the line of shade-trees at each cross street revealed a glimpse of the New Trent above the smaller buildings, at first a full half of its height, and then, street by street as other places rose in perspective size, only a few lighted windows on the eleventh and twelfth floors.

It was twenty-five minutes to twelve as I entered the lofty rotunda. The space about the desk register reminded me of the low entrance to a bee-hive. Men and occasional women were coming and going. A perspiring newspaper reporter, dashing in behind me, pushed himself ahead as we crossed the tiles. He queried an acquaintance in passing and had the reply, "You've as much chance as any; she's only come in fifteen minutes ago."

Another reporter, reaching out from a group, caught him by the sleeve as he was about to address the night clerk and invited him to wait with the others.

I advanced and spoke quietly to the man at the desk. "I'm afraid not!" he answered somewhat

shortly. "Apparently she doesn't intend to see anybody to-night."

"Nevertheless I wish my card taken up," I ordered.

"What shall — " he glanced aside at the card, scrutinized it, but the name Arthur Burden meant nothing. "You haven't an appointment, have you?" Deliberately closing my note-book again and securing it with an elastic band, I feigned not to have heard, and he asked again, "Is Miss Eltsa perhaps expecting you?"

"Yes, I think so. I think she is."

Instead of ringing for a boy the desk man stepped aside, handed my card to another clerk and returned to his duties.

Beyond the marble pillars against the farther wall I walked up and down slowly. In a short time the desk man's eye was seeking me. Again, instead of calling a bell-boy, he vanished and was soon approaching me from another direction.

"Miss Eltsa will see you," he said simply. "There are so many people she has refused to see that I would suggest you find your own way up, to avoid attention."

Starting off towards the remote eastern staircase, I was presently padding back the width of the hotel along the broad deserted corridor. I tapped at the door numbered 201. It was opened at once and an auburn-haired maid with faultless politeness but extreme deliberation took my hat and light coat

and, pointing towards the front windows, said that I would find Miss Eltsa in her drawing room.

After passing two doors which were apparently bedrooms I came to the one indicated. The space appeared to be of unusual size, lighted only by a heavily-draped piano-lamp placed to one side. To this region I addressed my attention, expecting momentarily to see the woman I sought rise from a position which in the doubtful light was hidden from me. For possibly five seconds my eyes searched, until a voice came from an altogether different part of the room.

"Mr. Burden, I believe?"

The words were so low that, turning sharply, it was rather my intuition which cried out in instant recognition. Her gown of dark blue clinging material stood out poorly against the sombre background of furry wall-paper. Also she was stooping, her attention seemingly on a vase with flowers in it. Her profile it was which I presently discerned; she was not even looking at me.

"'Sarah!" I cried in a voice which I had known would be only half my own, but in which everything but eager boyishness was absent and forgotten.

"That is not my name," she answered quickly, dropping a hand to the vase and straightening now to look at me challengingly.

"But it is—you real name," my lips opened gladly.

"Indeed!" and the quality of the hauteur seemed impenetrable, "Then perhaps you have a real name also?"

"Hendrick!" I called without an instant's hesitation.

The long slim arm holding the vase moved involuntarily as though stiffening to resistance. My eyes becoming used to the light, I could see her lips move, but the seemingly stern whisper I lost.

"You remember me?" I demanded.

"I remember Arthur Burden. You know, of course, that I do."

"I want to speak to you, Sarah. Twice, I've searched the continent for you."

"How interesting!" But with the words I knew that any embarrassment, temporary lack of poise, had left her. She was the actress, the perfect manipulator of emotions. The hope which had suddenly leaped within me was quenched. She had retired to the ground upon which we were unevenly matched.

"Don't you believe me, Sarah? Don't you know in your heart that— "

"O, yes, yes! Of course I must not disbelieve you. Forgive me for saying it, but somehow you make me think of fairy tales. And I have noticed that men, when soliciting the interest of stage women, always think it necessary to be declamatory, dramatic. However yours somehow sounds as though it might be different. What, for instance,

are some of the interesting things you did between those searches? Before them, and after them?"

