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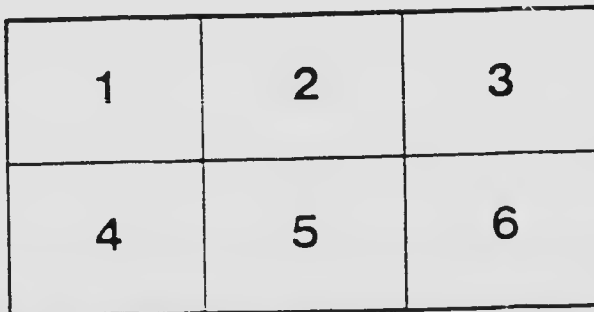
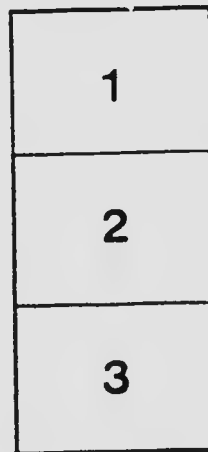
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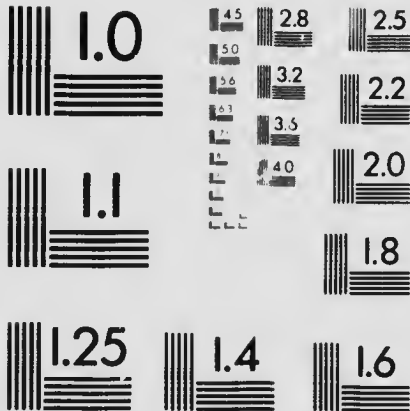
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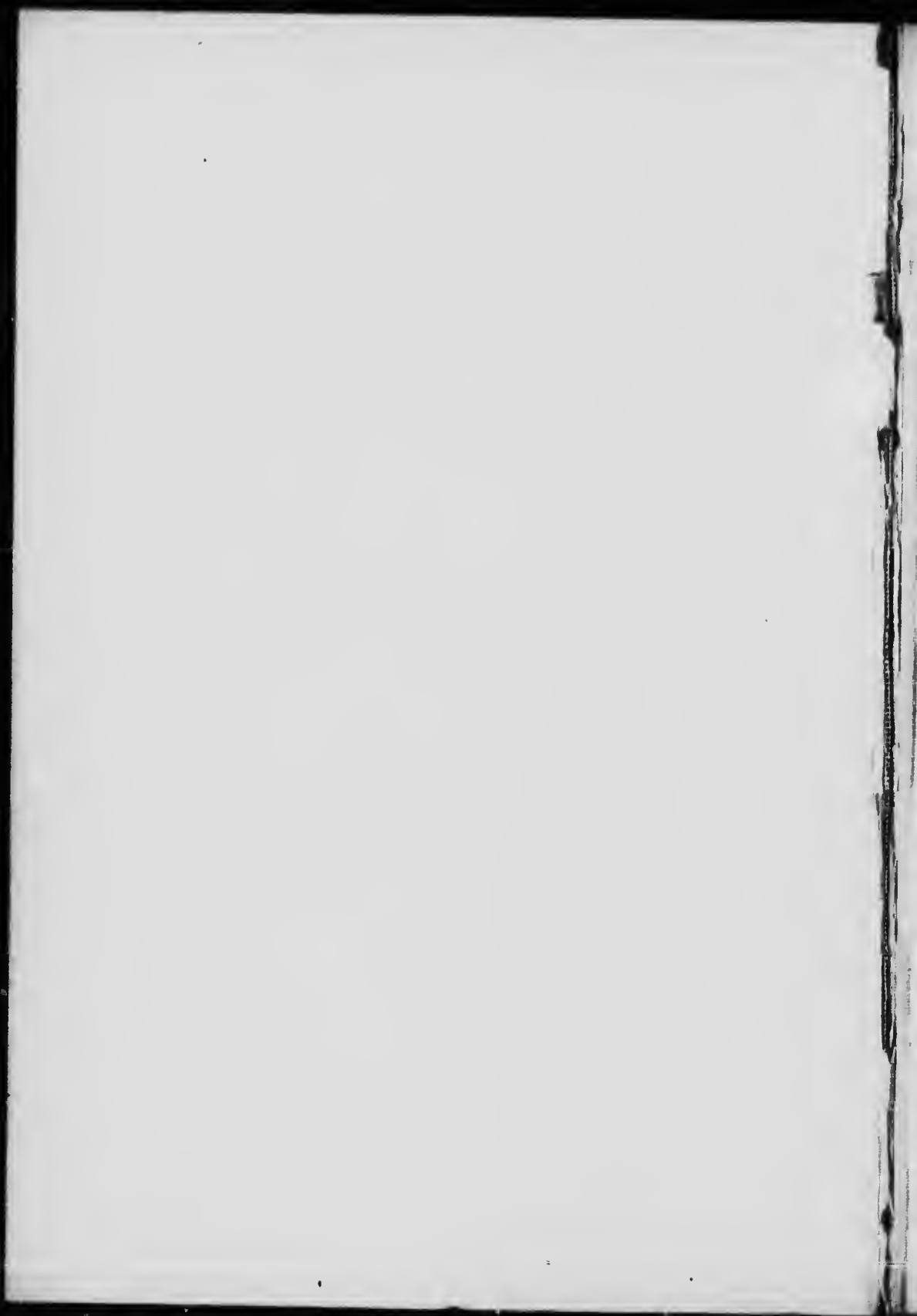
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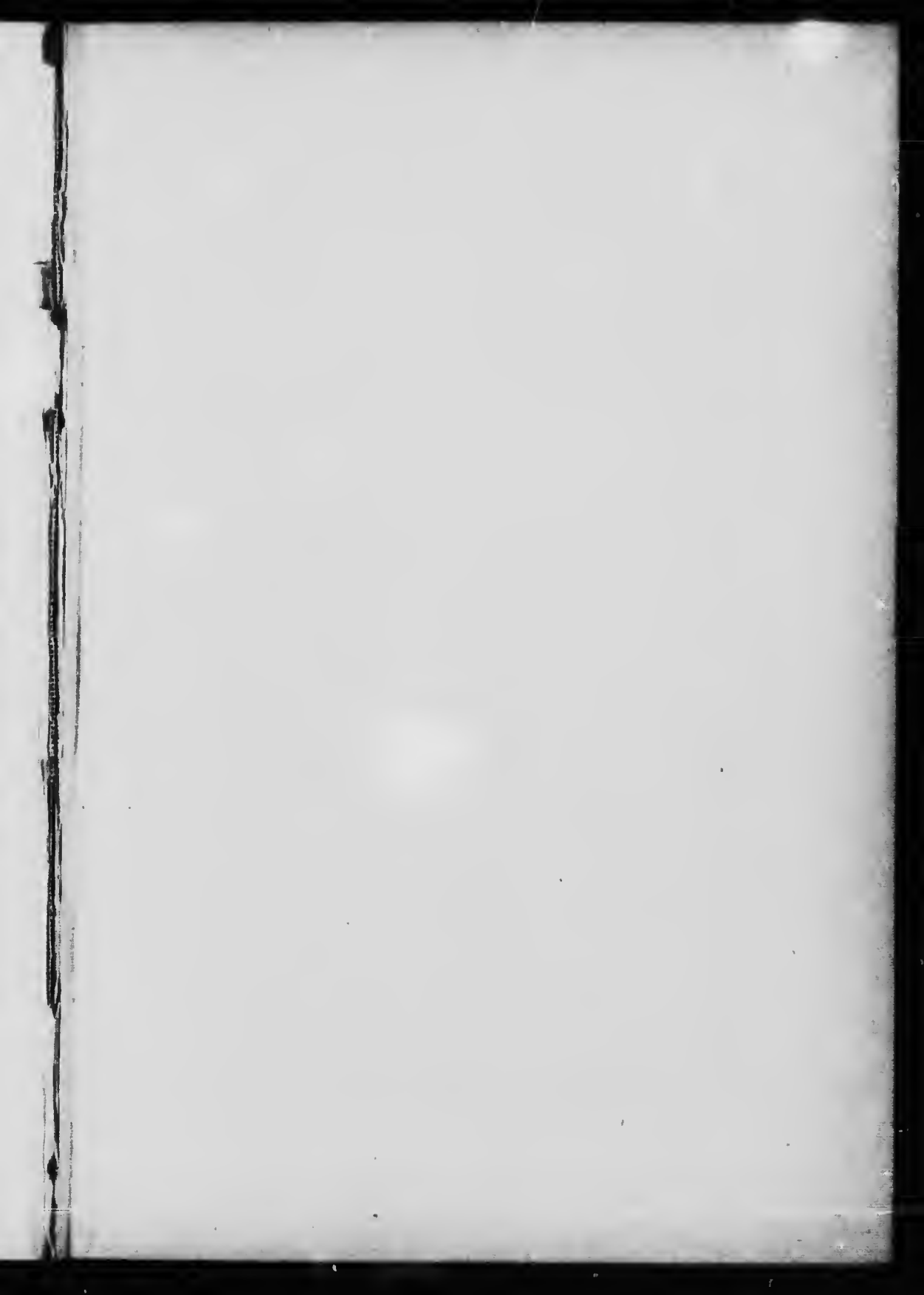


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THE ANVIL OF CHANCE







"Then all jobs are big jobs?" she said. (See page 242.)

THE
ANVIL OF CHANCE

BY
GERALD CHITTENDEN

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR
BY W. C. RICE

TORONTO
McCLELLAND, GOODCHILD & STEWART
PUBLISHERS



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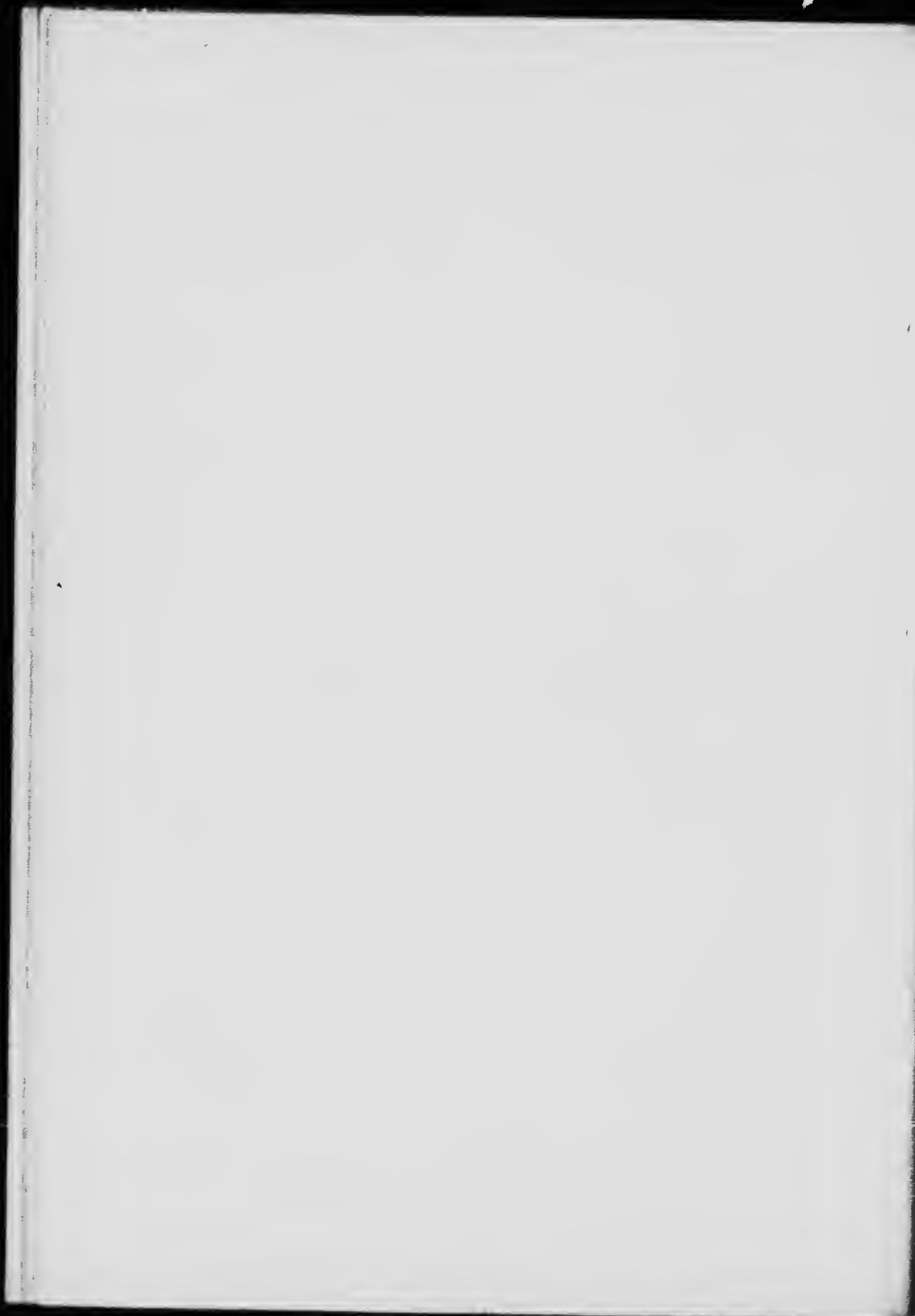
By divers hands designed, their plates were laid
Here in the tumult of our busy slips,
And honestly we wrought and strongly made
And this is our reward—"There go the ships."

Our merchandise stocks not a single hold
Though echoes of our hammers linger there.
They bring to us nor ivory nor gold,
But up the seas our labored honor bear.

We know that some, as steady as the tides,
Roll on a chartered course from shore to shore.
Our compasses, perhaps, are still their guides.
Thus much we dare to hope. No more.

We know that some, on desert seas and wide,
Little and lone, fly as the sea birds fly,
To far, strange ports, to prove a hope untried,
Or miss all hope, and break, and sink, and die.

"There go the ships." And we, upon the quays,
Look ever out to where the gray sky dips
To grayer sea. Their gale, perhaps, our breeze,
Our fears, their hopes. Ah, well—"There go the ships."



THE ANVIL OF CHANCE

CHAPTER I

IF Brooke had been more experienced, he would have sensed something electric in the air of the school-room long before eight o'clock. He had, however, been a schoolmaster for rather less than a fortnight, and, although he had noticed the covert glances which had been passing between boy and boy for the last half hour, he had attached no meaning to them. Therefore, the book that whizzed through the air at the first stroke of the hour, and narrowly missed his head, took him completely by surprise. Before he could rise from his chair the air was full of books. One of them struck him on the shoulder; at once, and for the first time in four years, he acted upon impulse. With his toothbrush of a mustache bristling, and his shoulders swinging like a belligerent terrier's, he stepped from the platform, strode the length of one of the aisles, and crashed his fist into the face of a boy a foot taller than himself. The other boys—all seventy of them—had ceased firing as soon as Brooke left the desk; now they gasped a seventy-fold gasp, and were silent. Brooke

did not notice them—was not, indeed, aware of their presence. His victim, who had gone down like a nine-pin, was wavering to very shaky legs.

"I'll see Mr. Marshall about this," he said.

"See him and be—hanged," Brooke answered. "Meanwhile—" He seized the boy by the slack of his trousers and the collar of his coat, made him walk Spanish up the aisle and out of the door, and shut it after him. Then, more angry than he had ever been in his life, he turned and faced the room.

"Anybody else?" he demanded. There was no answer. "Rumford, Heath, and Winters," he went on, "pick up those books and pile them on the desk. The rest of you, get busy."

He took a turn or two about the room, and then, his instinct for gallery play again supreme, sat down at the desk and pretended to correct papers. It was only pretence; his hand was shaking so that he could hardly hold the pencil, and there was mist before his eyes. Nevertheless, he shifted the pages at regular intervals, and no one in the room knew that there was not a blue mark on any one of them. He kept the boys a long twenty minutes over time, and not a shuffling foot or a loudly drawn breath indicated impatience. When he dismissed them, they closed their desks with a silence that was almost absurd, and departed to their dormitories, talking in whispers. Brooke put out the lights, and sought his own quarters, where he smoked

a much needed cigarette. Then he strolled—forced himself to stroll—to the headmaster's study.

"Has Lawson been to see you, Mr. Marshall?" he asked.

"He's just left. Said you hit him. Did he deserve it?" Marshall looked at Brooke over his glasses; his tone was non-committal.

"I don't know." Brooke was prepared to stand on the defensive. "Someone deserved it, and he seemed a likely criminal."

"More than a likely one. You picked the right boy." Marshall unearthed a box of cigars from the litter on his desk, and proffered it. "Won't you sit down?" he asked. "It's early yet."

"Then—it's all right?" Brooke, a weight lifted from his mind, dropped into a chair.

"Quite all right." Marshall paused, and arranged a stack of papers, snapping an elastic band around them. "Quite all right. I don't think you'll have any more trouble." He lit a pipe, puffing out huge clouds. "In dealing with boys, it doesn't really make very much difference what you do, as long as you do it quick. Don't you think so?"

"I hadn't time to reason it out this evening," Brooke answered, "and I don't know that I'd ever thought of it before. I'd never expected anything of just that sort. As a matter of fact, I was too hot under the collar to know just what I was doing."

"Excellent!" Marshall looked at Brooke—through his glasses this time, not over them—and chuckled. "Excellent! I'm glad to have a man in the school who can lose his temper completely—on occasion."

"Why—" Brooke turned his head quickly towards Marshall. "Why, that's not just what one hears about the business."

"I know. There's a fearful amount of foolish talk about schoolmastering—from people who don't know any better." Marshall tapped down the ash of his pipe with a fountain pen, smiling a little sardonically into the bowl as he added, "And from people who ought to know better. It's just like any other business, really."

"But everyone—schoolmasters and all—that I've ever heard talk about it, said that it was necessary to keep one's temper first of all."

"Generally speaking, they're right. They lose sight of the fact that it's even more necessary to have a temper to keep. What do you yourself think of a man who doesn't flare up when he's been handed the hot end of the poker?"

"I suppose—one generally hands him the hot end of the poker," Brooke's own fingers had sizzled more than once.

"Exactly. And boys are just like that. A pedagogue must explode occasionally—more often than other men, perhaps, because he's always dealing with

inferior intellects. Barbarian intellects. Most of the men in the business are far too equable and patient. That's one reason why the boys are apt to think us less than human." Marshall leaned back in his desk chair, placing the tips of his fingers together. "A man who acts on impulse is worth more to me."

That remark hit Brooke very hard indeed. He could not get it out of his mind; it was uppermost there when he said good-night to Marshall and went to bed. Habitually, he acted on calculation and not on impulse, and had done so ever since the first weeks of his Freshman year in college. He had been a very scared Freshman, and a very, very, young one, and potentially a good deal of a fool. A certain Senior whom he had long known had furnished him with a ready made philosophy of life.

"If you are walking with two other men," the Senior had advised, "always manage to walk between them. People notice that sort of thing."

Brooke had not paused to wonder what sort of people notice that sort of thing; literally and figuratively, he had followed the advice for four years. To his slight credit be it said, he did not carry the theory to its logical conclusion, and avoid compromising appearances in company with representatives of the common people. He therefore succeeded in maintaining a reputation for democracy, and no one, save him-

self, knew that his frequent, though accidental, associations with the working classes kept him warm with conscious virtue, and tittivated his adventurous spirit with the fear that he was endangering his social and fraternal future. No one even suspected as much, and that was remarkable, or would have been remarkable if the Theory of the Three Pedestrians had been a structural detail of his architecture instead of a bit of meretricious gimcrackery applied on the surface in an era of bad taste. Even in his most grovelling period, which lasted until well on in his Sophomore year, he preserve^d a certain essential humility, or perhaps modesty, which made it impossible for him to conceive that there were men in college who desired his intinacy as keenly as he desired that of the big men of his class. Withal, he was not a sycophant, for he never could force himself to seek the favor of the gods; he coveted prominence more than prominent friends. But he would have been a snob if he had had the courage of his convictions.

Circumstances, however, took care of his case with the most exact justice, as circumstances sometimes do. He never achieved in his class anything like the position he desired; he was, in fact, as lonely as he deserved to be until midway in his Sophomore year. Loneliness gave him the opportunity he needed to get acquainted with himself, and, since rot had never react^d the core of him, he passed rather quickly

through the stage of self-pity, little by little acquiring the ability to stand

“ . . . beside and watch himself
Behavin' like a bloomin' fool,”

and eventually developing a salty, satiric humor of which he himself was the butt.

