

EPICIER :: GROCER
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CHAPTER I

THE ROAD

THOUGH it was six days since Daniel Ordway had come out of prison, he was aware, when he reached the brow of the hill, and stopped to look back over the sunny Virginia road, that he drank in the wind as if it were his first breath of freedom. At his feet the road dropped between two low hills beyond which swept a high, rolling sea of broom-sedge; and farther still—where the distance melted gradually into the blue sky—he could see not less plainly the New York streets through which he had gone from his trial and the walls of the prison where he had served five years. Between this memory and the deserted look of the red clay road there was the abrupt division which separates actual experience from the objects in a dream. He felt that he was awake, yet it seemed that the country through which he walked must vanish presently at a touch. Even the rough March wind blowing among the broomsedge heightened rather than diminished the effect of the visionary meeting of earth and sky.

As he stood there in his ill-fitting clothes, with his head bared in the sun and the red clay ground to fine dust on his coarse boots, it would have been difficult