Hopelessly outwitted I felt myself. Worldly wisdom told me that this woman was entertaining herself at my expense, while yet my hundred and twenty year old soul held fast to its faith in the soul of Sarah Geddings. But, after all, could any womanly being remain unmarked, unspoiled by the success this one had achieved? I felt certain that she was acting, and rested my case, as it were, on my ability or patience to break through it. But acting was Cara Eltsa's life, her profession. At will she could step into a pose and dwell there. This very night I had witnessed how two thousand people had been swayed and enthralled by it. Dumb, nonplussed, at the end of my resources, I, a nonentity in the larger world, stood before her, the idol of two continents. Albeit I suddenly felt myself reliant on the power of my young manhood newly surging within me. Never before had I depended on youth for anything. All at once it was nothing to me that, for the past ten or twelve years, I had been regarded as a man steadily losing his grip, that people pitied my mental retrogression, that the heydey of my power was so remotely past as to be scarcely a memory. That past was a blank; I rose from it in the might of my hope, in the virility and ambition of a man of twenty-four—the man I was.

Whatever she might be to the world, this woman before me (she might be nineteen, she might be

thirty) was to me merely my mate. Ages upon ages of history, nature itself at the very beginning, had decreed that I, a man, should gain the mastery over her, a woman. By force of mind and strength of action I would have the mastery.

"Come, my friend, sit you down." There was cool daring in her voice. "We haven't perhaps a great many mutual interests, but—you will remember, for instance, a Miss Eunice Fox?"

"Revenge belongs to you, Sarah. If you demand it I am the willing penitent. Nothing I can now say or do will atone. Still I will say and do whatever is demanded by Cara Eltsa, 'The Incomparable'. Success must have all it asks. But revenge, even to witness the revenge of others, would have crushed and wounded Sarah Geddings, The Compassionate."

She had seated herself to face me. My eyes were now well used to the light. I thought I saw her shudder just before she smiled an artful unconcern. "Yes, revenge is yours, Cara Eltsa. Your title to it has been clear and unquestioned for almost ninety years."

"Dear me!" and one slender hand moved lightly. It was all acting again, as though a grown-up were trying to be patient with a child. "You really must confine you language within my comprehension. After all, are you not becoming very like the other men? You are happy and resourceful

and brilliant if permitted to talk always about your own affairs."

It must have been minutes that neither of us spoke a single word, though my whole nature seemed to be churning in agitation.

What terrible thing was this happening? I, who had scoffed at human opposition in my mastery of it, was now failing. Succeeding always when I cared not for victory, must I now be ground down to defeat while my whole being ached to triumph? No, it must not be! My fully found youth was a battle-cry impelling me to conquest. My will would smash through this ugly wall she had built about me—the wall of my wretched past—but what of the barrier thrown about herself, this fortress of theatrical unreality, mere acting but in its power and purpose more impregnable than real life. Moments only I permitted myself to contemplate the danger. Then in my impetuosity I disavowed its strength and recklessly made ready to overstep it as a lad would overstep the world. I would reach out and seize this living thing, my property by conquest as well as inheritance, coaxing, commanding, crushing, yea even throttling her into submission.

Yet in silence we sat, calmly surveying one another. A dozen times since coming into the room her person, in the treacherous light or in my treacherous vision, had resolved itself into alien shapes and poses. She was alternately of the past and of the present and of the past again. Her eyes

were young and lovely, now old and care-filled, and once again those of a serious child. It was perhaps strange that, even to myself, I failed for the moment to call my feeling love. Only the man who has experienced an emotion, such as love or suffering, can properly appreciate the sound of the word, so with me the actual significance of love had not yet dawned. It was something written in my past, a sort of forgotten art. I had known it only as the solicitude and anxiety Fairman felt for Doris and that I had felt for Grace. Examples of man-and-woman love had been strangely out of my compass. James and Rose O'Brien were said to be well-matched, but in reality James was still a simple roving soul who sought kisses from other women without realizing that it was a search for the mate he had missed. Fairman had married the widow because she had cleverer ways than he and because her little daughter satisfied his parental yearning for something to nurture and protect. Not only had love never met me with a kiss of greeting; she had never even crossed my path.