In one way, he was not without prominence. He had a neat trick of the pen, which earned him a position on the board of the college literary monthly; corollary honors, though none that were elective, came his way; by perfectly legitimate hard work, he gained a place which the acknowledged “big men” of the class had to notice, though they noticed it because they had to. Their tribute was paid to the positions and not to the man; in company with them, he was generally mum as an oyster. Therefore, they considered him a deep thinker; a very few of them knew him well enough to wonder why he did not say funny things in public, as he not infrequently did in private. None of them realized that he didn't because he couldn't; he did not even think funny things in the company of the aristocracy of his class. Yet he was not shy; the inhibition of his powers of repartee had its origin in the very aloofness from himself which he had achieved by travail, and in the uncomfortable certainty that his fellows tolerated him through a sense of justice—because they thought he might be worth while rather than because they knew he was sympathetic. That was

a reflex of his attitude towards them, and, in spite of the friendly imp of satire who sat ever at his ear, it cut him very deep. But discomfort of the mind was, as no one knew better than himself, part of the price to be paid for his pseudo prominence.

The price had been paid, and the goods delivered to him with no option of exchange; the bargain was concluded before doubts of its value began to grow in his mind. By the time that the first shoots of intellectual honesty began to show themselves, his second hand and second rate theory of life—the Theory of the Three Pedestrians—had been so long pursued that it had assumed the proportions of a cause. The results were inevitable; he could not escape them even by a tardy abandonment of the theory, for his equals and his superiors in point of age judged the whole of him by the part of him which he had permitted them to see. By underclassmen, in whose presence he was conscious of no awkward restraint, he was generally enthusiastically welcomed. With them, he could be himself; consequently, in their company, he discovered a certain charm which was elsewhere completely drowned. They capitulated to him unconditionally, largely because he did not try to capture them; as his classmates discovered with surprise, the fact that he was a member of a fraternity was a potent attraction to many of the really good and really solid men in the class below. It was one of the things about himself

which his queer, inopportune, modesty never permitted him to find out. In consequence, he did not assess it at its full value, nor did he draw from it any clear cut conclusion as to the value of spontaneity. To the end of his college course he continued to grope about in the dark, stepping cautiously. The only difference between his state of mind at the beginning of his course and his state of mind at the end of it was that, in his Senior year, he knew that he was in the dark, and that the light he had once followed was no more than a will-o'-the-wisp.

When he was graduated he drifted into the business of schoolmastering, as so many men have done before him. He had few ideas about it, and no ideals; the dream and the vision of it were completely hidden from his eyes. Therefore, he was meat for the cheap cynicism which is characteristic of so many of the men in the profession. He began his work with the cool detachment which his training had fostered in him. Then, like a bolt from the blue, came the Lilliputian riot in the schoolroom, the blindly impulsive assault on the biggest boy in the room, the unqualified approval of the Headmaster, and the immediate leap into the respect of the boys, which manifested itself on the following morning. The whole incident was the result of the purest accident; it called for a radical change in his point of view, but that necessity was not at once, or for a very long time, clear to him.

CHAPTER II

THERE were three married masters at Chester School; inevitably, therefore, there were three tea clinics, and the greatest of these was the clinic of Mrs. Henry Motley. Brooke had called there before the term was a week old, and had watched with much interest and little understanding the annual October preparation of specimens. It had fascinated him; he did not realize that he could not become a member of Mrs. Motley's course in pedagogical histology until he himself had been laid out on the slab and sliced into microscopical sections. His experiment in discipline by assault suggested to Mrs. Motley that he might be anatomically interesting; when Motley, well-trained in the whole duty of husbands, retrieved the news for her, she at once donned her rubber gloves, set the scalpels and the bistouries on to boil, and waited impatiently for five o'clock. The demonstration began as soon as two or three of the regular students were gathered together; each new arrival brought with him his contribution of imagined detail, until the entire

incident had been reconstructed from the flight of the first book to the exit of Brooke from Marshall's study. Then began the real work of the session—to wit, the careful probing of Brooke's motives; the consideration of the effect they had had on Marshall's opinion of him, and of the effect they should have had on Marshall's opinion of him; the meticulous examination of the influence of so radical a departure from educational precedent on the minds of the boys; and last, but not least, the ghoulish and gleeful consideration of Brooke's character as revealed by his actions. Altogether, the clinic spent a very delightful and instructive afternoon—not the less delightful because free speech was stopped by the entrance of Brooke himself.

"We were just talking about you," said Mrs. Motley, when she greeted him. Her tactics were aggressive at times.

"Then I arrived just in time," Brooke answered.

"Not quite in time," interjected Furness, who taught geology, and looked it. "You couldn't have heard. Mrs. Motley said we had been talking about you, not that we were just going to begin."

"Now, that's mean," Mrs. Motley objected, and added, "we were talking about last night, of course."

"Did you really knock Lawson down?" asked Motley.

"Why—yes," Brooke answered slowly, and thanked heaven for the jangle of the doorbell which promised

him a moment's respite from cross examination. Motley answered it, his voice rising in the entry as his cordiality burned bright under forced draught.

"You're quite a stranger," he said.

The words of the reply were inaudible. Mrs. Motley framed with her lips the word "Who?" Furness, as ignorant as she, but always willing to hazard a guess at her behest, answered "Hood," in a hoarse whisper.

It was Hood—a tall, light-boned man, with a smooth face, lean temples, and eyes noticeably tired. The clinic were uneasy in his presence—almost as uneasy as he was in theirs. He was a different type; a man tortured by the depth and glamor of his dreams. Brooke had been both attracted to him and puzzled by him ever since the first day of the term.

"You're quite a stranger," echoed Mrs. Motley.

"Er—one's so busy at the beginning of the term." Hood chose a chair, and sat down in it, leaning forward a little. "Cold for October, isn't it? Yes—one lump, please."

Weather, then, was the keynote. The usual meteorological symphony followed. Not for five minutes did the matter of Brooke's adventure come again to the surface. Furness introduced it.

"But you haven't told us what really did happen last night," he said.

"I heard about that," Hood blurted out. "I'm glad you soaked that fellow Lawson.

"I guess it taught him a lesson," assented Motley.

"Lesson!" Hood retorted. "He's too old to be taught lessons. He ought to have been fired long ago."

"I suppose that's so," agreed Furness reluctantly. "But then, we've never had anything on him."

"Except his character," Hood rejoined.

"That's a little indefinite, isn't it?"

"Indefinite?" Hood shot the word out. Suddenly he perceived that his remarks were too blunt to penetrate the antipathy of his audience; he quieted down, and made one of his rare compromises. "Perhaps it is," he said.

The conversation flapped heavily back to the alluring carrion of personalities—to Brooke, in this case. The incident of the night before was gone over again in all its details; Brooke, despite the implied flattery of the general comment, wearied of it before Hood did. But Hood made the first move to leave.

"Well," he said, "it's a good thing for Brooke, and maybe for the rest of us. But it ought never to have been necessary."

He bowed over Mrs. Motley's hand.

"Come again soon," she said, and added to Brooke, "Must you go, too?"

"I'm afraid so. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. Come again soon. I'm in almost every afternoon."

The door closed behind them. Hood drew a long

breath, snapped his lips as though about to say something, thought better of it, and walked on in silence for a hundred yards or so.

"Are you busy this evening?" he asked at last.

"No," Brooke answered. "It's my free night."

"Drop in later and have a smoke, won't you?"

"Thanks. I'd like to."

Brooke was sincere in that, for Hood had said enough to arouse his curiosity. But Brooke, contrasting him with the clinic, and seeking now as always to follow the proper lead, paused to wonder if Hood was a good person to be intimate with. His doubt might have induced him to neglect Hood's invitation, but fortunately he recognized the familiar horns of the theory of the Three Pedestrians, and did once more what he wanted to do instead of waiting to find out what was considered the proper thing. His skirmish with the Theory left him with some mental trepidation, of which he was uneasily conscious when he knocked at Hood's door later that evening.

"Come in!" called Hood. "Ah! I hoped it was you, Brooke. Sit down and have a cigarette; I'll be through with these papers in a minute."

Brooke, at his ease because his host had not stopped work at once, selected his chair, and looked about him. It was a large room, with something permanent and personal about it, for Hood had been fifteen years at Chester, and did not intend to leave. There were

books galore, some good bric-a-brac, and a few handsome etchings, carefully hung. It was an interesting room and a comfortable one; Hood himself, with his face in the shadow of the desk light, was more interesting and less comfortable. Brooke took advantage of his preoccupation; he could make little out of the face, except that it was not the face of a happy man.

Hood finished the last paper, and tossed it into his desk basket. He leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head.

"That's done, thank Heaven," he said. "What department are you in?"

"Four of them altogether," Brooke answered. "I'm a kind of a handy man for odd jobs."

Hood rose impatiently, sat down again in a chair nearer Brooke, and hung his leg over the arm.

"That's rotten," he exclaimed. "As if any man under heaven could teach half a dozen things equally well."

"Well, I suppose some one has to do the odds and ends."

"That's what they say." Hood filled a pipe with vigorous fingers and lit it. "That's what they say. It's not so—there ought not to be any odds and ends. Hiring a man to teach what's left over is just poor organization and nothing else."

"I had an idea it was necessary. Mr. Marshall seemed to me an awfully good executive."

"He is. Don't make any mistake about that. The best we ever had here. But he hasn't a free foot."

"How do you mean?"

Hood frowned through the smoke; then smiled, a little cynically.

"This is an old school," he said, "and has had its ups and downs. Some pretty deep downs, too. I never knew the founder, and I don't like half what I hear about him, but he was—must have been—remarkable."

"You mean The Professor?" Brooke queried, smiling.

"You've heard of him? But of course you have. Heard too much of him, I dare say, even in two weeks' residence here."

"Far too much."

"One does. He's a kind of a fetich. He's been completely de-humanized—like George Washington. Like him or not, as you please, he must have had a tremendous personality. That's why the place went down hill when he died. It was built on personality and not principle. Chaos was inevitable after the personality was gone."

"Doesn't sound very encouraging," commented Brooke.

"It isn't. Graduates think everything he did was right, and consequently everything anyone else does is wrong."

"That makes changes difficult, I should think."

"Almost impossible. But Marshall is a hard man to beat. He looks forward instead of backwards. There are some—trustees and old boys—who don't."

"Can't they be ignored?" In his own mind, Brooke was going over conditions at Chester as he had thus far seen them. He was unable to see that they were in so parlous a state as Hood implied; they were not so very different from what he had expected them to be.

"Not by a long shot," Hood replied. "The—the idolators won't keep their mouths shut."

Hood flung out of his chair and fiddled with the shade of an electric light. Brooke, feeling that something was coming, did not speak.

"That's what makes things so perfectly impossible," Hood burst out. "How can you get a decent point of view from the boys if you can't get it from their fathers?"

"You mean, make the boys behave?"

"I don't mean make them behave at all!" Hood, touched at the quick of the Utopianism which made him great, was aggressive in his denial—almost quarrelsome. "I don't mean that at all. I don't expect them to behave. I mean, make them want to behave."

Brooke laughed. Like most people, he believed that the hostility between boys and the law was irreconcilable. A moment later, looking at Hood's face, he was

sorry for his laughter, not because he might have hurt Hood's feelings, but because he feared that it had dropped him a peg in Hood's estimation.

"It's not impossible," Hood went on. "Boys—most of them—haven't any point of view when they come here. It's up to us to give them one."

"I'm not sure I understand what you mean by a point of view," put in Brooke.

"Why—look here!" Hood writhed in his chair a little, then sat still with his legs stretched out in front of him. "Look here—you can't get goodness by legislation. You've got to produce the point of view that makes legislation unnecessary."

"But that never has been done. Not in schools, at least."

"It's been done in individual cases," Hood answered with conviction. "You'll grant that much?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then it can be extended from one individual to another, can't it?"

"Why, I suppose so. But never over a whole school."

"Over most of it, under proper conditions." He paused for a long while, and went on more quietly, rubbing the back of his head, as his habit was. "It all depends on intimacy between man and boy, I think. And that means that the man has to stand so straight with the kid that he leans over backwards."

"Not—conceal anything, you mean?"

"Never. Concealment's worse than out and out lying, because it's more easily found out."

"I suppose it is." Brooke did not see how Hood could ever achieve what he wished. His desires were impracticable from beginning to end; Hood was a hopeless visionary. Brooke had no use for hopeless visionaries, and was as yet so blind to the possibilities of schoolmastering that he did not perceive how needful vision was to the business.

"And that isn't all." Hood was fairly in the saddle now, and galloped forward. "There's all the petty, mean-minded scandal and gossip that goes on all over the place."

"At the Motley's, you mean?"

"There, and elsewhere. It's rotten."

"But I've heard—. Isn't it just like all other small communities in that respect?"

"Perhaps it is. But, confound it, that sort of thing ought not to go on here!"

Brooke put his hand to his mouth rather quickly, fingering his mustache and concealing a smile at the expense of Hood.

"You want faultlessness," he objected.

"Of course I do. If you don't want that, you never get anything worth having."

"But in a school, of all places! The life's so narrow."

"So they say. Do you find it so?"

The question was a bullet, as so many of Hood's questions were. It found one of the many joints in Brooke's armor.

"I find it very interesting—" he began, cautiously.

"There! If it's interesting—really interesting—to you, it can't be narrowing."

"Why can't it?" Brooke was goaded at last to open opposition. "Any work that doesn't lead you anywhere must be narrowing, whether you're interested in it or not."

"Doesn't lead you anywhere?"

"Teaching doesn't. Nowhere at all, that I can see. Don't you do the same things over and over again, year after year? And pay! Why, the broker who starts at five dollars a week overhauls one in no time." Brooke glanced over at Hood, and paused. "Isn't that all true?" he asked.

"Perfectly true," Hood answered. "And perfectly unimportant. 'The same things over and over again.' Of course. That has to be. Is that all you see in the business?"

"All I can get my hands on. Other things are—too vague."

"H'm. So Motley thought. So he followed what he could touch. And now he does all he's paid for. His trouble is that he doesn't do anything that can't be paid for. Of course he's narrow."

"But if you do all you're paid to do—"

"And no more, mind you. Other things—all the best things—in schoolteaching as in any other business under the blue sky—aren't for sale. They can't be. Therefore, they matter. Teaching ability is compensated at the rate of so many dollars a year, and is worth it, or not, as the case may be. It's on the market. Do you see what I mean?"

"Er—not exactly."

Hood was half amused and half exasperated at the equivocation. Amusement conquered; he laughed. His was a full-bodied laugh, with a bouquet to it, and no harshness in the aftertaste.

"That means you do understand—exactly," he said. "We're all rather balky when it comes to saying in so many words that we want to do some good in the world." He paused, watching the blood slowly wax and slowly wane in Brooke's face. "Probably that's just as well. Welles goes to the other extreme, as you'll discover eventually. That explains Motley, by the way."

"How so?"

"Revolt against mush—sentimentality. It made us all sick ten years ago, but it played the devil with Motley's digestion, and he's never gotten over it. He can't swallow anything sweet even now." Hood sat up in his chair, crossed his legs, and hung a slipper on one big toe. "Do you remember that particularly

odious little boy?" he asked. "The Sunday School little boy—forget his name, if I ever knew it."

"Robert Reed?"

"No, he's the one who wouldn't chew tobacco, it was a nasty weed. This was his brother, I imagine. You know:

'How pleasant is Saturday night

When I've tried all the week to be good,
And have said all my prayers and have done what was
right,

And have done all the good that I could.'

That's the one. Know him?"

"I know about him." Brooke was beginning to enjoy himself. "But I never met him. He died, didn't he? On the last day of December, as the chimes were ringing in the New Year?"

"Not he. He grew up, and his name is—Hood, perhaps. Look out for him—he bites. Poisonous. And look out for—Brooke—he bites. Deadly poisonous."

"Scylla and Charybdis, eh?"

"No. The devil and the deep sea."

"Dangerous sailing." The conversation was whitening over shallows, and Brooke wished that it would continue to do so.

"Dangerous sailing," repeated Hood. "Very." The animation faded from his face, leaving it contempla-

tive, and not a little shadowed with sadness. The rapids were deepening into a pool; it was the pools that Brooke feared, for in the surface of them he must needs look down into his own face. He made a desperate effort to hurry Hood onward.

"Shipwreck's inevitable," he said. "Why not collect the insurance?"

"That's barratry. Besides, it's not inevitable," Hood answered, gravely and positively. "There's Sunday School smugness on one side, and hopeless mediocrity on the other. I'm sure there's a channel between—there must be. I think—well—it's a question of going on, isn't it? Not gloating over our successes, and not losing faith because of our failures. Not looking back, in short—just going on. Isn't that it?"

"Why—maybe." Brooke, half awake to what Hood meant, was too shamefaced to agree with him, or to pursue the conversation. "Why—maybe," he repeated, awkwardly. The ship's clock on the mantel struck seven bells; Brooke clutched at the excuse. "Half past eleven! I'd no idea it was so late."

He rose. Hood rose also.

"The spectre of seven in the morning?" he queried. His smile, with its touch of disillusion, had a very singular charm. "That always haunts us. Good night. Drop in again soon."

"Thanks, I will.

Hood had given him much to think about—much that was new to him. That night he pursued sleep a long time before he caught up with it. It seemed that there was a vastness in this sea of new experience on which he had so carelessly embarked—a vastness of which he had never dreamed, and a loom of fair and strange ports on the horizon. In the night he could believe in the worth of his venture—of Hood's venture; were it always night, men would be either great sinners or great saints.

In the morning, things looked different; the imp of satire which he had so long cherished as a familiar, stirred him to mockery of Hood's ideas. He feared other people too much to speak out—feared them almost too much to think; therefore, all things that smacked of idealism were dimmed in a fog of laughter. His intellect, artificially cold, refused Hood's gospel; at the same time, the warm and spontaneous boyhood which had never died in his heart, reached eagerly out for the glamor of Hood's inaccessible star. Pull devil, pull baker; he was neither young enough nor old enough to yield to his instinctive enthusiasms. One thing was certain—Hood made him uncomfortable. Therefore, he avoided Hood.

But he had to have companionship, and he began to see a great deal of the Motleys. The clinic came to know him well, and the fascination of dissection enthralled him. Little by little, he learned the intricacies

of school politics. The real reason why Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Herron had not spoken for years, the causes and the results of the vendetta between Mr. King and Mrs. Shaw, the latest bit of mordant sarcasm with which some full-grown man had floored some twelve-year-old boy—all these interesting items and many more besides began to strengthen the skeleton of his conversation. The ghostly presence of Professor Stokes—The Professor—became clear before him, and he no longer had to be warned to italicize the title. In anathematizing this factor of life at Chester, Hood and the Motleys were at one, though the grounds of their respective impatience were as far apart as the poles. The net of school gossip caught him fast in its meshes—and, because cardinal sin is almost impossible in a school community, school gossip is peculiarly vicious and peculiarly degrading. Brooke began to retrieve scraps of news for Mrs. Motley, and learned to use the tea table incantation, which runs thus—"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! I know something you don't know!" He heard a hundred times in a hundred different ways that term time was but a vale of tears, bounded by the Jordan of examinations, beyond which lay the Canaan of vacation; since he had but drifted into the profession, he was only too ready to believe this ascetic hypothesis, and began to strain towards release from the work which had a right to the best of his energies.

Chameleon though he was, it was not without some pangs and pains that he managed to melt into his background. He felt fettered, dissatisfied with something—whether with himself or his surroundings he was unable to tell. He consoled himself with the catchword that schoolteaching was a narrowing life, and let it go at that. Schools, it would seem—all schools—suffered from ingrowing toenails.

Chester was, or should have been, different. The fertile valley in which it was situated was full of gentlemen farmers—not dilletantes, but keen and alert business men, who raised fancy stock because it paid, and got from the wholesalers two cents more per hundred pounds for their tobacco than the average farmer of less favored districts. They had horses also, and, after their crops were harvested, amused themselves with a variety of sport and hospitality. Their relations with Marshall were rather close; almost every afternoon in the fall two or three of them could be found calling on Mrs. Marshall, while their ponies hobnobbed in the long shed which Marshall had built for their especial use and benefit.

