

## CHAPTER II

**A**UTUMN passed and winter, then on a day in early spring Alan Wayne was summoned to Red Hill. Snow still hung in the crevices of East Mountain. On the Hill the ashes, after the total eclipse of winter, were meekly donning pale green. The elms of Elm House too were but faintly outlined in verdure and stood like empty sherry glasses waiting for warm wine. Further down the road the maples stretched out bare, black limbs whose budding tufts of leaves served only to emphasize the nakedness of the trees. Only the firs, in a phalanx, scoffed at the general spring cleaning and looked old and sullen in consequence.

The colts, driven by Alan Wayne, flashed over the brim of Red Hill on to the level top. Coachman Joe's jaw was hanging in awe and so had hung since Mr. Alan had taken the reins. For the first time in their five years of equal life the colts had felt the cut of a whip, not in anger but as a reproof for breaking. Coachman Joe had braced himself for the bolt, his hands itching to snatch the reins. But there had been no bolting, only a sudden settling down to business.

For the first time in their lives the colts were being pushed, steadily, evenly, almost — but never quite — to the breaking point. Twice in the long drive Joe