As I sat now slouched inertly in my chair, chest regularly and deeply falling while my devouring and adoring eyes fastened unblinkingly on the ravishing features, the lithe sinuousness of the occasionally-moving shoulders, and those level orbs of lustrous brown, I worshipped with the suppressed passion, the stored-up desire to possess and to serve

which had been part of those two lives lying behind me and within me: and felt myself beckoned and enticed by the soul of this goddess-like girl who had been born, had died and was born again for me.

CHAPTER XXXII

DEFEAT

THERE had been two signs, two vague hopes shining between me and despair. When saying good-by Miss Eltsa had declined to take my hand. "It is fear! She is afraid to trust herself!" I assured myself while inviting masculine egotism to possess me. Also she had consented to my coming again. It was made to appear as though she had slipped into the invitation unconsciously, then, smiling archly to herself at the *faux pas*, accepted the penalty as a matter of politeness. But the play had not deceived me.

It was on Thursday that Cara Eltsa refused me. I told my story bravely, I think I told it well. At first protesting, then unresisting, the woman listened to the end, for there was no restraining me. Knowing her answer long before it came I still spoke, sparing myself nothing. At the end she was silent, her eyes averted.

Three brief days ago she had been as remote from me as a future life. Yet, at that moment as I looked at her, it seemed that she must have been sitting there opposite to me always. The tall piano lamp here at hand, that vase in the farther corner, all the furniture of the room, the positions of the three

windows, everything about her had grown old in familiarity.

Very slowly she turned, leaned her slim expressive shoulders towards me. The head came a little nearer and the lips, closest of all, began to move. In her face was firm resolution, but with it compassion and pain. There was to be no more acting now, only truth, the pure unafraid truth on which she had stepped to fame.

"You believe already that I shall say No, don't you? Concerning that first meeting you are right, Arthur. While my father was speaking to me, and I watched your face in the gaslight, it was enough. I saw it in your eyes, your manner, everything about you. Those minutes were for me an elevation of spirit transcending the nature of any young girl. O, it was real enough! There has never been anything quite so real. But it was part of my tired overwrought youth, the youth of which I sometimes think as a long swoon, from which I emerged gradually into womanhood."

She turned to me a look I shall never forget. There was ineffable tenderness, suffering, the blessed promise of tears. Unable to withstand it, I stood up before her as though to urge my small advantage, fondling her hand, her arm. She made no effort to repel me and there came the flickering of pitiful hope. But her words dispelled it. Above the sweetness and kindness of the tone there was presently

that ring of firmness and self-possession greater, far greater, than ever.

"But everything is different now. You ask me, in a breath, to renounce my career and— "

"Oh, no!" I pleaded. "I would not ask— "

"Ah! But no," she smiled ravishingly. "Perhaps I too am past the age of wisdom. It is true that my life has been precise and ordered, but now —now—how impetuous I could be!" She had looked away as though dreaming happily a moment. "Nothing would matter, nothing at all, if like you I could feel— "

Then her recalled thoughts brought strength into the face returning to me. "My great effort was spent when once I forgave. Your second desertion withdrew you so completely that—well, afterward I had nothing but my dreams! Only in my imagination—my daring imagination—could I see you and endow you with a valiant heart; for it was easy to learn that you were in truth married to a woman beautiful—as I was not—and accounted happy with her.

"No, Arthur, I wanted to see you and to know you, and I am heart-broken that I must make you suffer, but it can never be."

Then came, the final word, the woman's reason again. My patience gained it, my old faculty of listening with deadly unnerving attention to confess my victim.

"Even supposing I were free, and—and loved you, how could I forget— There would always be between us—ugly blots that make your disloyalty an imperfect thing compared with what you expect in me—those two women.

"Go then, friend; would that I might say Beloved—'Happy be, beloved!' "

It was over. Convicted, sentenced, I sat speechless, a whipped creature. When at last I raised my eyes she was gone. With scarcely a dreaming consciousness I went away, walking the hot blister-raising pavements and gravel paths till weariness overcame me, tortured meantime by an odd mystification in her words.