Brooke, who dropped in at the Marshall's almost half as often as he did at the Motley's, met them frequently. They perceived that Marshall liked him, and, ready as they were to take everything except a business proposition at its face value, they tested him by asking him to "come over and have a look at the stock

some day." Too diffident and too cautious, as usual, he allowed their invitations to remain indefinite, until, one Sunday afternoon, he lost himself on a long walk, and, climbing a low stone wall, dropped down beside the chicken run of a man called Scott—one of his would-be hosts. Scott, tall, lean and pleasant, and clad as usual in riding breeches, was playing with his chickens inside the wires.

"Hello, Brooke," he called. "I've been wondering whether you ever meant to come over and see me. Interested in chickens?"

"Not in the least," answered Brooke, smiling.

Scott laughed appreciatively.

"I wish everyone who felt that way would say so. Most of them beg me to show them the poultry, and don't know a White Orpington from a Barred Rock. Sit down and smoke. I'll be through here in a few minutes, and then we'll have a look around, or not—just as you please."

Brooke, however, was only too glad to look over the rest of the farm, for he was genuinely fond of dogs and horses, and had a real admiration for cows and pigs. Scott's place, also, with its trim fences and white gates, its carefully tended stock, and huge, gap-sided tobacco barns, pleased him more than a little; it was solid, permanent, eminently genial, as was also the house, where they went after the inspection was over.

"Do you ride?" asked Scott.

"A little."

"We do a lot of it around here. Some day, when tobacco and butter sell for a dollar a pound, we're going to get a pack of hounds. Meanwhile, we have paper chases every week in the fall, till the snow comes. Ever go 'cross country?"

"Once. Several years ago."

"Good. Let me mount you next Saturday. There's no one else coming up, and I've got two ponies that need exercise."

"I'd like to, but—" Brooke demurred.

"No objections. The beasts really do need exercise, and I keep them to lend. And the paper chases are the very best way to meet people; everybody comes."

"I'll come—thanks very much. It looks like beautiful hunting country."

"None better. There's almost no wire, and, after the crops are in, nobody minds our going across the fields. Of course, it's nothing like real hunting; we keep the ladies in mind when we lay out the course, and take some bars down here and there."

Brooke was extremely glad to hear that. As a matter of fact, although he had ridden a good deal on roads, he had never jumped so much as a gutter, and the prospect of taking a three-foot stone wall did not appeal to him in the least. He could not have told, if anyone had asked him, why he had answered in

the affirmative when Scott had asked him if he rode across country, the reply had followed the line of least resistance. It was the kind of thing he was always doing. If he had told Scott the truth, a conversational five-barred gate would have appeared between them, and not only between them, but between Brooke and all the people of the valley. By this time the term was five weeks old; Brooke had become weary unto death of the clack of tongues at the Motley clinic; of the multitudinous detail of scholastic life; especially of the shrill and piercing voices of little boys. He was ready for any desperate measure that would remove him for a while from these things. He was ready to take a chance of having his bluff called; he had never had to show his cards in all his life.

He did not change his mind about riding on Saturday. He hunted out a man of about his own size, explained that he "had not brought his riding things to school," and turned up at the meet accurately and effectively clad, though he had most conveniently forgotten to bring his spurs.

He was glad he had come. A dozen or so motors were parked at the edge of Scott's drive, and from the sheds which flanked the barn came snorts and whinnies and the stamping of little hoofs, for the "hunters" of the valley were without exception polo ponies on a vacation.

In the house, people were doing full justice to a

stand-up lunch which had more nutritive value than is dreamt of in the philosophy of a city caterer, and, as Scott told him, no introductions seemed to be necessary. Brooke foraged for himself and retired to an eddy of the crowd, where he took his stand next to a very pretty girl with fluffy yellow hair.

"I'm sure you're Mr. Brooke," she said presently. "I'm Billy Strange's sister. He's been talking about you a great deal since school began."

"Billy and I are good friends," answered Brooke. "He sits next to me at table. But he never told me he had any sisters."

"He has two," she answered.

"Then I suppose he's got so used to them that he doesn't talk about them."

"He talks about his teachers," she said.

"Disagreeable child!"

"That's what I've been telling him for fourteen years. But it depends on what he says, doesn't it?"

"You embarrass me frightfully. Let's talk about paper chasing. I've never done it before—on horseback."

"But you've ridden across country, haven't you?"

"Oh yes. A little." His tone gave the impression that he had hunted in Ireland.

"Then you won't have any trouble. In fact, I'm afraid you'll find the run a little tame. They're a lot of fun, though."

"I'm sure they are. It's so much better meeting people this way than quarrelling over auction with them, or gormandizing food."

"What an unpleasant way to look at it! While we're on the subject, would you mind getting me a cup of coffee?"

Brooke put down his plate and hers, and joined the bread line. When he returned with the demitasse, she was talking with Scott.

"Mr. Scott is one of the hares today," she said, "and I'm trying to get him to tell me where he's going to lead us."

"You wouldn't like it if I did," said Scott. "There's the first bugle now—you'll find out soon enough."

The three went out on the porch together. Scott beckoned to a boy who was holding two horses.

"The roan's yours, Brooke," he said. "Mind his mouth; he's apt to buck if you touch him with the curb." Brooke made a note of the information, and resolved to forget that there was such a thing as a curb.

"The other pony's mine," said Miss Strange. "Don't let us keep you, Brer Rabbit; the other hare is waiting for you. Mr. Brooke will mount me."

Brooke looked apprehensively around for the horse boy, but that useless person was lost in the contemplation of an automobile radiator. Brooke had not the vaguest idea of how to put a lady on a horse, though,

of course, he had seen it done more than once; his impulse was to put both arms around her waist and heave, but that didn't seem just the proper way to go about it. Helen Strange was waiting; her position stirred some subconscious memory. He seized the reins firmly in his left hand, and cupped his right at a convenient height. Helen put a small foot into it, and the next moment was in the saddle. Brooke never knew just how she did it; he bowed his head to conceal a smile at his own expense as he placed the stirrup over her toe and arranged her habit.

The bugle blew a second time, and the hares were off, the paper fluttering down behind them. Five minutes later the field followed. Brooke's horse almost threw him at the start; in the general excitement of the moment, no one noticed that his right hand was clenched tight between the pommel and the horse's withers. He got off a little behind the rest, but his beast picked up almost at once, and took a ditch in his stride, so easily that Brooke hardly noticed the jolt. The fact that he had ceased to hold on and yet was still in the saddle gave him a little confidence, and he began to look about at the rest of the riders. He had been separated from Helen Strange at the start; he saw her now, passing through a gate in a wire fence, and laughing with the man who was holding it open for her. Brooke wondered if they were laughing at him; the suspicion that they were occupied

his mind so exclusively at the moment that he was hardly aware that his horse was rising to a low stone wall. He responded instinctively to the animal's movements, and therefore went over it like an old hand.

"Well done!" commented a woman's voice beside him. "When did you take up cross country riding?"

"Pat!" he exclaimed, looking around. "Where did you spring from?"

They were traversing a couple of hundred yards of swampy land, and the horses dropped to a fast walk. The remaining riders were spread out fanwise, half visible through the undergrowth.

"Waterville," she answered. "Mother and I have taken a house there for the winter. But where did *you* come from—it's years and years since I've seen you. And how long have you been riding across country?"

"I'm teaching school at Chester," he answered, "and this is the first time I've ever ridden across country."

She looked at him out of the corner of an amused eye, exactly as she used to look at him before he went to college, and very much as she used to look at him when they were both children together.

"Teaching school?" she said. "What a funny thing for you to do! There—we're past that. Do you see the trail?"

"To the right there—across the pasture."

"And all the rest are behind us! Come along!"

She was over the fence at the word, and half way across the next field. Brooke gritted his teeth and followed—creditably again, for his gods were with him, and his hand was on the pommel. He heard hoofbeats on the ground behind him, looked, and saw Helen Strange on her big chestnut. He pulled a little to one side so that his horse would not throw mud at her, and she passed him.

"Thanks for the lead over!" she called.

She gave him a lead over the next fence. As she did not look around, she did not see him embracing his horse's neck and waving one leg vainly in the air as he sought for the stirrup. He fell off before he found it, but succeeded in holding on to his horse and climbed on again. It was the only fall he suffered during the run; he struggled through with the rest of it, and was well up with the field in the final dash across ploughed ground to the place where the hares were sitting their horses, watch in hand.

"We win!" he heard Scott shout. "You're two minutes behind time."

The riders broke into laughing groups, and let their horses rest a little before starting for Scott's farm, where tea was to be served. Brooke caught sight of Patricia Vaughan in the crowd, and went over to greet her more formally than had been possible when they met half an hour before.

"How many years is it?" she asked.

"Five, and a little more," he answered. "Do you think it's very kind to your friends to go and live in Europe half your life?"

"It wasn't even very kind to myself, I believe. But we're back for good now." She looked at him, not amused, this time, but very frankly, and for a long time as conversational intervals go. "Bobby Brooke," she said, "you haven't changed since you were six years old."

"That's discouraging. But how do you know it's true? You were only five at the time. And did you mean it for a compliment or an insult?"

"Take it either way you like." She cast a glance at the horses and the riders. "Do you remember the Wainwrights?" she asked.

"I should say I do. I wonder if any other kids ever had a secret society just like the Wainwrights?"

"Or such good times."

"Or such good times. By the way, I never knew who made up the name—'Wainwrights'?"

"I don't believe any one did. It just happened. Weren't those good Saturday afternoons with the dogs?"

"I'll never forget them. Half a dozen chop bones, soaked in grease and tied up in cheesecloth, and dragged over the fields with all the dogs and half the kids of Pelham following."

"Yes—'mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound.' More

mongrel than hound, though. I think you're right; no children ever did have such fun. And now you teach in a school. It's an anti-climax."

"Perhaps it is. I haven't decided yet. You mustn't forget I'm also riding in a paper chase."

"And riding so badly!" Amusement flickered again in her eyes. "It's just as I said. You haven't changed at all."

"I suppose some day you'll tell me what you mean by that?"

"Some day—per-haps."

She turned to answer a question addressed to her by the man riding on the other side. Brooke rode along in silence, puzzling a very little over what Patricia had said to him, but chiefly glad to see her again, and very glad that she was staying in the neighborhood for the winter. In the old Pelham days, and ever since, he had liked her enormously. His usual pretenses were unnecessary with her because they were useless, and, curiously enough, he rather liked to have her see through him.

Somehow, he was separated from her at the tea. Later in the afternoon, he was sitting in a corner of Scott's big room, drinking tea with Helen Strange. Patricia was nearby, sitting with her back to him, and talking to three men at once.

"My horse had been behaving very badly," said Helen Strange, "and needed just that lead over the

wall. It seemed to wake him up, and he went perfectly after that."

"It's often that way," Brooke answered. The remark reached Patricia; he caught the glint of her eyes over her shoulder, and knew she was listening, but went on as he had begun. "They get cantankerous—just like humans."

"They are like humans, aren't they? So few people seem to realize that. You know a lot of things for a schoolmaster."

"I thought it was a schoolmaster's business to know things."

"But you know things that everyone knows. Horses, for instance."

"I was brought up among horses." Patricia's profile turned quickly away from him at that. "And even schoolmarm's are human."

He hoped she would not begin to talk about hocks and spavins and things; had she done so, he would perforce have done some expert wriggling, and might have slipped free. There was no need; she followed his lead for the second time that day.

"Billy told me about the time they threw books at you," she said. "You certainly did not act like a schoolmarm then."

Now she was talking about something he had really done, and could do again if occasion arose. He was genuinely embarrassed.

"They didn't mean anything," he said lamely.

"They tried it once before—on another man— and he hid behind the desk."

"Well, anyone might do that." He knew how near he had come to doing it himself.

"I suppose—anyone—might." She spoke rather slowly as she placed her teacup on the table at her elbow. "Everybody's leaving," she said. "I have the motor here; shall I put you down at the school? It's right on my way home."

"That would be good of you."

As he left the room, he passed close to Patricia.

"Oh, Bobby!" she said. "Brought up among horses! Aren't you ashamed?"

CHAPTER III

THE Strange motor dropped Brooke at the school with ample time for a hot bath and a comfortable smoke before dinner. While he was luxuriating in the bath, and during the first stages of dressing, it seemed to him that he had done rather well that afternoon; he was disposed to pat himself on the back and forget his luck. Not until he went to the mirror to tie his scarf did his complacency evaporate. He was a little vain of his personal appearance except when he looked in the glass; then vanity was impossible, and the absurdity of cherishing any not infrequently brought him up with a round turn.

"You ass!" he remarked genially to his reflection. "You damned ass!"

He twisted his neck sideways and pulled at his tie until, with a rasp of tearing silk, it broke loose from his back collar button, and slipped into position. He tied it, stuck a pin into it, and sat down to consider his horsemanship.

He had been pretty well scared at the first fence,

and at all the other obstacles for the matter of that, until he had fallen off and discovered that a fall was not necessarily fatal. By the end of the run he had been fairly comfortable in the saddle; he knew that he had convinced at least one other person that he had been born and brought up with horses. Patricia Vaughan's mockery of his ability did not greatly shatter his content with himself—rather increased it if anything. He had never in all his life been able to fool her, and had not tried to do so since he could remember. Though he had not seen her for five years, it had somehow been the most natural thing in the world to encounter her at the paper chase. She belonged in his life, and had belonged there since his sixth year; her exits and her entrances never surprised him. His meeting with Helen Strange had been the real adventure of the day, partly because she was a charming girl, and partly because he liked her little brother exceedingly, but principally because his conversation with her had had all the fascination of poker. Patricia knew his game as well as he knew it himself—better, he often suspected—and habitually bet high before the draw, so that, nearly always, he was forced to lay down his hand and give her the pot without a struggle. With Helen, he did not even have to show openers. He would, he knew, meet her many times; he wondered now if she would also solve his play eventually, and laugh at him as Patricia laughed

at him. The possibility was interesting; he looked forward with delight to his next meeting with her.

The supper gong aroused him. He felt lazy, almost somnolent; his afternoon's amusement had sensibly decreased the jangling of his nerves, and cacophonous immaturity was powerless to disturb him that evening. Besides, he rather liked his table companions. They were all new that year; comparing them with the gang which had bombarded him with books, he had some hopes for the future of the school.

"Did you see the game today?" asked Billy Strange, who sat at his left.

"No. I was riding in a paper chase with your sister," he answered. "How did it come out?"

"We won—eleven to nothing. You ought to have seen Weston punch holes in their line."

"Four or five yards every time," added Ford, from his place below the salt.

"If we hadn't fumbled so, we'd have scored twice more, put in Bruce, from Brooke's right.

"Well, it's early in the season yet," Brooke said, "We'll get over that."

"Sure." Billy was almost scornfully confident. "And Fairbanks is a corking quarter."

"No better than Wilkins," urged Bruce, upholding the claims of a dark horse, as was his habit.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Billy.

"Wilkins isn't one-two-three with him."

They were fairly off now. All Brooke had to do was to put in a word here and there, or decide on the spur of the moment, and with the categorical certainty of complete ignorance, some weighty question of appeal. His attention strayed about the room. There was Marshall at the head table, laughing a little at something one of the boys had said to him; nearer at hand, Hood was talking with his usual animation, his boys bent towards him like grass before a wind; at the next table but one, Motley and his wife were being talked to. Brooke, with a vagrant interest, scanned this face and that about the room. There were so many of them that all individuality was merged in a general impression, like a composite photograph. His eye, dissatisfied, returned to his own table, where peculiar traits were more marked because the group was smaller; it focussed presently on Billy Strange. In some degree he suggested his sister, although she was light and he dark; there were the same arched eyebrows, animated gray eyes, and straight nose; the same look of blood and breeding; the same suggestion of pleasing conventionality which made them both so agreeable to meet. In both of them was the promise of force—the force of clean strain and sound traditions, but not in the least that of individuality. Brooke did not carry his analysis of their common features very far; it satisfied him that they were both good to look upon. He did,

however, appreciate the contrast between Billy and Bruce, whose face had been thrown together haphazard, although not altogether unsuccessfully. The comparison between the two boys so absorbed his attention for a little while that he did not hear what they were saying; suddenly both of them at once tried to claim his attention. Bruce was the less insistent; apparently he had made some statement or other, and was willing to stand by it. Strange, on the other hand, was clamorous for approval.

"Isn't that right? Isn't that right?" he kept repeating.

"Of course it isn't right," Bruce contradicted.

"Isn't what right?" asked Brooke. "I wasn't listening."

"It's this way——" began Bruce.

"No, it isn't!" interrupted Billy. "It's——"

"Talk one at a time, for heaven's sake!"

That was the sign: another simultaneous beginning.

"You shut up, Jimm,," Brooke ordered in desperation. "Go ahead, Billy, and tell me what you're talking about."

"Why he claims," Billy began, "that when a fellow's done something against the rules, it's all right to tell on him to a master."

"You've got it all twisted—as usual," objected Bruce, calmly. "I never said anything of the sort."

"What did you say, then?" said Brooke.

"I said that if a fellow was doing some rotten thing or other—something he ought to be fired for—it would be a darn good thing to get him out of the school somehow, even if you had to tell on him to do it."

The statement was so amazing and revolutionary that it took Brooke's breath away. His impulse was to ask Bruce just what sort of thing he was referring to—to bring the boy's vague general statement down to cases. It would, as usual, have been better if he had done so; he hesitated, and was lost in a maze of second and more worthless thoughts.

"That's just what I said you said," asserted Billy.

"It isn't. You were talking about breaking rules. I wasn't thinking about rules at all, and you know I wasn't."

"What's the difference?" Billy demanded.

"There's a big difference. Isn't there, Mr. Brooke?"

"Why, er——" Brooke hung on a dead center. He had missed his chance thirty seconds before, when he had failed to force Bruce to a more specific statement, and he had missed it beyond hope of recovery now. He temporized. "The rules cover about everything," he said, and knew he was lying.

"There! Didn't I say so?" Billy was triumphant.

Bruce, who had all the while been arguing in favor of his own convictions, but against what his practice

would probably be, simply grinned, and applied himself to a preserved peach, looking first at Billy and then at Brooke. Brooke felt as uncomfortable as if the boy had said aloud, "Gee! What a pull that kid's got!" He knew that Bruce was thinking the remark.

And he knew that Bruce was right. Young Strange was by far the less interesting of the two boys, but Brooke felt much more warmly towards him—more warmly, indeed, than towards any other boy in the school. Bruce could be trusted to blaze his own trail; there was small chance of his ever getting permanently lost in the woods. Strange, on the other hand, was no pioneer; if he should miss the marks or come to the end of them, he would be apt to sit down and wait for someone to come and show him the way out. This dependance was a powerful factor in the sum of his very considerable personal charm—a charm which worked its full magic only on the older people with whom he came in contact, and which had in particular hypnotized Brooke. For there existed an accident of fellow feeling between them, arising from their common lack of enterprise and initiative. Brooke made no attempt to find the reason for this sympathy; he knew only that he enjoyed the company of Billy Strange, sometimes to rather a ridiculous extent. His tendency to satire forced on his attention the absurdity of the relation, and brought him face to face with the amusing realization that his feelings towards

Billy Strange had in them much sentimentality and no sense at all. As usual, he laughed at himself a little too much; it was a pity that he did not talk more frequently and more frankly with Hood. If he had, he would have discovered that Robert Brooke was very like most men, and precisely like all schoolmasters.

Supper ended; the usual evening duties followed. When Brooke had rocked the cradles and put out the lights in his dormitory, he went to smoke a good-night pipe with the headmaster.

"Did you have a good time today?" asked Marshall.

"Splendid. I fell off only once, and then no one was looking."

"I imagine everyone falls off now and then, no matter how well he rides," Marshall rejoined.

"Oh, yes. Of course." That answer permitted Marshall to believe that Brooke could ride.

"I'm very glad you're getting away from the school occasionally," Marshall went on. "It's fatally easy for a schoolmaster to grind out a rut so deep that he can't see over the top of it. A man ought to get out and meet people whether he wants to or not."

"I want to."

"So much the better. But not everyone about here thinks as I do," concluded Marshall, smiling a little wryly.

There was a knock at the door, and Welles, the dean of the Pre-Adamites, entered.

"Good evening," he said to Marshall. "Good evening, Cavalier Brooke. These paper chases must be very enjoyable affairs."

"They are. Very enjoyable," said Brooke.

"And excellent things for schoolmasters," Marshall added.

"Ah, that's the modern point of view. I can't quite subscribe to it. In my young days, we had absolutely no interest outside of the school. That was in the days of The Professor," he explained to Brooke.

"Don't you think," asked Marshall, "that outside interests keep the young men fresh for their work?"

"Perhaps—perhaps. But I don't think the effect on the boys is good. A schoolmaster is a kind of a lay monk; at least, that is what The Professor always used to think. There is so much luxury in modern life—so much over organized diversion—and there used to be so little of it here."

"They must see luxury in the vacations, and when they leave school, sir," Brooke suggested.

"Quite so. We should give them other ideas to come back to—ideas of simplicity, not luxury."

"I fell off once," Brooke murmured, goaded to impertinence, "and I'm so stiff I can't move, and I'm chafed in spots so that my underclothes stick to me and hurt. Is that luxury?"

Welles ignored him.

"I don't think we fit boys to cope with the luxury of the times by training them to see luxury in school."

There was a deal of good sense in that remark.

"True enough," Marshall agreed, heartily. "Luxury makes liars. That's one reason why we shouldn't pretend to despise it." He knocked out his pipe, and smiled a pleasant, quizzical smile as he looked at Welles. "I don't despise it, myself. And don't you think it's possible to overwork the idea that a schoolmaster is a man apart?"

"How do you mean?" Welles was on his guard in a moment.

"Well, we're supposed to be training boys for practical life—giving them good simple ideals that will be useful to them when they leave us." Marshall paused, and reflectively set a ruler and a paper cutter exactly parallel on his desk. Welles nodded his head in grave agreement, but did not speak. Brooke watched them both. "They're inclined to think," Marshall went on, "that a schoolmaster is a queer sort of a creature at best, especially that his principles and his ideas are hopelessly different from those of the average business man. And so, unless they can be convinced that the good pedagogue and the good business man are brothers under their skins, they'll discount—even disregard—everything we try to teach them outside of books." He paused, in the fear that he had been didactic, and ended no more than half

seriously. "I'm inclined to think that a schoolmaster ought to cultivate two or three perfectly evident and harmless vices to make him seem human to the boys. Do you see my point?"

"I'm afraid I don't." Welles, hostile to Marshall, and therefore inhospitable to Marshall's ideas even when they coincided with his own, was very stiff indeed. "I don't think anything is gained by clouding the old simplicity of school life. That has a direct effect on the boys. There's William Strange, for example—a dear little boy—" Brooke squirmed at the epithet. "—a dear little boy, but, I sometimes fear, not—quite—truthful."

"I've never noticed that." Brooke was up in arms in a moment.

"You haven't? Ah, well, perhaps I am mistaken. I hope I am."

Welles departed presently, his manner still rather heavily starched. Brooke followed him, stepping lightly through the sleeping dormitories to his rooms in the west wing of the building.

In the center of each long corridor at Chester, about half way down the row of alcoves, hung one electric bulb, which was supposed to be kept burning all night. Its power was just sufficient to enable the master on duty to distinguish the participants in a pillow fight or other disturbance. When Brooke reached his corridor that evening, he found the light extinguished.

Sundry thumps at the far end apprised him of what was going on; as his foot hit the threshold, he thought he saw a white figure whisk into Billy Strange's alcove. On the chance that he had seen aright, he went to Billy's door and said:

"Ten demerits, Billy."

"What for, sir?"

"For being out of your room after lights."

"I wasn't out of my room, sir."

"Weren't you? All right. My mistake."

He went on to Bruce's alcove, which was next to Billy's, and repeated the sentence.

"Why, sir?"

"For being out of your room."

"What if I was just going to brush my teeth, sir?"

"Were you?"

"No, sir."

Brooke laughed.

"Your usual hard luck, Jimmy," he said, as he drew the curtain. "Good night. Don't get up again."

"Not much. Ten's enough for one night. Good night."

Brooke had reached his room, and was just taking off his coat when Billy Strange opened the door without knocking, and entered.

"Mr. Brooke," he began breathlessly, "I lied to you just now. I was rough-housing in the corridor."

"Shut the door," said Brooke. Billy did so, and stood with his back to it.

It was some time before Brooke spoke, for he could not make up his mind what to say. The lie existed, of course, and deserved censure; he wondered how much censure, and wondered also if Billy's confession did not completely assoil it. He knew, if he had only been willing to let himself think straight, that further punishment was the boy's due, but he feared that punishment would give the confession, in Billy's eyes, the cast of folly. If he should be punished for the lie, he might feel that he had not been rewarded for the truth. Brooke, as usual, vacillated, and tried to unravel the knot from the wrong end; the lie was the thing. While he yet hesitated, Billy gave way to the strain and began to weep.

"I'm glad you told me," said Brooke, knowing that his words were feeble, and hating them for that reason.

"Don't do a thing like that again."

"I—won't," gasped Billy.

"Don't. And—and we'll call this a closed incident." He paused; tears had had their usual effect on inexperience. "Good night," he said.

"Good night, sir." Billy half opened the door.

"But wait!" said Brooke. "I've stung Bruce, so I must sting you too. You'll understand."

"Oh, yes, sir."

The boy departed. That he had made an excuse

for penalizing Billy annoyed Brooke enormously. He did not clearly see that he had bungled the whole business from beginning to end, and probably missed an opportunity of being valuable to Billy by helping him to find out that it was impossible to dance and let the piper go unpaid; that he could not escape the consequences of an act by admitting that the act had been wrong. Several days later, however, when he recounted the incident to Mrs. Motley, he adorned his report with all the things that he ought to have said, and more than half believed that he had said them.

Next morning, just after breakfast, Welles drew him aside and said:

"I hope you won't let what I said about Strange's not being truthful influence your judgment of him."

"I have never," Brooke answered, "had the slightest reason to doubt his word."

CHAPTER IV

"You ought to have been here during the ...," said Hood, and added "and you ought to have been here if you were somewhere else."

He had come into Brooke's rooms, and as the conversation had turned to the ... there was a mighty difference between the ... of Hood and those of other people like the Motleys, for instance. Hood talked of the school as it should be; the Motleys prattled about it as it was and let it go at that.

"That Chaos, as you call it," he answered, "must have been worse than the ... of the Professor."

"Oh, no, no, no," I don't hold a brief for The Professor, but I don't know how you have gotten through the Chaos ... that he left behind him."

"Ah, I suppose you're struggling now with what the Chaos left behind," he said, looking at his watch. He did not know just what he meant by ... it was his usual chameleon speech.

"That's it," Hood responded. "That time they threw ... for instance. It's rotten."

"Yes," Brooke assented, unconvinced, "I suppose it is. But that was easy enough to handle." He paused. Hood, who had at times the intuition of a woman, regarded him calmly, and a thought speculatively.

"Other things—are harder," Brooke concluded.

It was some moments before Hood asked, "Just what do you mean?"

"There's this kid—Strange." Brooke was oddly reluctant to mention the name.

"Billy? What did you do when he lied to you that time?"

Brooke jumped.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"He and Bruce were over in my rooms the other night. It came out. He owned up, didn't he?"

"Yes." Brooke leaned forward in his chair, took a newspaper from the table, folded it carefully, and tossed it into the scrap basket. "Yes. He owned up. At once." Hood was still silent, and still interested. Brooke went on, and told him exactly what he had told the Motleys, reporting an imaginary conversation. There was this difference: with Hood, he knew he was romancing, and with the Motleys he had not even suspected as much.

"That was the way to handle it," said Hood, when he had done. "Noticed any results?"

"None. That is, no good ones."

"Bad ones?"

"Hardly that, either. They've given me a nickname—Babbling Brooke—and I've acquired the reputation of being easy." Hood moved suddenly in his chair. "Both the name and the reputation were tacked on by Billy Strange." Brooke added.

Hood exploded on the spot.

"What a damned rotten point of view!" He flung out of his chair and tramped up and down the room, talking fast. "That's the kind of thing that was happening all the time under the Chaos. I thought we'd got over it. How the dickens can you accomplish anything when the kids—the good kids—act like that? Always hostile—always on the wrong side of the fence—always trying to slip one over on a master! It's wrong—absolutely! Confound Billy Strange, anyhow!"

Brooke listened in amazement to the tirade. He could see no reason for it, and was not without certain qualms of conscience because he had misreported his conversation with Billy.

"I don't mind the nickname," he said, when Hood paused for breath. As a matter of fact, he did mind it exceedingly. "And they can do as they like about thinking me easy as long as they obey orders."

"But they've got no business to stab you in the back. That's what makes this job so confoundedly unnatural. They'd take a calling down from any man except a schoolmaster, and probably profit by it."

"Isn't that an inevitable difference?"

"Inevitable fiddlesticks! Isn't a schoolmaster a man? That kid lives in this corridor, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

Before Brooke saw what he was up to, Hood had flung open the door and shouted,

"Strange! Billy Strange!"

"Yes, sir!" answered a voice.

"Come in here. I want to see you."

Billy appeared. Hood went for him at once.

"You lied to Mr. Brooke the other night, didn't you?"

"Has he told you?" Brooke noticed the boy's manner with amazement; this was a different Billy from the one he knew. During their former talk on this matter, which now for the first time seemed important, the boy had been very much the culprit, and had appeared very eager to escape the consequences of his actions. He had been, therefore, confessedly the inferior of Brooke. With Hood, he stood in a sense on level ground, and was not afraid at all.

"You told me yourself," Hood answered. "And you told me what he said to you."

Brooke was on tenterhooks; if Billy had told exactly what had passed between them his reputation with Hood would be completely destroyed. As a matter of fact, he need not have worried. He and the boy were cut from the same piece of cloth. Billy knew as well as Brooke what Brooke ought to have said to him, and had besides a by no means inconsid-

erable affection for Brooke himself. Therefore, when he had related the incident to Hood, he had done some imagining on his own account. There was astoundingly little difference between the two accounts which had reached Hood.

"Didn't you tell me what he said?" demanded Hood.

"Yes," the boy answered.

"And then you go and brag to your friends about how easily you put it over Mr. Brooke. What kind of a performance do you call that? I had a kind of an idea that you played the game squarely."

Hood went on, overleaping Billy's scattering interruptions. It was as though two equals were discussing a third person. Billy put forward no excuses, and was at no time near to tears, as he had been when Brooke talked to him. Hood talked at length, and so impetuously that his meaning was not always clear; he made no effort to talk down to Billy, but soared, at times, into the clouds of abstract right and wrong, where the boy could not follow him at all, although, very evidently, he strained in the effort to do so. And gradually, Brooke began to see importance in an incident which he had been inclined to regard as too trivial to occupy his mind at all, and which had irritated him because it had taken up so much of it. Against his will, he acknowledged to himself now that it might very easily be made influential in the development of Billy, and at once the

enormous importance which Hood seemed to attach to it ceased to be incongruous, was no longer a purely pedagogical glorification of the unessential. To Hood, the affair was not a case, but a principle, and a big principle. The amazing thing was that Billy seemed to perceive this, though dimly—almost as dimly as Brooke. He did not understand all, or a quarter of what Hood was saying to him; he did feel, as Brooke did also, that Hood was worth understanding. The whole conversation was a revelation to Brooke, or would have been, if he had not been obsessed with the idea that nothing should be said to an adolescent which the adolescent cannot understand. Hood's theory, if he had a clearly formulated theory at all, was diametrically different. He talked as he thought, with his eyes on the goal and not on the road to the goal, and let reason and logic and suitability take care of themselves.

At length, he relaxed the strain, and came down to level ground.

"Whatever you do," he said in conclusion, "don't stab a man in the back again. There's an excuse for almost everything under the sun except that."

"I didn't mean to stab Mr. Brooke in the back," Billy protested.

"I don't care whether you meant to or not," retorted Hood. "You did it. The point is, you didn't mean not to do it."

Billy did not quite apprehend that remark. He took it, however, with all the other things that had been said to him, and presently left the room.

"I never saw anything like that," said Brooke, stirred to honest admiration for the nonce.

"Like what?"

"Like the way you talked to Billy."

"Oh." Hood was deeply embarrassed. "Hope it wakes him up. Probably it won't." He looked at his watch. "I must be getting on," he said. "I've got a lot of papers to do before I turn in. Good night."

"Good night," Brooke answered.

He was glad to be alone; Hood, as usual, had given him something besides himself to think about. The aggressiveness of the man; his straight and clear cut questions, which had called for and received, even from Billy, straight and clear cut answers; his manner of tossing aside all that was not essential to the gaining of his point, and of overriding all the school-boy prejudices which Brooke felt bound to respect—all these constituted in Brooke's eyes a sort of burglarious entry into the sanctuary of Billy's reticence, a demand under arms for the boy's confidence. He had to admit that the boy had seemed unconscious that his citadel had been stormed, and had freely rendered the confidence which Hood required. He could not, however, see himself similarly militant; he was too calculating in the first place, and too much afraid

of being laughed at in the second to attempt to be so. Aggressiveness was natural to Hood; it was not natural to Brooke, and therefore could not be attempted. It was another man's game and not his own; he had had enough experience with the Theory of the Three Pedestrians to know that he could not play another man's game, but had not yet acquired the initiative necessary to plot out his own play. Nevertheless, he wished that he had told Hood the truth about what he had said to Billy.

The whole incident had stirred him considerably. It was a good half hour before he was sufficiently in equilibrium to sit down and correct the fifty odd exercises which had piled up on his hands. This was a task which did not ruffle the deeper levels of his consciousness; it could be done and well done with the topmost layer of his mind. It seemed to him typical of the vast majority of pedagogical tasks.

It was typical; superficiality is the quicksand of schoolmastering. Excepting Hood and Marshall, all the older men in Chester were bogged in it. Welles, with whom Brooke perforce spent a leaden hour the next evening, was in it over head and ears. He taught Latin, and, with an exercise on the desk before him, could blue pencil every infinitive used to express purpose with the accuracy of a cash register and the inspiration of a cow. That, of course, was about one-fourth of what he was paid for. He was far from

shirking the other three-fourths—he did it well, according to his not too brilliant lights—but, if an institution hires a man's brains to correct exercises and his character to squirt influence, it would do well to hire characters of iron instead of characters of pith, lest conceit be the only element of them that shall grow and wax strong. In schools, there is comparatively little friction of equal intellects wherewith to whet one's wits; one cannot keep keen by accident, but must be so by intent. Welles had never seen his danger, or, if he had, had been at no great pains to avoid it; he had grown dull by constant use, and, in the first place, had not been very highly tempered metal. Thirty years of association with boys—association controlled by a somewhat weak-minded affection for boys in the abstract—had made him softer, and had spoiled his edge with a deposit of saccharine rust.

His conversation revealed him ruthlessly. For the most part, he talked about the boys, and his attitude towards them seemed to Brooke, fresh from the stimulus of association with Hood, to be sticky in the extreme; almost as sticky as Brooke's own would become if he let it, but not much stickier than it already was in the case of Billy Strange. Welles dripped honey and molasses for forty-five minutes out of the hour which intervened between supper and evening duties. Then some casual remark of Brooke's

suggested to him that Brooke did not have a proper respect for the Dative case, and he became furiously partisan for ten minutes more. Brooke, with almost superhuman ingenuity, finally succeeded in connecting the Latin declensions with a high protective tariff; Welles tried to defend free trade, at once began to wallow in the mud of misunderstood economic theory, and in three minutes reduced the national policy to terms of the personal equation, like a woman. He wanted to buy his clothes in England; he did not want to pay duty on them; therefore, foreign manufactures should enter the country free. The school bell marked the framing of the syllogism, and Brooke, much to his own relief, went on duty.

Was that what he was coming to, he wondered? It was a ghastly prospect; he consoled himself with the reflection that he did not intend to stay in the business long enough to be overtaken by the Nemesis of it. Even if circumstances should keep him chained to school work, the fate of Welles was not inevitable, if—always if—one kept one's mind working to the utmost limit, and remembered that it was as necessary to make it play as to make it work. Marshall and Hood had succeeded in this enterprise; the task, therefore, was not hopeless. But Hood, and Marshall also, in a less degree, committed the crime of making him uncomfortable. There remained the middle of the road—and the Motleys.

CHAPTER V

HELEN STRANGE looked abstractedly at the crowd of enthusiastic paper chasers which filled Mrs. Vaughan's dining room and overflowed into the hall.

"I wonder," she said, "why Mr. Brooke never comes to the paper chases?"

Scott broke off in the middle of a discussion of the comparative merits of Ayrshires and Jerseys—a subject about which, as he was aware, he sometimes talked too much.

"Brooke?" he answered. "It's so long since I've seen Brooke that I've almost forgotten what he looks like."

"Billy won't let me forget him. He talks about him all the time. They had some trouble not long ago—I don't know just what—and Billy thinks more of him than he ever did. Who are the hares today?"

"Murphy and Shaw, I think."

"That means the run will be a stiff one."

"Trust an Irishman and a reformed Yankee for that."

"Have you seen Mrs. Vaughan yet?" Helen asked. "Patricia told me she expected her home any minute."

"She just drove up. Where's she been?"

"In New York. I must go and speak to her. Coming?"

They moved off through the crush, and presently found Mrs. Vaughan in the hallway. She nodded vivaciously to Helen and Scott; the oldish gentleman with the youngish figure to whom she was talking stepped aside, and made room for the new arrivals.

"Helen, let me present Major Ward," said Mrs. Vaughan. "Mr. Scott, Major Ward."

While Scott and the Major were shaking hands, Mrs. Vaughan produced from the bag on her arm four ragged samples of some pinkish material, and handed them to Helen.

"Will any of these do?" she asked. "I lost the pattern you gave me, and had to go by memory."

"I think they're just the shade," Helen answered, feeling one of them between her forefinger and thumb. "How did you ever do it, with nothing to go by?"

"Mrs. Vaughan," interjected the Major, "is full of little tricks like that. She would have got just what you wanted even if you had never shown her the original."

"It's a dollar and a half a yard, at Benson's," said Mrs. Vaughan. "So glad it's good enough."

"Thanks ever so much," said Helen. "We have to make pack horses of our friends, and send to New York for everything," she added, turning to the Major.

"Askew doesn't keep any greater variety than he used to, then?"

"Askew? Do you know him?" queried Helen.

"You don't mean to tell me that he's still alive? The old man? He must be a hundred by this time. We used to think he was that much twenty years ago."

"The Major's an old Chester boy," explained Mrs. Vaughan.

"Oh, really?" Helen exclaimed. "I have a brother there now. You'll be going over to see the school before you leave?"

"Yes, indeed. I'm staying here a week. Is Goat Welles still there?"

"You can't mean the grave and reverend Mr. Welles?" asked Helen.

"I suppose he must be grave and reverend by this time," said the Major. "I haven't seen him for years. I think I'll walk over there tomorrow afternoon, if I can find the way."

"Let me keep you from getting lost," suggested Scott. "I owe a call at the Marshall's and was going over tomorrow anyhow."

"Delighted. What sort of a man is this Marshall?"

"You'll like him." Scott nodded and moved off.

"What's the bugle for?" asked the Major.

"Time to start the run," said Helen, beginning to put on her gloves.

"Boots and saddles, eh? I must go and find that Montana camel Murphy lent me."

They all moved towards the door, except Mrs. Vaughan.

"You're coming tomorrow night?" she said to Heien.

"Surely."

"It'll be just a family party—and the Major. Have a good time, dear. I'll see you when you come back for tea."

When the riders had gone, and the automobiles, bound for the finish of the run, had followed them, Mrs. Vaughan called up the school on the telephone and asked for Brooke. She had always had a maternal affection for him, which had by no means diminished with the years; recently, she had made up her mind that it was time for him to get married for the good of his soul. She had no particular girl in mind for him, but she intended to give him every opportunity to select for himself—to pry him loose from his hermitage, and keep him as free of it as possible. It was her private opinion that he was not yet awake, and she meant to disturb his slumbers.

"Is this you, Bobby?" she said when she heard his voice on the wire. "It's Mrs. Vaughan talking. I'm going to give you a good scolding."

"Don't," he begged. "Not now. Central's listening."

"I am not listening!" broke in Central.

Mrs. Vaughan laughed. Central heard her, and in a frenzy yanked out the plug. It was some minutes before she consented to connect them again.

"That was too bad of you, Bobby," Mrs. Vaughan continued. "I was going to scold you, and you've taken all the wind out of my sails. You deserve it, you know. Can you come to dinner tomorrow night?"

"I wish I could," Brooke answered, "but Sunday is my busiest day."

"Poor pedagogue! Couldn't you change duties with someone else?"