Without some willing ear to listen, some sympathetic heart to understand, it seemed to me I could not live the night. Darkness had come, and I was in streets of the city unknown to me, but by some indistinct volition I had kept turning my steps latterly towards the big stone house, to Grace, to her who as a girl had striven so hard to understand me, and, even failing, had had so great faith. Perhaps even under these astonishing circumstances she would solace and cheer me.

And how true was this instinct that led me to her, how abundantly justified my belief! Now, at last, I was to her a boy to be understood and appreciated, and with all the affection of a mother she entered into my sorrow.

"What have you told her you will do?" she asked.

"To-morrow I shall go back to my native village of Bloomfield—and I shall not return."

With arm consolingly about my shoulders, she was silent and still for a long time. Then, very slowly, "That will be as well as anything. In great tribulation we do turn to the memories of childhood, even though they may be unpleasant ones. You may find in that obscure place the means to start life anew."

"There is no starting life anew for me," I whispered. "I am broken, Grace, finally defeated. I have no hope."

"Did you say good-by to Miss Eltsa, then?" she asked presently.

"There was no need. Good-bys are for those who have been friends."

Something Grace talked about the future. I think I told her that if I did return to St. George it would be because I needed her, that I could not live it out alone.

At midnight, my exhausted body stretched heavily on my bed for sleep became instead a tortured battle-ground. It was as though my two personalities, having together brought me down, were fighting for possession of the corpse. All night it seemed the conflict raged. Alternately from the viewpoint of one and the other, I saw the warfare. It went as it always had gone; Arthur Burden, logical, rational and simple, striving to use my

physical organism for natural growth and development, but being turned aside, and, at will, snuffed out by the subtle illogical power of Hendrick Charters, whose whip hand sought to drive me hither and thither to unnatural ends, as though, through trial and suffering, I would at last arrive where he wanted.

"But" — as utter exhaustion of mental strife left me calmness and judgment — "has Arthur Burden been rational. . . or just?. . . When Hendrick Charters' starved tormented mind left his body, his powerful will was pledged to a righteous task. . . His letter acknowledged that a lifetime of wrong, to be balanced, might require a lifetime of suffering. . . . Yet he faced it bravely. . . bravely. . . What storms and stumbling blocks his patience had survived!. . . On the side of the angels truly, yet what angels were on his side?. . . Unrewarded, twice unhappy soul!"

The five o'clock waking was a waking to the emptiness of life, the blankness of the future. Even when my hunger faintness had been appeased my thoughts continued in the tenor of a man whose days are drawing to a close. Earlier in my career I might easily have become wealthy, had money then meant anything to me. As it was, my experiments in private trading and pyramiding had brought me large sudden profits. In later years (and this was a secret I shared with none) losses had very generally attended my independent ven-

tures, but I was still possessed of some fifty thousand dollars. One of the ideas which had come to me during my aimless foot-wanderings of last night was that I could at least emulate the final act of that other fruitless life, and dispose of these means as old Hendrick Charters had done with his. During the morning therefore, I visited trustees of various charitable funds. Our camp for crippled children, the immediate welfare of which I had so dishonourably neglected during the week, would now, I made sure, have cause to honour my name. Lastly I made a will. Strangely enough it read in favour of the rich firm that employed me and which for thirty years had treated me with generosity and amazing patience.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DAWN

FROM the glitter of the St. George terminal the ponderous train slipped away on its nightly journey towards the sea. Up close to the baggage cars, amongst rough ill-groomed men, and weary mothers and children with soiled faces, I had taken my seat. Happily there would be no intrusion of acquaintances. I was numb with heart-sickness, dejected beyond expression. As the coach rumbled onto an overhead street-crossing I peered down on a brightly-lighted thoroughfare and the roofs of motor cars as they darted past. Some of these doubtless were carrying people to the theatre. Momentarily there flashed a large poster displaying Sarah's picture. The performance would be almost at its commencement; the nightly hundreds were even now reading the folders. Then the dimly lighted suburbs and darkness.

Many hours hence, some time early in the morning, sixty miles after the train had passed Bloomfield, there would be a junction point. A sleeping car would be gently shunted to the limited train on the main line west, what we referred to in St. George as the southern transcontinental.

For a long time I stared unseeingly from my window, thinking of many things. Of how, fifty-six

years ago, Hendrick Charters had made this same journey, acknowledging the futility of life, the fruitlessness of his world, to end his days in obscurity. No luxury of Pullman or diner was available to Mr. Charters. What was it (now that I had time for reflection) that had prompted me so naturally to insist to Grace that I would travel in the least comfortable of the day coaches? A peculiarly old-fashioned car it now seemed to be sure. Then I commenced for the first time to consider what I should do in Bloomfield.

"While in one sense I have never lived," at first my reasoning ran, "yet life for me is done. . . Or is it merely that my old life is done?. . . The hardest thing of all to undo is selfishness, for it is not a matter of impulse, like the sudden spur to generosity of Mr. Charters to divest himself of his worldly goods. . . Yet in a measure I have now extinguished my legacy of greed. At the end of my monstrous mistakes I have at least retrieved his gift of love—none the less because the achievement is barren of victory."

I recalled the names of people to whom I should have been grateful; my elder sister and my parents, Doctor Biggar, Benjamin Sanford, Eunice Fox, more contentedly of Grace, most reverently of Sarah Geddings, and the clergyman in Winnipeg. Long ago hate of Warren Syminton had turned to regard; now I found it natural to forgive Hendrick Charters, to sympathize with his resolve, yea, to love him.

Then my thoughts turned to things I might still do in the coming years, the crippled children and the less fortunate of my friends to be served, of the unblessed people of the world in general—of everybody but Arthur Burden. And all at once I knew that my heritage was peace.

The train stopped frequently. Passengers kept getting out; none seemed to be getting in. We could not reach Bloomfield till after midnight, meantime I need not count the hours. A brakeman passed through, dimming alternate lights so that the few remaining passengers could sleep. I think I may have slept, for I was near to exhaustion. The monotonous roar and swaying of the train gave place to a smooth purring rumble, as the locomotive ran out on a long steel bridge. In the late moonlight the waters beneath glistened like a field of rippling light, while overhead hung a fantastically-shaped column of snow-white smoke from the engine ahead. I had just fitted the picture to my imaginaings: the moving river was the stream of life, the folding pillars of smoke were human emotions (so real to the senses but soon dissipated), the silvery moon was Cara Eltsa—when I was disturbed by a voice,

"Sir, could you help me with this if you please?" from the seat ahead.

Following this disturbance an appreciable time elapsed ere I became fully alive to it. During those moments I was overwhelmingly conscious of the

presence of Sarah. Somewhat dazedly I fumbled for my watch, then smiled lovingly at the hour it told. She seemed nearer to me than ever before during these experiences and I waited in the simple hope of her voice. With the opened watch in my hand my face must have expressed its childish faith and joyous anticipation. But the odd creature in the seat ahead had turned to me, and was asking again.

"Won't you help me with my window?"

Incredible it may sound that I failed then to know her, but the very wish of Cara Eltsa to be disguised was, to practical purpose, a cloak of invisibility.

As I made to rise and to move into her seat it crossed my absent thought that the Charters influence threatened again to claim possesion of me. I knew, too, that in my weakened condition, it might be difficult if not impossible for Arthur Burden to resume control at will. But there seemed no particular object in resisting any longer. During the moments of change there came to me the odd reflection that I should be safe under the dicipline of the old man, that somehow his ancient wisdom was better than mine.

Coming to the woman who had spoken and leaning across her as she sat I tried vainly to loosen the dusty sash so that it could be raised. After a time I was exerting myself to the full; with head lowered almost to the glass I thumped and banged with the

fleshy sides of my fists until I heard an instant's sliding roar above me, felt a quick blow on my head, and afterward knew not what happened. Presumably I had loosened the inner sash or wooden shutter suspended aloft, and its sharp descending edge had cut my scalp.