"I hate to ask a man to take Sunday duties for me. They're the worst of the week."

"I'm sorry. When are you coming to see us? That's what I was going to scold you about."

"As soon as I can get a minute free," he answered. "It's awfully hard to get away—really."

"Drop in for a meal at any time. By the way, you'll have guests tomorrow—an old friend of mine, Major Ward, and Mr. Scott."

"Good. I'll try to amuse them."

"The Major knows Mr. Welles—"

"Oh, Lord! An old boy?"

"Yes. But you'll like the Major, in spite of that."

"Sure to, if you do. But—a friend of Welles! Will he talk my head off, and tell me what a great

man The Professor was, and think everything new is rotten?"

"Not he. You'll like him, as I said. And do drop in on us some time soon."

"I will, honestly."

"Honestly? We'll expect you when we see you. Good bye, Bobby."

"Good bye, Mrs. Vaughan."

Mrs. Vaughan hung up the receiver and went to change her travelling dress. Bobby, she reflected, had a most amusing faculty of wriggling out of a scolding. It was a relic of his childhood.

Scott and the Major walked to the school in the morning and stayed to lunch there. At dinner, the Major was full of reminiscences of petty wickednesses, which he recounted with the usual gusto and rather more than the usual humor of middle age.

"Welles was the man who always caught us—and the man we always went to when we were in trouble," he said.

"The two things don't seem to me to go together," observed Helen.

"They always go together, I think," returned the Major. "You see, if a man knows all about you, you might as well tell him a little more. If he doesn't know anything about you, it is better to keep him in a state of blissful ignorance."

"That's the bliss of ignorance with the reverse English, I suppose," Scott commented.

"Bliss for the boys, you mean? Decidedly that. The uneducated schoolmaster doesn't always see the pleasure in it."

"And Mr. Welles was the man who knew most?" Patricia leaned forward and straightened a candle shade. "I can hardly believe it."

"He was a young man then," answered the Major, "a . . . remarkable one. Strongly individualized."

"He is now," said Scott, dryly. "At least, I never saw anyone like him."

"He has developed eccentricities," the Major agreed reluctantly. "Most of us do. What do the boys think of him, Miss Strange?"

"I can't tell you exactly. They talk about him very little. Or, at least, Billy talks about him very little."

"I'm sorry. His impression was stamped on a good many of us. But the die wears smooth, I suppose. When a man gives the best he has to one man, there's little left for the next that's worth taking. And Welles gave all he had to the school—and to the Professor."

"I've often wondered about the Professor," said Mrs. Vaughan. "He must have been able. It means a lot to start a school, keep it under the limit of a hundred boys, and yet make it famous."

"True," the Major agreed. "In his own way, the Professor was one of the most astoundingly able men I ever met. But his under masters worked for him and not for the school—and that's the trouble with Welles today. Lots of us graduates are like him. Pre-Adamites, wasn't it, that young fellow called them?"

"Brooke?" queried Scott. "Yes. Pre-Adamites."

"You met Bobby Brooke?" Patricia asked.

"Yes," answered the Major. "Nice young fellow. Marshall's a good man for his job," he added.

"Is he like the Professor?" asked Mrs. Vaughan.

"Diametrically different. And that's a good thing, though Welles can't see it. He will put new life in the school, instead of just keeping old traditions going."

"And he's man enough to train lieutenants," added Scott.

"I think he is," said the Major. "Young Brooke, for instance."

"Bobby Brooke? In training for a lieutenancy?" There seemed to be something in the idea which amused Patricia.

"Why not?" said her mother. "I'm sure Bobby is a very able boy."

"Granted," Patricia agreed, "but I can't quite see him as the head of a school."

"Why not?" asked Helen in her turn. "He seems

a very agreeable man, and I'm sure the boys like him. Billy is quite crazy about him."

"Of course," said Patricia. "Nearly everyone likes Bobby—though he doesn't know that. But a headmaster—. You see, we've known him for years," she broke off.

"I suppose that does make it seem incongruous," Helen admitted. "But I'm glad he's there. I hope he stays out Billy's time, anyhow."

"I agree, Miss Strange," said the Major heartily. "He's the only schoolmaster I've ever seen whom I'd like to have in my squadron."

"That's a high compliment, Major," said Mrs. Vaughan. "I know what you think of that squadron."

"I think the world of it. You would too, if you'd seen it at work in Mindanao."

The talk shifted, first to the Major's campaigns, thence to the problem of the Philippines, and thence to politics in general. Patricia and Helen, interested as long as the personal element of the Major's observations and experiences continued to spice the conversation, permitted their attention to wander as soon as theories of policy in general began to intrude. It was persons and not events that attracted them—the concrete and not the abstract—for they were both completely and typically feminine. The difference between them was that Patricia was not jealous of politics, and Helen was. When they had left the table and

moved to the library, the talk shifted again; politics fell out, books, people, and incident came in. They broke up comparatively early; Scott took Helen to her house in his motor.

CHAPTER VI

It never occurred to Brooke that he had too seldom taken advantage of the proffered hospitality of the gentlemen farmers until one day he went to the village to replenish his stock of tobacco, and ran across Scott in the store.

"Hello, Brooke," said Scott. "Haven't seen you in weeks. Why don't you come over to the farm sometimes?"

"I've meant to drop over several times," Brooke answered, "and I've meant to call on the Vaughans, and I've meant to do a lot of things, but, what with the kids and their football games, I don't seem to have time to do anything."

"Of course. I suppose the boys and their sports do take up a good deal of time. I rather hoped, though, that you'd be able to get off for more of the paper chases."

"The football games with other schools come off on Saturday, and I've got to go to them if I want to know what the kids are talking about. It's self defense."

"I'll bet it is, just that." Scott paused to take his bundle and his change from the clerk. "Can you get off for lunch tomorrow?" he went on.

Here was just the chance to break his routine that Brooke had been waiting for; his perverse impulse was to refuse the invitation because it would take an effort to accept it. The creeping inertia of his profession was beginning to get a hold on him; it is exceedingly hard for a man whose routine decides most of his actions to make any decision of his own. When order is king, independent action is treason. It was with something of an effort, therefore, that he said:

"I'd like to. I'm free all the afternoon."

"Good. There's a man over on the West Ridge who has a couple of blooded Jerseys for sale, and I want to ride over and have a look at them. I'll expect you at one o'clock."

Scott climbed into his runabout and drove away. Brooke walked back to the school feeling like a little boy who had been asked to his first party; he was looking forward to his luncheon and his ride with a completely absurd—almost an ecstatic—anticipation. There was also a spice of crime in the prospect; he felt, quite unreasonably, that he ought not to go riding at all.

It happened that his last recitation the next day ended at noon; he changed into his riding things, and

arrived at Scott's farm at about twenty minutes before one.

"Mr. Scott had to go down to Waterville, sir," said Scott's man as he took Brooke's coat and hat. "He'll be back a little after one. There's a fire in the big room, sir, and I was to ask you if you'd like anything to drink."

"Not just now, Evans," Brooke answered.

"Very good, sir." Evans held open the door into the living room, and put another cordwood log on the fire before leaving Brooke alone there.

It was all very pleasant and comfortable. Brooke picked up a copy of the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic* from the table, and sat down on the lounge before the fire. A collection of strange looking bits and bridles on the wall near the mantelpiece attracted his attention, and he speculated about them idly. One, prominently placed, was evidently from the Near East; next to it hung a villainous bit, attached to a headstall of braided horsehair, fuzzy as a black caterpillar. Mexican, of course, Brooke surmised, and the one beyond it looked Chinese. There were twenty or so more, all unusual and foreign; he wondered if Scott had visited all the countries they represented. He must ask. It would be interesting to knock about the world like that. A slight clink of china came from the dining room, and made him aware how deliciously quiet the house was in contrast to the per-

petual Bedlam of the school. He laid aside the magazine, and settled back to harvest the full enjoyment of it. He had not been so comfortable or so perfectly unconscious of himself for six weeks.

The whirr of a motor presently aroused him; he looked up as Scott entered. His impulse was to rise politely, as though Scott was a lady, for that was the custom at Chester; he sternly repressed it.

"Sorry to be late," said Scott, "but I knew you wouldn't mind. Did Evans make you comfortable?"

"Perfectly, thanks. "I haven't been here long."

"It'll be a bully afternoon for a ride. The ground's pretty soft still on the back roads, and it's not so very cold. Do you have to be back at any particular time?"

"I ought to be there for supper."

"Why?" asked Scott.

"I'm sure I don't know," Brooke answered. "I'm not on duty tonight. But I feel as if I ought not to be absent two meals running."

"Pshaw! There are eight other men to prevent the kids from falling into the soup."

"I know. But I think Mr. Marshall likes to have us all there."

"You don't know Marshall," Scott said, "if you think he wants his men to tie themselves down as tight as all that. If you become a recluse while you are at Chester, it's your own fault. Let's go in to lunch."

They rose; Brooke paused a moment to examine more closely the cruel bit on the hair brush.

"Mexican?" he asked.

"Yes. Ingenious jaw breaker, isn't it? Are you interested in headstalls?"

"In those headstalls." Brooke sat down and unfolded his napkin. "Before you came in, I was wondering where you got them all."

"From Arabs and coolies and droschky drivers and vaqueros. Some of them I bought in bazaars and junk shops, but none of them were new when I got them. At least, I don't think they were. They fake things so ingeniously you never can be sure."

"I suppose not. Are you going to increase the collection pretty soon?"

"I wish I could. Scott rearranged the cutlery beside his plate. "Jove! I wish I could. Have you travelled much, Brooke?"

"Not at all."

"Few people have. Most go to Europe, and take America with them. Big hotels and all that. To their credit, they aren't usually the ones who talk nonsense about the Wanderlust."

"The people who stay at home are the ones who do that," Brooke agreed. "They know what it means."

"I suppose they do though I never thought of it in that way. Uneasiness, and the desire to go look-see. Well, that's one advantage of your business."

"The chance to travel in the summer?"

"Yes. Your crop of boys comes along regularly enough, and between crops you don't have to think about them."

"Thank God for that." Brooke's voice was fervent, almost prayerful. "You've seen deserts?"

Scott, who had finished his lunch, lit a cigar and answered slowly,

"Yes, I've seen deserts. All kinds of them—cactus and alkali and plain sand. And I'll see them again before I die—all of them. They're the most beautiful things in the world, without exception." He shoved his chair back abruptly. "We'd better get started."

Riding, if the horses go faster than a walk, does not encourage conversation. That is one reason why it is so companionable an exercise. The ponies needed no attention; they fell into an easy lope which they maintained till the road began to climb through the chestnut and the scrub oak of the valley, and Brooke, for the first time in weeks, slacked the curb of his mind and let it wander as it would. As always when he so relaxed, he meandered in spirit through a country of surprising adventures; was alternately priest and pirate, hero and highwayman, in the drama of his imagination. His dreams on these occasions were cousins german to the dreams of children, and he—the aloof, the cynical Brooke—was not ashamed. Every turn of the road concealed a possibility of ad-

venture; his inclination was to approach it with the caution of a scout or a thief; he wanted to raise his hand in the traditional manner and shield his eyes from the light. He forgot Scott, forgot that he was in Connecticut and not in some untrodden No Man's Land; in his own mind he saved fifty lives and sacrificed his own fifty times in the few brilliant December miles which intervened between the farm and Scott's coveted Jerseys. In the rare flashes of sanity that illumined his conceits, he knew he was mad; he dismissed sanity as a faithless slut, and continued to rescue damsels, lay down his life for his friends, and tilt at windmills to his heart's content.

"Have you ever read *Don Quixote*?" asked Scott, suddenly.

"Many times." The question almost knocked the wind out of Brooke. It was uncannily apt to his thoughts.

"Me too," said Scott. "Did it ever occur to you that the Knight of La Mancha was not so crazy after all?"

"He was no more crazy than I am," Brooke answered with emphasis.

"Just a little less restrained, eh?" There was an embarrassed uncertainty in Scott's voice, which vanished at his next remark. "Why, I'm not sure that the Don isn't the only character in history who really had the courage of his convictions."

"Not the only one," objected Brooke. "His legitimate children are all the bad little boys who play pirates and detect criminals and wreck trains."

"And all the men who don't," Scott added.

"Not all, do you think?"

"There are Sancho Panzas, I suppose. But even Sancho had an island of his own. Here's a good level stretch. Let's gallop."

The conversation and the gallop changed the current of Brooke's thoughts—brought him back to his usual contemplative point of view, and set him to speculating about Quixotism. He could not accept Scott's charitable theory that Quixotism, though generally latent, was universal; with the sole exception of Hood, who disturbed his peace of mind, he had seen no one in his profession who would have been disposed to joust with a barber for the helmet of Mambrino, or who was even capable of imagining himself in such a combat. While Scott was examining the cows, Brooke's reflections crystallized into an aphorism: the Quixote in most men, he decided, dies at adolescence. He was proud of the aphorism, and especially proud that the Quixote was not dead in him.

Scott, still bargaining with the farmer, came out of the barn and mounted his pony.

"So long, Mr. Webster," he said as he gathered up his reins. "I'll drop over and have a look at them again."

"You haven't made up your mind to buy them, then?" asked Brooke.

"Indeed I have. They're good cows. But I can't let Webster know that for a week yet, or he'd charge me two prices. How about going to Waterville and taking tea with the Vaughans? You said you owed a call there."

"Can I get back to school in time for supper?"

"Pshaw! Telephone Marshall that you're not coming, and dine with me."

"Right." Chester School seemed a hemisphere away at that moment, and Brooke had no desire to come nearer to it. The ponies picked their way down a stony hillside, and at the foot of it settled into their easy lope once more. There was the yielding firmness of slight frost in the roadway. The bare, black branches of the birches, and the rustling tan of the tenacious oaks, with a light in their branches that was like smoke against the low-hung sun, slipped by them to the soft thud of hoofs; now and again, a stone rang against the iron of a shoe like a dulled cymbal. At the occasional farmhouses, panic stricken chickens scurried into the ditches; several times a dog paralleled their course for a hundred yards or so, barking them to the boundaries of his bailiwick.

"Better than motoring. what a fellow called across to Brooke.

It was better than motoring; immeasurably better



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than the over-organized activities of the life that had fettered Brooke during the autumn. At the edge of Waterville, which is a town full of very small children, they pulled up and let the horses walk.

"You've known the Vaughans a long while, haven't you?" Scott asked.

"Patricia and I were kids together."

"I had an idea you were. That's their house over there."

They turned into a short drive, left their horses at the stable, and walked to the house. They found Patricia reading a newspaper at a tea table set in a room gay with chintz; Brooke knew that they must have taken the house ready furnished, yet there was something of Patricia about it. It had always been her habit to own things, and not to let things own her.

"This is nice!" she said, rising to greet Scott, who entered first. "And you've dug up Teacher and brought him with you!"

"Yes. I kidnapped him," Scott answered.

"Congratulations." She sat down at the table and began to measure out the tea. "We'll have to kidnap him more often, or he'll be turning into an Ichabod Crane before his time. It's very good for your soul to be routed out," she added, turning to Brooke.

"Please don't put it in that way," he begged. "I never knew I had a soul till I began to teach."

"Then we won't remind you of it," Patricia answered. "But you are a barnacle, Bobby. Do you realize I haven't seen you since the first paper chase?"

"He's got a conscience, Miss Vaughan," put in Scott.

"It's a new growth, then. He never used to have one. Two lumps, Mr. Scott?"

"And lemon, please."

"Bobby?"

"The same. But you mustn't waste a perfectly good afternoon talking about me, I've done nothing but talk about myself and think about myself since September. Let's talk about you instead."

"Well—Mother and I are thinking of buying the old Clifford house."

"That is good news," exclaimed Scott. "You never told me."

"We've only just begun negotiations."

"That settles it," Brooke said. "I'm going to stay on at Chester."

"Such a sacrifice! Had you thought of leaving?"

"More than once."

"Don't find the infants inspiring, what?" suggested Scott. "Or are they only on your nerves because you've seen too much of them lately?"

"Maybe that's it." For the second time that afternoon, it was on the tip of Brooke's tongue to say that he did not mind the boys half as much as he minded

the men. Instead, he asked, "Where is the old Clifford place?"

"We passed it on our way into town," said Scott. "That house on the hill with the white pillars and the overgrown lawn."

"I remember noticing it," said Brooke. "A beautiful situation."

"It is," Patricia affirmed. "And it's as good inside as it is out. Mother and I are quite children about it. It's so long since we've had a place of our own."

"I thought you had a villa at Fiesole one year."

"We did. And a cottage at Bournemouth the next year, and one in Cornwall the year after. But those don't count. They are full of other people's things—like this." She nodded her head at the chintz.

"Does the Clifford house need much repairing?" Scott inquired. "I haven't been in it for a couple of years."

"Surprisingly little. It was so well built in the first place that even the plaster has stuck where it was put. That is, in most places."

It was evident that Scott had come to know the Vaughans rather well. Patricia began to ask him a hundred questions about the agent who was holding the house for sale, about the idiosyncrasies of the various contractors and masons and plasterers of the district, about the most approved way to arrange a small stable. Occasionally, one or the other of them

referred some point to Brooke with a perfunctory "Don't you think so?"; he always agreed with the speaker, and spent the intervals in examining a portrait of Patricia at the age of eight which stood on a table at his elbow. Even in those days there had been mockery in her eyes.

The conversation, rather to his relief, was interrupted by the entrance of Helen Strange, who had been in the clutches of her dressmaker, and was glad to see Scott, and very glad to see Brooke—where had he been keeping himself?—and wasn't a fire pleasant, and she never wanted a cup of tea more in all her life. In the shuffle, Scott paired off with her, and Brooke at last had a chance for a few words with Patricia.

"The nicest thing about you, Bobby," she said, "is that one doesn't have to pick up old threads with you. One can take the reminiscences for granted, and start right on in the prophecies."

"And talk about zinc sinks in the pantry and enamelled mangers in the stable—with someone else." Brooke retorted. He had felt just sufficiently neglected to pretend that he had felt more so.

"It was enamelled sinks and zinc mangers, really. I suppose it wasn't very interesting to you. It was all a compliment, you know; it shows that you fit in."

"To the background—yes. May I have another cup of tea?"

"How absurd you are—or would be, if you really felt that way!" She took his cup. "Aren't you glad that we're going to live here?"

"Very."

"Tremendous enthusiasm! Though we might as well be in Timbuctoo for all we see of you."

"I can't get away very much, Pat."

"Nonsense! Of course you can. You're a kind of natural hermit, that's all. Two lumps, isn't it? By the way, did you mean what you said about not coming back to Chester another year?"

"I kind of half meant it." Brooke took his cup, and pressed the lemon against the side of it.

"You don't like the life?"

"Sometimes I hate it. Other times, I like it too much. There are a lot of interesting things about it, and one can keep in good shape physically, which is worth considering. I'm not sure it isn't the only job which makes it possible to be a country gentleman on nothing a year."

"Why that sounds as if you liked it a great deal!" Patricia half turned her back on her other guests, who seemed perfectly capable of amusing themselves. Helen was describing her adventures with a trolley conductor, and Scott's laugh was appreciative. "Do you like it, Bobby?" Patricia persisted.

"I could grow contented with it," Brooke answered, "and contentment is a swinish state of mind, isn't it?"

Seems as if it was, when you look at most of the men who like schoolteaching. They decay from the head down. The life's too easy, for one thing."

Patricia traced the outline of a rose on the chintz with one strong finger before she answered.

"It doesn't look easy to me," she said slowly. "That is, not for a man who plays the game."

"So many don't."

"And it's easy not to—is that what you mean?"

"Yes. No criticism to keep a man on his toes."

"I wonder," mused Patricia, "if that isn't what marks most schoolmasters so clearly? I've met a lot of them—on steamers and in Europe—and there was something unsatisfactory about nearly all of them. Pathetic, very often, and a man's got no right to be pathetic. So few of them really arrived."

"That's absolutely true," Brooke replied bluntly. "They don't arrive. They aren't like other men. And why—why? They ought to be, you know."

"Of course they ought to be. They ought to be as human as doctors or lawyers or any other men who deal in human nature every day of their lives. Are they too comfortable—does that account for everything?"

"For a great many things, anyhow. Lately, I've been wondering if the trouble isn't with the kind of men who go into it more than the life itself."

"What's queer about the kind of men? A schoolmaster is a very important person, it seems to me."