Before my eyes opened I could feel a hand pressing something soft, and wet, to my head, and I caught the sound of Sarah's voice—not only dream words but wonderfully distinct now and assuredly hers—"Let me be thy healer, dear one." Then, after a few seconds, "Arthur, it is I; won't you speak to me?"

"Speak to you, yes." It seemed unbelievable to have it thus. "I always wanted to answer you, Sarah, when your words have come to me at the wonderful hour to reward my loyalty to your memory."

"*Ecce Signum*!" The words sounding above me were so strangely dramatic that my eyes opened. A few seconds I gazed at her face in the very flesh, but under the paralyzing realization of what it meant my faculty of speech was gone, the power of movement followed and, on a dissolving world of confused lights and shapes being drawn into a whirlpool, my eyelids closed of their own weight. I sighed quickly, audibly. Something which had been heavy upon my head had all at once gone soaring away like a great and heavy bird, leaving me for a moment with a mysterious instinct of relief, then senseless.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MIRACLE

EVERYTHING I was looking at seemed so out of place—for my bedroom. The hands before me were spread motionless on the white coverlet of the narrow cot. It made me think of sick people of whom I had seen scarcely anything in my life. Or was it just the appearance of the nurse I discovered stooping over a desk in another corner. She was talking to a doctor. "Newspapers. . ." "Yes, isn't she!" were words that rose above the whispering, and once, "Huge sensation!" I liked these two. Village doctors often look so much more old-fashionedly professional than city ones. Somehow I knew the room itself; I thought I must have read a story about it somewhere. I remembered that door directly in front of me, through which the morning sun streamed onto the floor. It should lead to a side balcony. Yes, I could presently find a patch of the balcony ceiling through the two glass panels rounded at the top. That was curious, too, because there should be a heavy iron grating in those panels. The doctor at the heavy old walnut desk was sitting where the boy of my story had sat, when he had opened the third right-hand drawer and taken out an old daguerrotype.

I soon grew tired trying to remember where I'd read the story: stories are so like that.

Then a tall willowy girl glided into the room from behind me, and was speaking very quietly to the nurse. She was a glorious figure. My face beamed as she passed, my eyes glowed happily and I felt on a sudden very young and eager. The stately girl belonged in the story certainly. Perhaps that was only because I was at the age when such things happen. Her name too escaped me, but assuredly I had known her somewhere. Not only that but it came to me swiftly now that she was associated with some terrible time of trial in my experience. Or, No! it could not be that either, because—I seemed to be reading her aura—I perceived that she was connected with some great unbelievable happiness which had come to me in a dream, a dream which had been so realistic that, even now, it was true.

She happened to look toward me. Instantly her eyes snapped magically to meet mine, and she came running to me. Yes, I remembered much more now; she was the angel who had come to me through great suffering and tribulation.

"We are in Bloomfield, Arthur," she told me in a soothing voice, kneeling by the cot. "This is such a queer old place. It was built, they tell me, by an eccentric old recluse and was never intended for a hospital. The rooms were all full so they had to put you in the office like this."

"Well, it's a very beautiful room," I answered, quite incapable of removing my eyes from her amazingly lovely ones, so light brown in the sunlight. I wanted to put my arm around her neck so that she would be nearer to me, but somehow could not make up my mind whether I should ask her permission, or merely do so, or whether I should be thinking of such a thing. "Why don't I get up?" I asked, shifting in that direction. At my movement the nurse came towards us but, without speaking, passed out of the room. The doctor followed her, folding up his eye-glasses as he went. I was being gently pushed back by the long white hands I loved to obey.

"How was it—?" I asked falteringly as facts began collecting in my brain. "How did it happen that you came back to me—?"

"I do not know. Because it wasn't—wasn't my wish. It was something else. Thursday, when you went away—" She spoke with profoundly thoughtful hesitation, "My ambition seemed to have gone with you. My performance that night was a failure. Instead of being my characters I was with you, outside in the darkness, suffering with you and yearning—almost half believing—that my eleven o'clock visits to you might have been true—And always unable quite to believe. Then, last night, I couldn't bear it any longer—thinking of you going away from me again. Yes, as I say, I

did not know why I did it—but I left my audience waiting."

"Oh, yes, yes!" I smiled, recollecting Cara Eltsa perfectly, though still puzzled. "But you are—you are Sarah, aren't you?"

"No, Arthur, I'm not—even to you— I am not that any more. Sarah I remember as a weird child-woman, full of nothing but pathos and unnatural visions she could never penetrate. Then—yesterday—" She looked at me anxiously as though I were still a patient.

"Tell me about it, dear," I spoke eagerly. "It will give me time—to realize—who I am. I feel I am going to be entirely that self with a very little more help. . . Was it then really you—your own presence and words—that have so often come to me at the same hour, ever since we met?"

"It is hard to tell you. All my life I have known a separate—influence. Not a mother influence exactly, but rather a—an older self. A superior ego which, with gentle wisdom, ever counselled and encouraged me. It was this undefined ego who wanted to visit you, and, in her desire to have you worthy, always found you different to that which common reasoning and the world found you. Even I—my ordinary workaday self—believed sometimes. . . But of course not permanently, but only to indulge myself in happiness."

Through the cool hand on my forehead and the light of her eyes as much as through her marvellously

controlled words I understood, and there came to me the soothing fragrance of her presence.

"It was all so—so strange," she sighed, "and yet so inevitable. I realized it when I saw you looking at your watch. And I knew then that, in a moment or two, you would prove to me that all my supposedly imaginative faith in you was real and justified."

She laughed a tender relieved ripple. Effortlessly her voice penetrated my brain, like a magnet stirring amongst my thoughts and drawing together the true and ordered ideas of my new life, until I exclaimed:

"I'm Arthur Burden, who gave away a lot of his money yesterday. And you're—yes, you are Sarah, and we are going to be married. Soon I'll be quite sure where I came from, and where you came from. Where did you come from?"

"And that I do not know," she purred happily, at seeing how bright and natural I had become. "Why should I want to know whether, as you say, I am not really forty-nine but twenty-three. As it happens you are the only living person who knows anything about my years. I had thought that my present life was nothing more than requital for my serious and clouded girlhood. Twenty-eight years ago I looked into your eyes, which were matured and inscrutably wise; now I am looking into the eyes of a boy. There is a miracle somewhere, but love is always a miracle. All I want to know is that you and I are standing hand in hand on the threshhold

of life, and that from this time forward we are going to march naturally and splendidly towards old age."

While we talked the whole skein of my life seemed to be unravelling itself to my understanding. The weight I had been carrying had fallen away from me, to prepare me for my pilgrimage, just as Christian's burden of sins fell away. What was it really? What is this weight that some people carry for part of their lives? Is it perhaps the burden of unfulfilled purpose—sins of omission—of persons we suppose perished, but whose minds are not prepared to pass along to a higher form of life awaiting them? Or, in my own case, was it that Hendrick Charters' resolve was too strong to be ended by death? That, possessing my body, he had urged and suffered and struggled these forty-eight years to place me back once more in the position of promise he had thrown away? Whatever the answer, it was all past with me, and that past was like an impersonal tale.

The lovely face leaned smilingly nearer to me now and I stretched up my arms and drew it so close that in the warmth and sweetness of it our spirits were as one.

Hendrick Charters was at last what people call dead.

THE END

PERCY GOMERY

is by birth of that classification which has contributed a great deal to modern literature, a clergyman's son. Coming to Canada when his son Percy was but three years old, the Rev. Henry Gomery served his Church as rector of two country parishes before being called to the city on special work, and it was during those early years spent in the country amidst rural scenes that the boy developed the habit of composition.

Graduating from the old Montreal High School for Boys, in 1897, Gomery entered the business of banking in which he has been engaged ever since, though his restless temperament at times has led him far afield. He took special courses at both McGill and Queen's, he was president of the Montreal Society for Psychical Research, edited a country newspaper at twenty-two, toured Europe in 1908, removed to British Columbia in 1910, and some years later attracted attention at home and abroad by performing the first trans-Canada motor journey. The story of this he has told in his book "A Motor Scamper 'cross Canada"

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