"He should be." Brooke was delighting in the conversation. He never thought clearly unless he thought aloud, and this was the first chance he had had to unbosom himself on the subject of his profession. "He should be important," he went on, "but he isn't. The business is full of drifters—men who've taken it up as a stop gap, and stay in it because it assures them of three square meals a day. I'm one, myself."

"No ambition? I can't understand that, with the opportunities staring them in the face."

"Influence—all that?" Patricia nodded. "I'm not much of a believer in influence," Brooke went on.

Patricia leaned further back in the corner of the sofa, and, with her own face in the shadow, looked at Brooke. "How about Billy Strange?" she said.

Brooke blushed and hesitated; he could not see the slight smile in Patricia's eyes, but he knew it was there.

"What about Billy Strange?" he asked.

"I have seen him at the Strange's several times," she said, "and he talks about you almost as much as you'd talk about him—if you did as you wanted to do."

"Well, I don't want to bore people more than I can help. It's good hearing that the kid likes me. But what has influence got to do with that? It's an accident—like almost everything that's worth while. An accident of sympathy."

"Doesn't that imply influence?"

"Not a bit. I get as much as I can possibly give, if not more. There's no influence about it. And, if there were, don't you see where thinking about it, and thinking that you have it, leads you to?"

"Where does it lead you to?"

"To a particularly hot corner of hell where all the smug people go when they die. And, if you think about influence at all, you think about it too much, and begin to believe you're paid to exercise it. That's degrading, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is."

"I know it is. The average schoolmaster sells himself for a maximum salary of twenty-five hundred a year, and is worth just about that."

"Aren't there any exceptions?"

Helen broke in on them.

"/ two people deciding the fate of the nation," she asked. "Or is Patricia scolding you for not coming out of your cave, Mr. Brooke?"

"Just that, Miss Strange," Brooke answered, "and I've decided to reform."

"I'm afraid it's too late." She looked at him critically with her head on one side. "Yes; I'm sure it is."

"Will you go riding with me on Saturday?" countered Brooke.

"I'm afraid I can't go Saturday."

"Monday, then?" She shook her head. "Tuesday? Now don't say 'Oh, hell, I'll come Saturday.'"

They all laughed.

"Shall we call it Tuesday?" Helen said. "Though I don't believe you'll turn up."

"Tuesday's my afternoon out, and I don't think I've got anything else to do," Brooke said ruminatively.

"Thank you." Helen bowed ironically, but there was appreciation in the snap of her eyes over her dark furs.

"Don't be too sure, Helen," said Scott. "Brooke's the original groundhog, and if he sees his shadow on Tuesday, he'll go back into his hole for six weeks."

"And pull the hole in after him," added Patricia.

"Why don't we go, too, Miss Vaughan?" Scott suggested.

"Let's. You could all come here for lunch, couldn't you?" They nodded, except Brooke. "Bobby?"

"I'll be a little late. But I'll come, sure."

"Till Tuesday, then." Scott rose. "We'd better be moving along, Brooke. Good bye, Helen. Good bye, Miss Vaughan."

"Are you sure of Tuesday?" smiled Helen, as she shook hands with Brooke. "Are you quite sure?"

"I'm awful brave, as groundhogs go," he answered.

"Cheer up, Bobby," said Patricia, "you're not a pedagogue yet."

CHAPTER VII

It was a small meeting of the clinic, and not a very limber one, for Hood was present. Yet the post-mortem continued, with Mrs. Motley officiating, while her husband and Furness handed her the instruments.

"Depend upon it," said Motley, "there's a girl in the case. This is the third time this term that he has been away the whole afternoon."

"I don't see just why that means a girl," Hood objected. "The first time, he was riding in one of those paper chases, and the second he went over to the ridge to help Scott buy a cow."

"And dined with Scott afterwards," added Motley. "He told me so himself."

"Didn't you know that he met the girl at the paper chase?" asked Mrs. Motley. "That's once. And how do you know that the West Ridge was the only place he went?"

"It wasn't," volunteered Furness. "They stopped at Waterville on the way back."

"Ah!" Mrs. Motley was delighted. "Now I see." She peeked over the kettle. "Have you noticed Mr. Brooke and Billy Strange?" she asked.

"By Jove! Of course!" Furness was beginning to see that the patient had died of a complication of diseases. "The Stranges live in Waterville, and there's a sister!"

Mrs. Motley nodded four times, slowly and emphatically.

"Have you seen her?" she asked.

"Pretty girl with light hair," supplemented Motley. "She's been up to see her brother two or three times."

"Yes, I've noticed her," said Furness. "She comes up to see her *brother*, eh?"

It was a second before the Motleys laughed at the innuendo. Hood did not laugh; he became impatient and exasperated. As he could not in decency leave five minutes after he had come, he attempted a comment that had no malice in it.

"She looks well on horseback."

The sound of the doorbell called Motley from the room. Mrs. Motley dropped her voice until she should be sure that no enemy lurked in the passage.

"That's just it," she confided. "The Strange girl looks well on horseback. Has Mr. Brooke got money of his own?"

"Certainly not!" Furness ejaculated. "If he had, he wouldn't be teaching school."

No one took exception to this argument, though Hood wiggled a little. Motley entered, convoying Welles.

"Ah, Mrs. Motley!" murmured the Pre-Adamite. "One is always sure of finding company here."

"You should join us more often, Mr. Welles." Mrs. Motley could be gracious when she was not sincere. "It's a very long time since we've seen you."

"I must plead guilty." Welles took his tea, and added ponderously, "The loss is my own. But one gets into such a rut."

"Everybody does," Motley agreed. "Always the same old round."

"And not an unpleasant round, at that." In one respect Welles had the advantage of the clinic; he thoroughly enjoyed his work, albeit with sentimentality. "The boys absorb one's energies." Everyone, even Hood, nodded agreement. Welles bristled a little, and snapped a rider on his speech. "Or, they should do so."

He leaned over the cake-stand to select a piece of toast, and so missed the glance that flashed from Furness to Mrs. Motley and back again.

"All our best energies," Mrs. Motley agreed. "That's true. You men have so little time for other things."

"We used to, in the old days," Welles pursued. "Now, matters seem to be different. I suppose it's what you call progress. But I can't see what we gain by leaving the boys to take care of themselves, and gallivanting about the country on horseback."

"You're thinking of Mr. Brooke?" Mrs. Motley queried. "We were just talking about him. I think—" she leaned forward over the table—"I think there's a girl in the case."

"A girl in the case?" Welles felt the prick of the banderillas, and tossed his horns in anger. "A girl? What has a schoolmaster to do with girls? He should be a lay monk—a celibate."

"I'm not a celibate," Motley objected, half seriously. Hood's eyes flashed, and were veiled again.

"That's different," countered Welles. "Very different indeed. You're getting on towards middle life." Motley, annoyed in good earnest, shot a glance at his waist line, of which he was precariously proud. "With the young men, especially men in their first year," Welles went on, "it's quite another matter."

"Why should it be?" Hood's questions, bursting as they so often did, out of his silences, had the effect of bombs. "It's ideas like that that make this life unnatural. Why should a young schoolmaster be different from any other young man?"

"Because it's a life apart." Steam was rising in Welles' boiler. "Because all a man's interests should center on the boys. I'm proud to say that Chester has never had good accommodation for married men—young married men." Again Motley looked at his waist line. "They are useless to us and ought not to

be kept. A teacher has no business to play with debutantes."

"If that's true, there's something wrong about schoolmastering." Hood was emphatic.

"Not at all. Not at all. It's a life of sacrifice."

Welles, canting on a favorite theme, overbore interruption. As usual, he forgot that all assemblies were not public meetings; he did not converse—he delivered an address. His remarks were exasperating beyond endurance because he was so nearly correct in his major premise; he knew that there was enough worth in his profession to call for all there was of power in any man who entered it; he knew that scattered interests mean dissipated power. His mistake lay in the corollary assumption that nothing else in life was worth anything at all.

In the first convenient pause, Hood, who could stand the lecture no longer, slipped away. Furness, shamelessly disregarding signals of distress from the Motleys, followed him. Welles remained, and talked the Motleys first into a rage, and then into a stupor, whence arose now and then a comatose matrimonial assent to his rhetorical questions. When he left, they gradually came to, and waxed angry at the personal application of many of his remarks. Within twenty-four hours, however, they forgot the wounds which they themselves had suffered, and, with the glee of true scientists, began to perceive that Brooke and

Brooke alone was the victim of Welles' homily. To the clinic, when next it met, they preached on the Pre-Adamite's text; excerpts from their sermons were repeated to Brooke, and made him very angry indeed, for the accusations they embodied were just true enough to hurt.

They had no effect on him except to make him obstinate. He went riding with Helen Strange not only once but several times after the ice-breaking tea at the Vaughan's, and enjoyed each ride more than the last. She, like most of the valley people, and unlike any of his colleagues—he forgot Hood—was kindly rather than critical; disposed to take people as she found them instead of trying to make them what they ought to be. By the same token, she was a charming person to lie to, because she always believed everything that Brooke told her about himself. Billy had prejudiced his sister in Brooke's favor; it was not long therefore before Brooke realized that he had a reputation to maintain, and proceeded to maintain it at the expense of his character. This was poker. But there were times when he wearied of bluff, and found Patricia's just and amused estimate of him as refreshing as her habit of smelling of cold roses. Of one thing he was certain—Patricia and Helen and Scott, between them, were protecting him from the end-of-the-term irritation which was making the school a hell of nerves.

Most of the time he had to live in it; always he had to go back to it. It set his teeth on edge like the scrape of a gritty piece of chalk on a blackboard. He began to perceive that the task he had undertaken was only superficially easy, that the apparently short hours were in reality the longest hours in the world, for there was no respite, morning, noon, or night, as long as he remained on the school grounds. There were the same faces at meals, the same acrid arguments between the masters—grown more acrid than ever now that vacation was no more than a fortnight away—the same errors in the same or similar compositions, the same high pitched little voices discussing the same or similar subjects in the same terms. The difficulty of separating the individual from the mass grew upon him; he ceased to find any humanity in any of the younger boys, with the sole exception of Billy Strange, about whom he was as besotted as ever. The rather extraordinary penetration of young Bruce became a source of discomfort to him; whenever he saw the boy “laughing consumedly” with his friends, he feared they were talking about him, and, although that sensation was no new thing in his experience, he could not disabuse himself of it. When he turned for relief to the companionship of Billy, he found his self consciousness even more unbearable; frequently, he hated the sight of the boy simply because he was young.

Since he could not always get away to his valley friends, he cast about for a more accessible relief, and began to cultivate the society of the older boys, and of one in particular, Lyle by name. Accidents of routine threw them together; Brooke applied to the boy the converse of the Theory of the Three Pedestrians, and, with a somewhat cold-blooded and cynical delight, found that it worked. He captured Lyle; during the last part of the term they were together a large part of the time, both outdoors and in. Lyle and his friends took to dropping in on Brooke at odd hours, and their manner towards him had in it just enough respect to preserve it from familiarity. He flattered himself that he had with them achieved a distinctly human relation; that they looked upon him as a man and not as a master. The feeling was flattery and no more. The clinic told him so, and the clinic for once was right. He did not subscribe to their prognosis; to himself he talked big about the opportunities of schoolmastering in general and about his own opportunities in particular. When he thought of Lyle and his friends, he stole a phrase of Hood's, and omitted the quotation marks. These boys, so soon to leave school for college, needed a point of view by virtue of which they might overcome the handicaps of wealth and indolence. He knew them well; it was for him to give it to them. He did not reflect that it is impossible to give what one hasn't got, but began

to live in that pedagogue's paradise of conscious well-doing of which he had once spoken so disparagingly to Patricia.

The strenuous days of the examinations came at last. The other masters, who were all in one department or another, and entirely in it, received all their papers at once, and went into decorous retirement until they had corrected them. Brooke, the newest man, the youngest man, and therefore the doer of odd jobs, had classes in four different subjects. His papers were handed to him in driblets, and kept his mind jumping from German to English History, and from Geography to English Literature, until he fell thrall to an Anglo-Teutonic devil whose soul was set on parallels of latitude, and who demanded that the exploits of Oliver Cromwell be described in faultless Hanoverian, with due regard to the causes and results of the battle of Naseby, and that set passages be translated by twelve year olds in the diction of Macaulay's Essay on Addison.

It was over at last. Brooke said good bye to the boys, promising to look Lyle up in New York—he had no intention whatever of keeping that promise—and wrote two notes, both different and both amusing, to Patricia and Helen. Then he drove to the station, handed his bag to the Pullman porter, and settled back in the stuffy car, thoroughly enjoying the click of the wheels beneath him, because the jolt of every

railhead was taking him farther and farther away from the boys and all that concerned them.

New York was his goal. He had never before enjoyed the city, but he expected to this time. He wanted to see people—crowds of people—and vehicles—millions of vehicles—all in a hurry. He was hungry for the rasp of motor brakes at avenue crossings, for the pithy, antiphonal cursing of truck drivers and policemen, for the shattering small arm fire of the pneumatic riveters on the skeletons of new skyscrapers. For a considerable time, also, his mind had dwelt on the savor of delicious food. He had become so tired of the same three animals, served naked at noon, and in weird panoply of stews and croquettes at night, that the prospect of at least one perfect meal had become an obsession with him. Therefore, some time before, he had written to one Winthrop, a man who knew him as well as did Patricia Vaughan, and arranged for a meeting at Delmonico's on the first night of freedom. It was to be a Lucullan occasion; Brooke stipulated that no plans should be made for amusement after dinner. They were to stimulate the imagination of the gray whiskered head waiter, and enjoy the best that he could suggest to them; they were not to limit their fancy by any sordid contemplation of the menu; they were to linger over the disorder of dessert as long as they pleased. The dinner was to be a gastronomic poem; the very anticipation

of it made Brooke's mouth water, and went far towards compensating him for the twelve lean weeks of Autumn.

Brooke took a taxi to Winthrop's apartment, where he bathed and changed. Then the two of them walked the dozen blocks that separated them from the restaurant, for the night was fine and the air mild for December. Hastings had engaged the table at the southeast corner of the grill; they ordered leisurely. To this point, the period of anticipation continued. It might have proceeded without a hitch to a climactic realization if two of Brooke's classmates, Hallam and Selwyn by name, had not happened in on their way to a dance uptown. They greeted him with more or less genuine enthusiasm, drew chairs up to the table, and had their dinners served there. Their attitude was exactly what it had always been in college: it affected Brooke in exactly the same way. Before they entered, he had been entertaining Winthrop with an account of his experiences during the last term, and had been keeping the ball of conversation in the air more skillfully than he ever remembered to have done before. The entrance of the two extra men had cut a story off in the middle, and Brooke discovered that he was still constitutionally unable to go on with it; that he was as uncertain of his ground with them as he had always been. He fell back into his notch with an almost audible click, and became at once the

listener, the observer. He was, indeed, more so than ever, for now there was added to his former lack of assurance a desire not to brand himself as a pedagogue by any dogmatic statement. Hallam and Selwyn asked him a few more or less perfunctory questions about himself and schoolteaching in general, and then, since they were neither of them as yet fathers of male offspring, and had therefore not joined the great army of educational experts, they began to talk stocks. Brooke applied himself to the sea bass, and reflected sardonically that the jolt was good for his soul. It was not, as a matter of fact.

He and Winthrop were soon alone again, for the other two had been late for their engagement, and had dined on chops and potatoes. The waiter brought the mallard and the hominy; Brooke examined the dusty label on the accompanying Burgundy as if he really knew something about it, and filled the glasses himself. Winthrop looked across at him.

"What a queer devil you are!" he said. "Silent as the grave just when other people do most of their talking."

"Nothing queer about that," Brooke rejoined. "You see, the other people do do most of the talking. Didn't you write me that you had discovered a new Kipling?"

"You bet!" Winthrop was enthusiastic at once. "Clinton, his name is. He writes about Mauritius. There's one story of his—"

The conversation was fairly begun now, firm on the foundation of one of the strongest of their common interests. The salad, the cheese, and the coffee came and went through spirals of cigarette smoke; the talk flickered from books to authors, from civilization to the dark places of the world and back again. Then, over the liqueurs and the thin, foot-long cigars, it left books and authors to take care of themselves, and broadened into a quieter current, such as characterizes the intercourse of friends, and is so universal an experience that it retains its zest through a thousand repetitions.

The dinner was over at last. They paid their bill, and stepped out into the street. And, since anti-climax is the only logical event of combined high living and high thinking, midnight found them at a cabaret off Broadway. They sat for half an hour in the balcony, watching the couples hunch and wriggle on the cleared space below, and chaffing with the people at the neighboring tables. A girl sat down beside Brooke and began to talk with him; she was a pretty little thing, but her voice was so rasping and her conversation so vapid that he presently sank into a fit of abstraction from which he was roused by Winthrop, who yawned, and suggested that they go home.

"Good bye," said the girl, smiling through an inch and a quarter of paint.

"Good bye," answered Brooke. Then, very sud-

denly, the miasma of the senses swirled about him. He forgot that she was stupid and tiresome, forgot everything about her except that she was a woman. He stood for a moment in a kind of a fog; then the lights swung back into their places and he was cool again.

"Coming?" asked Winthrop.

"Yes."

He went rather quickly, threading his way between the tables. He hated to come so near losing control of himself, and for so trivial a reason.

A party of six or seven was just coming up the narrow stairway; Winthrop and Brooke stood aside to let them pass. Two women and two men—no, two boys—were sitting at the table nearest to Brooke; one of the boys turned and looked at him. It was Lyle; there could be no doubt about the character of the two women. Brooke bowed; Lyle, his face scarlet, bowed also.

"Who's your infant friend?" asked Winthrop, as they were going downstairs.

"One of the paper sports I have to teach," Brooke answered. He handed his coat check over the counter, and added, "Poor little fools! It's too damn bad."

"Have you many like that?" asked Winthrop, when they were clear of the chauffeurs at the door of the building.

"I'm afraid we have. I don't know that I'm alto-

gether surprised to see that kid here, but I don't like it any the better for that."

"No. It's not a pretty sight."

"Seventeen is too early to begin woman chasing," Brooke went on. "Not that there's too much excuse for it at any age. Those kids don't stand a chance. Can't you see them when they're thirty?"

"Yes. Poo, little fools, as you say," Winthrop answered. They covered half a block before either of them spoke again. "What kind of a kid is the one you spoke to?" Winthrop asked.

"I like him." They crossed Forty-second street. "And what the deuce can I say to him that will have any effect?"

"As much as anyone," Winthrop answered. "Does talk ever have any effect?"

"Very seldom. Never, when it comes from a pedagogue."

"You're pessimistic."

"With reason. Don't you know I'm supposed to be a Galahad just because I happen to be an instructor of youth?"

"Well, has Galahad got so much on you?"

"Perhaps not. But I'm in unstable equilibrium, like every other man in the world. How am I going to convince the kids of that?"

"I never thought of that side of your business," remarked Winthrop. "Counsels of perfection are

useless or worse. And I suppose that's what you've got to hand out to them."

"Why have I?" Brooke was rebellious to his soul. "Why should they have to think that I'm different from other men they know—and like?"

"Do they think so?"

"Of course they do. They know I'm a schoolmaster. Isn't that enough? You have to be a hypocrite to make good in that business, and you have to handle any situation like this with both hands tied behind your back."

"Do you?" asked Winthrop. "Do you? Why not tell them the truth?"

"They wouldn't believe it."

"Try it and see." With one of his rare impulses of demonstrativeness, Winthrop hooked his arm through Brooke's. "You're a mighty human little cuss, Bob," he said. "Give them a chance to find it out."

CHAPTER VIII

BROOKE spent Christmas day with some distant relatives, and then, finding that his friends in the city were too busy in the daytime and too tired in the evening to play with him, went to Pinehurst for the rest of the vacation to play golf. Luck stood by him; he met Major Ward on the first tee, and had a game with him. Brooke regarded the match as a fortunate accident; he had heard from Mrs. Vaughan enough of the Major's fame to be shy of intruding on him further. He was proportionately surprised when the Major sought him out the next day and challenged him again.

"We play about even," said the Major as they left the eighteenth green. "Might make it a regular engagement if you care to?"

Brooke jumped at the chance. That evening, the Major entered the dining room after Brooke had begun dinner, hesitated a moment at his regular table, and then came over to Brooke's.

"May I join you?" he said. "I hate to eat alone."

"I'd be delighted," Brooke answered, and warmed

instantaneously to the Major. A moderately old man can, if he is not a talkative hospital case on two legs, flatter a young one into helplessness by showing him the most ordinary attention; probably the Major knew that. Moreover, he had liked Brooke when he met him at the school, and liked him more now.

"Nasty hole, that fourteenth, isn't it?" said the Major as he unfolded his napkin.

For the most part, he talked golf in the intervals of playing it. But at times, when some side draft blew across the conversation, he dropped into anecdotes of the army in general and of the Philippines in particular, where he had seen three separate tours of service. Brooke yielded to the sorcery of outlandish names; there was to his mind an aroma, an alluring savor, to such words as Mindanao, Zamboanga, and Luzon. They were as the islands of dreams, where all things are possible, and he led the Major on to talk about them as often as he could. Nor was the Major unwilling; he had seen the East from the inside, as it were, and the sultans and petty native princes with whom and against whom he had fought were to him far more than insoluble puzzles—they were friends or enemies, as the case might be, and only a little more perplexing than the white men of the service. He had an eye for drama and humor, had the Major; the figures of his tales—Hajji Abdullah, Datto Ali, and the rest—were not names, but

men. He did not monopolize the conversation, but, perceiving that Brooke did not want to talk shop in his vacation, he tacitly agreed to avoid mention of Chester; it was not until the evening before Brooke left that he talked about the school at any great length.

"Leaving tomorrow morning, eh?" he said. "I shall miss our games. Things seemed to be going pretty smoothly at Chester when I was there in the fall."

"Very smoothly indeed, as a rule," Brooke agreed. "Mr. Marshall is a wonder."

"Yes, I think he is." The Major cut the end of a cigar, and lit it. "Do you like it—schoolteaching?" he asked.

"Why," Brooke answered, "I've only been in it a term."

"Then you don't find it very interesting?" pursued the Major, grasping at the sense rather than at the sound of the words.

"Not very—as yet. There seems to be a great deal to learn about it. Many sides to it. And the best sides aren't the most evident, just at first."

"Of course. That's the way it is in the army." He paused, and dropped the ash of his cigar into a tray. "I wonder if you'll like it when it clarifies? I should think a big man could make a big job of it."

"How, a big job?"

"Well, it's useful, and necessary. Not just filling kids full of Latin and mathematics."

That was like one of Hood's remarks; Brooke had hardly expected anything like it from the Major. He began to suspect that Hood had the right idea, and the suspicion grew into a certainty as the Major went on talking. It was disconcerting to hear a man of the Major's varied experience talking altruism, or rather talking all around altruism, indicating its boundaries and position on the map while avoiding all direct mention of it. Brooke rubbed his eyes and wondered if he was awake.

They were interrupted before Brooke had asked the Major all he wished to ask him. When Brooke left in the morning, the Major was just starting for the links.

"Good luck!" he called, waving to Brooke. "Remember me to the Vaughans."

"Thanks. I will," Brooke called back.

In spite of his talk with the Major, and his glimpse of the Major's point of view, he did not want to return to school. The more he saw of other people, the more heavily fettered schoolmasters seemed to him.

There was the matter of Lyle and the chorus girl, for instance, which had altogether slipped from his mind. Major Ward, or Winthrop, or any one of twenty laymen would have been able to speak with authority to the boy, and perhaps, if they were lucky, to steer him clear of certain rocks. Brooke felt that he himself might do the same if it had not been for

the handicap of his profession. Beyond question, it was his duty to say something, but, strain his ingenuity as he would, he could discover no way of introducing the subject. It seemed to him that it must come up naturally, or with the appearance of naturalness, if his opinion and reproof were to carry any weight at all; it never occurred to him that matters of sex seldom come up naturally between boys and men. He could not force himself to cut the knot, and drag the business in by the heels, as Winthrop or Major Ward might have done, as Hood would most certainly have done. Throughout the trip northwards, he wasted time and energy in the attempt to find some Machiavellian device which would give his counsel authority; he arrived nowhere, of course, and when he greeted Lyle at the school a few days later, it was as if nothing had happened. For a few days, he kept watching for a chance to speak; none occurred, and as time went on it became increasingly difficult, and finally impossible, for him to say anything at all. He nevertheless deceived himself into thinking that his disapproval was evident enough, though tacit. Lyle put a different interpretation on his silence. He told his friends that Brooke was a good sport, and didn't mind if a fellow kicked up his heels in vacation; he hinted rather broadly that Brooke himself was not above kicking up his own heels. The obvious conclusion of those premises was that Brooke didn't mind,

or minded only in a Pickwickian sense, if a fellow kicked up his heels in term time. Brooke's last state was therefore worse than his first; led on by his fear of seeming pedagogically censorious, he had achieved a reputation for acquiescence which he was very far from deserving. It was a clear case of lost courage; the consequences were inevitable, as they always are.

They manifested themselves in small ways, for Lyle was a good sort at bottom, and was besides far too canny wantonly to destroy a reputation which was in the main good. In his talks with Brooke, however, he more than once permitted it to be seen that he looked upon Brooke as a fellow rake; there was often in his speech an air of "you-know-how-it-is-old-man" familiarity. He could not have taken a worse road to Brooke's good opinion, if that was what he was after. Brooke sickened of him and his man-of-the-world attitude, and was glad that Lyle had ceased to drop in upon him as often as he had done in the previous term. Angry at Lyle, and helplessly angry at himself, he lumped all the older boys under one head, branded them in his own mind as cheap, and was at some pains to avoid them. They seemed to him neither kid nor goat; he preferred an age with a name to it, and once more cultivated the society of the younger boys, as he had done when first he entered the business.

They rewarded his interest with the generosity

characteristic of their age. Bruce and Strange continued to interest him more than any of the rest; he saw a great deal of both of them, but seldom saw them together, for, though they were not often openly at war, they were essentially antipathetic, as originality and conventionality generally are. Yet, with both of them, Brooke succeeded in establishing a relation of frankness which sometimes caused him embarrassment. Very often, indeed, they let slip information about petty crimes which they never would have dreamed of divulging if they had thought of him as a master rather than as a man. Even Bruce, who had once championed a revolutionary frankness, occasionally so far forgot himself as to forsake his practice and live up to his theory, and threw traditional reticence to the winds. Billy Strange did it all the time. Brooke was very far from comfortable when these disclosures occurred; he spoke to Hood about them.

"That's just what you want, isn't it?" Hood demanded. "If you don't get in close touch with them, you can't do anything for them. There is nothing in this corset-and-uniform business. Absolutely nothing."

"Let 'em talk, then?"

"By all means. Make 'em talk."

"But if they tell me things in confidence which I ought to make use of?"

"Make use of them—if you do it right."

They were interrupted at this point, and Brooke was unable to find out what Hood meant by "doing it right." Marshall, to whom Brooke also mentioned his perplexity, gave him similar, though more theoretical, advice.

"Boys may put you in embarrassing positions at times," he admitted. "But it's worth it, isn't it? And it's unlikely that they'll be so very embarrassing."

Brooke had to content himself with such vague counsel, or try to do so. Meanwhile, his intimacy with Bruce and Strange continued. Bruce for the most part confined his comments to observations and estimates of the characters of other boys, and spoke in general terms. Billy, on the other hand, talked of specific acts, and kept urging Brooke to draw his conclusions for him, instead of drawing them for himself. Therefore, his information was the more disconcerting. Mostly, however, his revelations exposed minor breaches of rules rather than instances of moral turpitude, and in these breaches Billy himself was generally the chief actor.

"You ought not to tell me things like that," Brooke once remarked to him.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't punish you for them."

"You can, if you catch me," Billy replied. "What's the harm?"

Brooke let it go at that. Nevertheless, the situation

annoyed him to such an extent that he forgot how utterly trivial it was; for the time being, his sense of humor was in suspension. It was so completely suspended that he mentioned his perplexity in a full meeting of the clinic. Diagnosis, or post mortem, whichever it was, began at once.

"You've got to keep them at a distance," said Furness. There was a sort of panic in his eye, indicating a fear of being assassinated if any boy approached within knife-reach.

"Yes," Motley agreed. "You can't trust any of them. If you don't look out, they'll put you in a hole with the boss."

"They put me in a hole with myself," Brooke answered.

"By telling you things?" Furness asked.

"Just that. Minor matters, of course, but told in confidence."

"Confidence, eh?" Motley sneered at the word. "You'd better look out, Brooke, or you'll get in bad."

"What would you do about it?"

"Simple enough. They use everything you say—and use it against you, like a Sherlock Holmes policeman. Why haven't you a right to do the same? Get all the information you can, and use all you can get. That's the way I look at it. It's just a matter of rules."

Motley's attitude was at least definite, though

Brooke could not subscribe to it, or make up his mind to follow it. He remained perplexed as ever, and let matters slip along to the inevitable climax.

Billy Strange, of course, brought the climax about. He had been to the neighboring city of Wimpole to see a dentist, and had happened to return on the same train with Lyle, who had broken his one pair of glasses and gone in to get them mended. No school-boy, by the way, ever owns more than one pair of glasses at a time. A second pair might be inconveniently useful. In the train, Lyle had unwrapped a bottle of whiskey, and had wrapped it up again so that it looked like a pair of shoes. Billy had seen him do it; since Chester boys went to Wimpole on honor, and since the restrictions of honor were pretty generally observed, Billy was indignant. For once, his somewhat slavish regard for public opinion marched with his inherited prejudice against crookedness, and guided him to a proper conclusion. He was also a bit of a prig, being just at the age when one is apt to be too good or too bad for a commonplace world. He had fallen into the habit of seeking support from Brooke in all his perplexities; when they were together, a good half of his sentences began with the query "Do you think it's right?"; his theory of unswerving loyalty to the other boys persisted in the main, but was discarded when he talked with Brooke, for he had utterly forgotten that Brooke was a person in authority. The

matter of Lyle and the whiskey could not be crudely introduced; it came out, nevertheless. Within forty-eight hours after the incident had happened, Brooke had all the facts in his hands; the crucial dilemma which he had so long feared, confronted him at last.

It presented itself as a matter of the least harm to the smallest number. Billy had given the information, and had thereby violated his own ethics, although unconsciously. There was no good reason why he should be protected from the consequences of his own acts. That was the way it looked on the surface, and Brooke forced himself into an attitude which was perfectly cold, perfectly impersonal, and therefore perfectly false. It was not even just, for Billy's information had been purely inadvertent. There was a way out; Brooke might have sent for Lyle, handled the matter himself, and caused Billy little if any trouble. This solution he did not perceive. After much cogitation, he took the matter up to Marshall, and demanded from the headmaster as much protection for Billy as could be provided.

That was little enough, although Marshall dealt with the situation with his usual tact and perspicacity. He sent for Lyle, and told him that he had been found out, stating also that the information had come to hand in such a way that no legal penalty could be exacted. He put the whole responsibility for Lyle's future behavior on Lyle himself—which proceeding

would have been reckless in the extreme, if Marshall had not formed a pretty accurate estimate of Lyle, founded on a wide acquaintance with young fools. He did, in brief, what Brooke should have done on his own initiative, not only in the case of the whiskey, but in the case of the lady of the cabaret, and did not once hint at the source of his information.

Lyle, however, could add two and two, and did so. Four was the answer, and Billy Strange suffered for his inadvertence, although not directly, for Lyle was only a temporary fool and not a permanent knave. He responded to Marshall's treatment of his case, for he both admired and respected Marshall. He only half meant to hurt the informer, and told no more than a few of his intimates his suspicions as to the former's identity. The intimates leaked, as intimates invariably do. Little by little, Billy became a pariah, and his intimacy with Brooke seemed at first to a few, and then to nearly all the boys, a thing completely damning. The story of Brooke, however, is no place for the timeworn exposition of the variety of gloom which is apt to overwhelm a boy at a certain age. It is a common, almost a universal, experience, and has been used as the backbone of school stories ever since Cain went to kindergarten. In the case of Billy Strange, it may have been more than usually crushing, for there was a definite cause for it, and a definite injustice in it. Brooke had ample opportunity to observe

the progress of it, and, very often indeed, felt worse about it than Billy did himself. for he and he alone was responsible for it. The incident added itself to his experience, and became a step towards the solution of his personal problem. But the day when he should write Q. E. D. was yet far off.

CHAPTER IX

MORE and more clearly as the winter went on, Brooke perceived the ghastly awkwardness with which he had handled the whole affair of the two boys and the whiskey. It was true that a similar breach of honor would not be likely to occur again—thus much he had undoubtedly accomplished, and in the realization of that fact he found a barren satisfaction. But, for almost the first time in his life, he had set a match to a powder train of circumstances, and was powerless to quench the flame. There was worth in what he had done as far as the school community was concerned, but he had done it with bungling hands, and the unhappiness he had caused one individual far outweighed, in his emotional mind, whatever valuable end he might have gained. That Billy Strange did not hold it against him, but seemed to depend on him more as he became more completely outcaste, did not contribute to Brooke's peace of mind.

The business had one good result. He was forced to seek relief from the obsession of it, and consequently was very much less of a hermit in the winter than he had been in the fall. Contrast was vital to

him, and he made Scott's place, or the Vaughan's or the Strange's the goal of many a long and lonely tramp on snowshoes. He was by now on the footing of other days at the Vaughan's; he felt free to call them up at any time and demand hospitality, for he knew that both Patricia and her mother would tell him if it was inconvenient to have him when he wanted to come. Mrs. Vaughan's maid, who had been Patricia's nurse, and whose brogue was a brogue of soft gold, played no small part in making him feel at his ease; she insisted on calling him Master Bobby, and roundly berated him when he got his feet wet. If it happened that the Vaughan's were out when Brooke called, old Katie did the honors, and subsequently with a pious gusto, repeated all his observations to Mrs. Vaughan and Patricia. He was, and always had been, and always would be, her Master Bobby; she looked upon it as a direct dispensation of Providence that he still liked sugar cookies.

The Stranges also came to depend on him to make up a fourth at bridge, or to establish the balance of the sexes at a dinner. At times, he preferred the society of Helen to that of Patricia; it depended on his mood. If perchance the day's work had made him more than usually disgusted with himself, and his own incertitude—a trait, by the way, which he was miraculously expert in concealing from the public eye—he called as soon as possible on the Stranges, for

with Helen he could lie himself back into self respect, and depart exalted. She was willing to take Brooke at his own valuation, for her brother had created in her mind a very favorable prejudice, and he was far too reserved to rehearse, even to her, his present unhappiness and the cause of it. She sensed it, however, and chose to regard Brooke as her small brother's best friend—as he was in a way, for Billy himself so considered him. She said as much to him one day.

“You have done so much for Billy.”

“You think so?” he answered, honest for once, and a good deal ashamed. “I've got him into trouble with the boys. That's all I have done for him.”

“He hasn't said anything about that. So he probably doesn't think so. But what do you mean—if you don't mind?”

He was fairly in for it, and found relief in telling her the story. If she had heard it from another source, she would have been very indignant with him—permanently so, in all probability. As it was, she suspected that Brooke was painting himself too black, for she could not believe that Billy would have held his peace if the circumstances had been quite what Brooke said they were. She did not realize that the boy was growing up. And there was besides a certain element of third act, melodramatic, nobility in Billy's actions which appealed to her primitive and female imagination. She was proud of her brother.

"It was hard on Billy," was all her comment.

Neither of them mentioned the subject again. But Brooke did not forget what she had said about it; he held it in grateful remembrance. For this and other reasons, he called more and more frequently at the Strange's. He began to wonder if he was in love with Helen, if he was at last growing susceptible to feminine charm. The suspicion gave him a queer thrill whenever it occurred. He had no fundamental objection to susceptibility, but he had never experienced it. Most of his friends counted their calf loves by the score; he himself could not recall a time when the presence of a particular girl had accelerated his pulse by so much as a single beat. The queer thrill was therefore doubly pleasant because it was quite new. He looked forward eagerly to the recurrence of it—worked himself up to the feeling, in fact, as he could easily do, for his long service under the Theory of the Three Pedestrians had made his imaginative control of his emotions almost perfect.

It was Scott, however, who that winter supplied to his life the most valuable element. They saw a great deal of each other, for Scott, once the ice was broken, came more than half way. Not content with entertaining Brooke, he gave Brooke a chance to entertain him. Two or three times a week, he came over to the school for a game of squash, and either stayed to supper or took Brooke back with him to the farm.

On fine nights, when the snow was hard and squeaky, he was given to taking long drives; he went by the school very often, and always paused beneath Brooke's window, and called up to him, demanding company. And sometimes, for no reason at all, he dropped in for half a dozen pipes and an evening's desultory talk. With Scott, Brooke forgot to be introspective and careful; he was as completely at his ease as he was with Winthrop. There were not five men in the world of whom he could say as much.

About the middle of February, the Stranges went to Bermuda, Scott left for Aiken to play polo, and the Vaughans, the repairs on the Clifford place well under way, departed for six weeks or so in New York. Brooke missed them all a great deal. He found vacant on his hands a good many hours which he had been used to spend with one or the other of them. He tried to apply his spare time to his class work, but, exercise his conscience as he would, he could not so dispose of more than a quarter of them. He next attempted to spend more time with the boys, and succeeded in finding ways of doing so, to his own great advantage. Association with them tended to make him more human, for it forced him to be simple and direct, even though in his dealings with them he still preserved many an unnecessary and pernicious reserve. But the boys did not always want him about, nor were they accessible at all times of day; there re-

mained certain empty intervals in the afternoons, and two hours at least between their bedtime and his, for Brooke was a late sitter. The choice presented itself of putting away his time, as the Pre-Adamites did, or of making exercise a dissipation, : did the younger men, or of joining the clinic for good and all, and playing bumble-puppy auction in the intervals of scandal. None of these diversions appealed to him as an exclusive pursuit; his mind, just beginning to grow lusty and to feel the chafing of the fetters which his life and his philosophy of life had locked around it, demanded more nourishing food. Reading was not altogether adequate, although he did a good deal of it; he had always found it easy to read and read intelligently with the same superficial layer of his mind which he used for teaching, or at most with the layer below it. The words of other men did not sink the shaft deep enough; he felt, though vaguely, the need of penetrating to bedrock, of laying bare the fundamental strata of his soul, instead of forcing an unambitious content with the surface outcrop. Remembering his very moderate literary success in college, he conceived writing in general and short story writing in particular to be the drill wherewith he could best probe his mind. He knew that the effort to write made him think, exactly as conversation made him think. Possible payment for what he might do was of course a consideration, but it was actually

not the principal one. The main thing was to think.

Theory to the contrary notwithstanding, the pursuit of literature presented itself to him not as an attempt to explain life, but as a relief from life. Therefore he began by writing tales about things he knew nothing of, and dealt with women and horses and power and war. He worked his stuff over two or three or six times, till he was fairly satisfied with it, and then sent it away. All of it came back, and kept coming back; when he had expended as much for postage as he cared to, he dropped each effort into the bottom drawer of his desk, and forgot about it. He began to suspect that he was too easily satisfied with his work, and spent more time on it, but a peculiar quirk of his brain, or else a certain obtuseness of vision, led him to concentrate his attention on the manner of his tales instead of on the matter of them. This proceeding exaggerated his distinctly academic bent, which was already too much exaggerated by the constant correction of English compositions; moreover, it emphasized the structural weakness which was the glaring fault of everything he wrote. He produced some stuff which certain editors were pleased to say "had charm," but all of which they more or less reluctantly returned with the damning comment, "No story." He invariably agreed with them on this score; more than that, he perceived that the criticism was a

proper one from a literary as well as a commercial standpoint. Nevertheless, so blinded was he by the perilous glitter of technique, so foggy in his perception of the relations of cause and effect, and so callous to that sympathy which is born of experience, that he continued to elaborate his sketches—they were no more than that—with a painstaking care which a masterpiece would hardly have justified. There was hope for him; he kept fast hold of his sense of satiric humor, although he never, under any circumstances, allowed it to appear in his stories. Nor did he ever so far degenerate as to believe that inspiration was anything but glue on the seat of one's desk chair. But he had begun the business of writing fiction at the wrong end; with all his nice sense of the connotation of words, and all his feeling for the metrical value of phrases and sounds, he was quite unable to say anything that was worth the trouble of saying. He was like a carpenter with a full set of excellent tools, and no lumber with which to build a house. Patricia, to whom he wrote about his new occupation, hit the nail on the head as usual. She sent him a copy of the "Peterkin Papers," with a page turned down at the account of Solomon John's attempt to become an author. "But I haven't anything to write about," said Solomon John at the end of that distressing experience. Brooke laughed and agreed when he received the book—and continued to juggle with words.

The occupation was diverting, but it was far more than that. Flimsy as was the texture of his product, it absorbed his attention while he was at it, and, to some slight extent, burrowed into the second layer of his mind; the search for the inevitable word was in this way almost as useful as the discovery of a new thought. It kept him fresh for his school work, and even enabled him to get a little perspective on it, so that, when certain undiscoverable criminals turned a chicken loose in the schoolroom, he was able to disbelieve Welles' assertion that nothing of the kind had ever occurred in the days of *The Professor*. The constant rejection of his stories also humbled his conceit, for there is nothing more rude than the discovery that one can be bored and almost made ill by the contents of the monthly magazines, and yet can write nothing that they will accept. His failures at once piqued and stimulated him; he became determined to keep on playing the literary game until he either won success at it, or proved beyond a shadow of doubt that he was unfitted to win it. In the meantime, there was a certain amount of interest in the process of production.

There was so much interest in it that it began to encroach on his school duties. To balance this encroachment, he made out a schedule for himself, according to which such an.' such papers were to be corrected at stated times. When he had devised it,

he at once forgot it, and allowed the exercises to pile up on his desk till the end of every week, when he sat up all night with them, and in consequence was fit for nothing the next day. Then he wrote the schedule out in red ink, posted it conspicuously over his desk, and stuck to it for almost a week. It lapsed after that, but left behind it sufficient traces of order to give him four or five hours every week which would otherwise have gone to waste. Of one thing he was sure—schoolmastering gave him more time to himself than any other business. Therefore, when Marshall asked him to return the following year, he accepted on the spot.

"Glad to hear it," said Marshall. "You've done well, and will probably do better. The first year is always the hardest."

Brooke thanked him, wondering the while if his second year would be any more interesting than the first. He had his doubts; teaching seemed to him but a gray business at best.

When the clinic heard of his decision, they exercised their inconvenient memories, and recalled some remarks he had made at the beginning of the year.

"I thought you had decided not to come back," said Mrs. Motley. "Didn't you say so last November?"

"I guess I did," Brooke admitted, "but this is March. And we all go mad in March, you know."

"Perhaps so." She had missed the allusion. "But why did you change your mind?"

"Oh, various reasons. It seemed to me that one year was hardly a long enough time."

"Enough time for what?" asked Furness.

"To find out if one really liked the job."

"That's what they all say," put in Motley. "But it's plenty to find out that you don't like it."

"One side of the case," Brooke answered. "Hasn't the defense a right to a hearing?"

"Maybe." Motley rose and placed another log on the fire—placed it so as to choke the draft, and then poked at it viciously with a pair of tongs. Eventually, he chastised it into a better mood, but the flame which licked about it was feeble. "Maybe. But men sometimes leave after one year's experience. No one ever does after two."

"Isn't that an argument for the defense?" Brooke was talking against his convictions, as he frequently did at the Motley's.

"Not at all. It's because they lose their nerve. Become schoolmarms, and want to be protected. No one stays because he likes it."

"No one?"

"No one except people like Welles and Hood."

"It beats me," said Furness, "how a grown man can enjoy playing around with kids all day and every day, as Hood does."

"Isn't it queer," agreed Mrs. Motley. "And, do you know, I think he really enjoys it?"

"He does—or seems to," Furness went on. "He thinks it keeps him young."

"It keeps him childish, if that's what he means." Mrs. Motley looked about for approval of her distinction, and found it in Furness's eyes. Brooke was vaguely irritated.

"I don't think he's very childish," he said slowly.

"Schoolmarmish, then," Motley amended. "Impractical. He'll be as bad as Welles in ten years."

Brooke did not see the similarity between the two men; nevertheless, he let the remark pass. Any comment on it would have given the buzzards something more to peck at. For his part, he was tired of carrion—tired to death of it, and tired, moreover, of everything that was connected with his profession. He looked about on the men at Chester, and wondered if, in accepting a position for another year, he had not paid too high a price for time to write in. Gossip, or sentimentality, or ungoverned idealism were the paths on which his colleagues travelled; to the first two faults he himself was very prone, and he was beginning to realize it. As he walked away from the Motley's, his mind was sorry and sour over the prospect of returning. Then he thought of his writing, and was suddenly hopeful that an outside interest might, if it were strong enough, serve to make the

leisure of the business worth having. It never occurred to him that schoolmastering might be worth while on its own account.

He looked forward to his vacation at Easter more than he had done at Christmas. He was lonely because of the absence of all his friends in the valley, and more irritated day by day with the friction of antipathetic personalities. Yet, when the boys had gone, and he was practically alone in the building, a reaction of lethargy set in. He slept late, and, while cooking coffee and toast in his study in the morning, made up his mind that he would not leave Chester that day—that he would stay on for a while, and do what he pleased. He had made no particular plans, and had only himself to consider.

Wheels, and the slog of a horse's hoofs in the driveway, attracted his attention; he looked out, and saw Scott below in a Hempstead cart.

"Hello!" he called, throwing up the sash. "When did you get back?"

"Yesterday," Scott called. "Where are all the kids? You're quiet as the grave here."

"Term's over. They went this morning. Come up and have some coffee."

"I will. Just wait till I hitch Kansas in the shed."

He entered the room presently, very brown and very fit after his month in the south. He refused coffee, lit a cigarette, and stretched out his long legs.

"Have a good time?" asked Brooke.

"Fine. And you?"

"Not bad. The term's gone pretty quickly."

"Least said soonest mended, eh? When did you invest in a typewriter?"

"When I started to be an author."

"An author?"

"Don't be so indecently surprised. Yes, an author. Don't worry—I don't talk about it. You back for good now?"

"Yes. And not sorry. There were a lot of things here that needed attention. I suppose you're bound somewhere or other?" Scott looked at the three plethoric kit bags which decorated the floor.

"Not at once. I don't care to move just yet."

"Then why not come over to the farm for a few days, or the fortnight, if you care to?"

Brooke finished the coffee, and scraped the sugar out of the bottom of his cup before he answered.

"I'd like to," he said then. "But don't you get up horribly early in the morning?"

"That doesn't mean that you have to. You can have coffee and eggs any time you want them. Are you so sleepy?"

"I don't want to do anything but sleep for a week."

"The farm's a good place to do it. You'll come?"

"You bet I will."

Brooke was not in reality very keen about going. He knew that he would have a good time at the farm, and be allowed to do as he pleased, yet a reluctance to do anything at all—a feeling closely akin to the pettishness of a spoiled child whom its elders are trying to amuse—had taken possession of him. He was tired to be sure, but he had many times been equally tired, and had never, until now, felt so perversely opposed to any suggestion of amusement. He suspected that this new frame of mind was pedagogical, and he was right. It is a common experience among schoolmasters—the result of an unnaturally remote connection between one's work and one's bread and butter. It is a womanish tendency, and, if it is not caught and crushed, develops into a parasitic growth which chokes the spirit of enterprise and adventure which is so essential a factor of good work in any line of life, schoolteaching included. In situations where there is a turbine connection between work and food, the taking of chances, greater or less as the case may be, is unavoidable, and presently becomes habitual, so that zest stands a fair chance of continuing to exist. The prisoner, the pauper, the lunatic, and the schoolmaster—all inmates of institutions and not citizens of the world—must deliberately manufacture enough of the gambling interest to keep them alive, and very rarely do so. Brooke dimly realized this; he crushed down his inclinations,

or rather his disinclinations, and went with Scott as soon as he had finished his breakfast.

That evening, after dinner, Scott reverted to the subject to the typewriter.

"So you're trying to write?" he asked.

"Yes." Brooke was willing to talk about the subject if anyone else introduced it.

"Any luck?"

"None at all, as yet. It's a thing that has to be learned, like anything else. I can't expect results for several years."

"It must be the pleasantest life in the world, if you can make a go of it," Scott remarked. "What kind of thing are you trying? School stories?"

"No. Love stories—the usual thing."

"I suppose there's a better market for them. But there must be a lot of things happening in school that would be worth writing about."

"There are, of course. But it would take an O. Henry or a Kipling to see them. How many really good school stories—or college stories for that matter of that—are there in the world?"

Scott thought for a moment.

"Only one that I can remember," he said.

"'Philosophy Four'?" Brooke rolled the end of a fresh cigar under his tongue.

"How did you guess it?"

"Too easy. It's far and away the best, and there are few that are even good."

"But there ought to be a great many."

"Let me know if you can find them. I grant they are there for the man who can see them. Love stories are easier."

It was not the first discussion or the last that they had on the subject during the four days that Brooke spent at the farm. For the most part, however, their talk ranged North, East, South and West, over the whole wide world, for Brooke had made no plans for the summer, and had an idea that he would like to travel a bit. Scott was full of plans and suggestions; the Mercator chart with the red lines on it which marked his voyages was in daily requisition. The Orient was too far away; Europe too civilized. Brooke wanted a radical change.

"Then the Caribbean is your meat," said Scott, and forthwith produced atlases, and queer commentaries unknown to tourist bureaus because they tell the truth, and steamship folders which for years had been collecting dust in his pigeonholes.

"There aren't any guide books," he said. "At least none that are worth anything. That's because there aren't any sights. It's the people and the life of the people that is interesting."

"Then that's the place for me," Brooke answered.

"I guess it is," Scott agreed, and forthwith, at

great leisure, spoke of Caribs and Mayas, and of white men who lived and died among them; of jungles and the life of jungles; of overgrown temples and lost cities which were all that remained of races which had risen and flourished and fallen as mysteriously as Atlantis itself. Before he left the farm, Brooke was enthusiastic to the core, but, beneath his eagerness, his lethargy was still crawling. The consciousness of it made him fear that he might, at the last moment, give up all his swashbuckling plans, and go to Europe after all.

He went to New York for the last days of his vacation. One day, after lunching downtown with Winthrop, he strolled eastwards along Wall Street to the region where the financial canyon broadens out, and is bordered not by banks, but by the markets and warehouses and saloons and shipchanderies of the water front. It is here that the language of the city changes from something recognizably English to a babel of tongues—Spanish, Portuguese, West Indian Negro, French, and an off-soundings *Lingua Franca* which is a blend of all the idioms of the seas. It is here also that the magic of smells begins, for here lie cargoes redolent of Bombay and Batavia, of Sydney and Cadiz, of Santos and Para and Limon. It is a fruit-reek, and a coffee-reek, and a reek of raw sugar, with the snap of salt running through it all, for, though the days of the clipper are done, there remain

cargo steamers whose own familiar ports lie on hot seas at the back of beyond. Here the city reaches out and draws to itself merchantmen, laden with its desires; here, and perhaps here alone, can one breathe the air of wider spaces, and remember that one lives by tribute from Tarshish and the isles.

The new smells and new sounds affected Brooke with a sort of epic drunkenness. He spent that afternoon and many afternoons following, among the ships, collecting between whiles a suit case full of folders and maps, and returned to school temporarily at least all afire for horizons.

CHAPTER X

By the time that Brooke returned to school, the Stranges and the Vaughans were back, as were almost most of the residents of the valley, for April was half over, and gardens required attention. The old Clifford house had been thoroughly painted and papered and bathroomed; the Vaughans were getting their furniture into it, and planned to move in themselves early in May. Brooke, freshened and lively, was not particularly unhappy about getting back to school. He was glad to see some of the boys again—Strange and Bruce in particular, who were going about together more than they had done, for Billy's slip from science was well on the way to oblivion. The climate was in immediate and comparatively innocuous season, for, with a short vacation past and a long one to come, it had something to talk about beside human shortcomings.

"What are you going to do this summer?" asked Mrs. Motley.

"I'm thinking of Central America," Brooke answered.

The announcement shocked and surprised the clinic; the temptation to elaborate upon it was great, and Brooke, recalling the pretty pictures in his thousand folders, did so.

"If you go to places like that," said Mrs. Motley, "you'll soon be as queer as Mr. Hood is. Better look out."

"I didn't know he had travelled so much."

"Oh, my, yes! He goes abroad every summer."

"And," added Motley with acerbity, "he's had more Sabbaticals than any of the rest of us."

"One in fourteen years," said Mrs. Motley, who not infrequently made exploratory incisions in her own husband.

"Well, that's more than any of us, isn't it?" he answered.

Brooke, his curiosity aroused, went that evening to Hood's rooms, and found Hood sitting in a morris chair, ankle deep in steamship literature.

"Hello!" he said. "Will you come to Seville with me?"

"Why Seville?"

"Why not? Besides, I've never seen a real bull fight. Better come."

"Too cold," Brooke answered. "I'm going south."

"South? Do you mean Virginia, or really south?"

"Really south. Below Cancer. The Caribbean."

"I've been in Cuba," said Hood. "Two Christ-

mases ago. Saw just enough to make me want to see more some day."

"Why not now?"

"On account of a bull fight. I've never seen one."

He followed a sailing list with his finger, first down the page and then across it. "There are other reasons," he said, dropping the pamphlet on the floor.

"Europe—even Seville—is closer to us than the Caribbean countries. Not geographically of course. But as a matter of racial experience."

"I don't understand."

"I mean—well, countries in Europe—physical and social conditions—aren't so very different from our own, or what our own will be in a few years. It's interesting to see how other people—older people—have handled them. Tropical countries are different. Radically so."

"That's just what attracts me," Brooke answered.

"Like the smell of strange cargoes, eh?"

Brooke looked up in quick appreciation.

"Exactly like the smell of strange cargoes," he said.

"I spent some time on the docks in New York."

"I know the feeling—the odor of camels and carpets and musk.' Or bananas and coffee and hides. It's all one. A kind of divine curiosity."

"Curiosity, anyhow. It's the—"

"Don't call it Wanderlust," Hood interrupted quickly. "Curiosity's a better word. One of the best

words in the world. Sometimes, it's not too easy to keep life in it." He fell into a long and grave silence, with aggressive fingers rubbing his mustache the wrong way. "So you've decided on the tropics?" he said at length.

It was two in the morning before Brooke left him and went to bed. To the very edge of sleep, the opinion of the Motleys and the opinion of Hood remained distinct. Startlingly so; their respective comments were like two parallel lines. Like the irons of a railway; as dreams misted in his brain, they presented themselves as rails—extending indefinitely, never meeting—and he himself seemed as a drunken man staggering between them.

Early in May, he sold a story—his first. He told Marshall about it, because Marshall happened to be nearest at hand when he received the letter, and, bubbling over as he was, he had to tell someone.

"Keep it up," said Marshall heartily. "It's a fine thing to have some interest of the kind. But I hope you won't succeed so well that you'll give up school-teaching," he added.

Mrs. Vaughan took the announcement differently. He encountered her in her own garden—the garden of the Clifford house—whither old Katie had directed him. She was mulching a rose bush, and since she refused to let him do it for her, he sat down cross-legged on the ground and told her about the story.

"A love story?" she queried after she had congratulated him. "How can you, of all people in the world, write a love story?"

"Maybe I can't." Brooke was a little nettled in spite of himself. "But I can sell one."

"Did you keep a copy? I should so like to read it."

"I'll bring down the carbon the next time I come. The amount I know about love will surprise you." His pique had passed.

"What dark secrets there must be in your past!" Mrs. Vaughan replaced the trowel in her gardening basket, and took out a sector, with which she began to clip twigs from the bush. "It's a great pity, though, that you don't write about the boys."

"That's what Scott said. Some day, I think I shall." He did not feel like telling anyone, even Mrs. Vaughan, that he had been trying his hand on school stories ever since the beginning of the term. It had been hard enough to write them; they had impinged on his own experience and grated against his reserve. Try as he would, he could not make them limber. That he must bully himself out of his armor-plated reticence if he ever wanted to write anything worth while was a fact that was only just beginning to loom through the fog with which devotion to technique had surrounded his perceptions. The more important idea that he must bully himself out of it if he

ever wanted to live, was still miles away, over the farthest edge of his horizon. "Some day," he went on. "I think I shall write a yarn about school life."

"A story for boys, perhaps?" Mrs. Vaughan took to the trowel again, and began on a second rose bush.

"Heavens, no! A really serious story—an epoch making novel. Something that will secure me an impertinent biography in the *Bookman*."

"Illustrated with cuts of you at the ages of two, twelve, and twenty-two—that sort of thing?" Mrs. Vaughan grubbed out a particularly obstinate bit of turf, and pounded it to pieces with the trowel. "I have some old photographs of you that I'll let them have. But you must have a new picture taken, Bob—one that will make you look like a cowboy or a stock broker. Apparently, that's what all authors do look like, these days." She glanced up at him. "Then no one will ever recognize you," she concluded.

Brooke grinned.

"You and Patricia are an awfully good tonic," he said. "I'd have been an Ichabod Crane before now if it hadn't been for you."

"Are you quite sure you're not, in spite of us?" was Mrs. Vaughan's parting shot.

He had to confess to himself that Helen Strange's attitude about the story was more soothing. She was far too sophisticated to look upon an author as a sort of superman, but nevertheless she had retained so

much of the antique respect for the species that Brooke could not help but preen his feathers a bit in her presence. It was an operation which he thoroughly enjoyed—a kind of mental manicure. Helen was more interested in the process of fiction manufacture than in the product.

"I suppose you have to go over a story several times?" she asked.

"Oh yes. Seven or eight at least." Three would have been nearer the truth.

"And then I suppose there's the question of the point of view?" That matter had been explained to her exhaustively by a popular novelist who had taken her into dinner the week before.

"Yes. That's hard to choose, sometimes. There are so many different ways to tell a story." He had never tried to tell a story in more than one way. "But I'm talking as if I were Richard Harding Davis. I'm really only a poor man with one ee-wee lamb."

"Did you use to pronounce it that way, too?" she queried. "I always did. But there are going to be more lambs, aren't there? A whole flock of them?"

"Surely, if I can find other editors sufficiently insane."

"Mr. Flanders"—Flanders was the point of view man—"Mr. Flanders tells me there's a great deal in getting started."

"I suppose that's the hardest part. Once get your

name before the public, and the rest ought to be comparatively easy."

In the bottom of his heart, he had little faith in that hoary fallacy. He did not trust the memory of the public any more than he trusted his own.

"I really am awfully glad," said Helen, as he was leaving. "Do it again quick."

"I'll try," he answered.

Of course news of the acceptance leaked out among the boys with uncanny rapidity, though Brooke himself said nothing to any of them about it. Welles heard of it, and was pleased to approve; Brooke warmed to his encomiums.

"Why don't you send stories to *The White Mouse*?" asked the inept Billy Strange. "They take rotten stories sometimes."

The clinic heard of it at once, of course, and talked lightly of his success, hinting that Brooke had found his material in the Valley. Their suggestions made Brooke hot and uncomfortable; although he had no particular objection to vivisection under ether, there seemed to him a certain indecency in probing too deeply after the sources of fiction. He was perhaps a little sensitive on the subject, thinking of Helen Strange. Withal he did not fail to perceive and enjoy an apprehension which underlay the remarks of the clinic; with an author in their midst, there was no telling when they themselves might appear in print.

Hood's attitude, bristling as it was with theories about avocations in general, and the literary avocation in particular, pleased Brooke best of all.

"How do you find time to write?" asked Hood. "But keep it up if you can. If you make a go of writing, you'll be more useful here than any of the rest of us." One of his pauses followed; they were never cheerful pauses, suggesting, as they always did, an imprisoned personality fighting for release against the bars of life. "Keep it up. It ought to keep you in touch with big things—the real things. For I don't believe you can sell the unessential."

For the first time, Brooke wondered if that was not exactly what he had been trying to do.

CHAPTER XI

"DINNER is served," announced the Vaughan's maid.

The groups of guests under the lamps in the big drawing room separated and formed again as men sought their dinner partners; three couples, who had wandered out on the veranda, came in through the long windows. It was the Vaughan's house-warming, and practically the whole neighborhood was there. There were some importations also—friends of Patricia's who were staying in the house for the week end, and Major Ward. Brooke, much to his delight, took in Helen Strange; Patricia sat at his left.

"What a beautiful old place it is!" Helen began.

"Beautiful," agreed Brooke. "The Beaux Arts does no more than to teach men to copy houses like this."

"You can't improve a perfect thing. And this house is perfect, down to the garlands carved over that fireplace."

"I wonder where the old carpenters learned it all?"

"Remembered what they had seen in England, I suppose. Then too, they built for use." Helen had talked to architects in her time, as well as to novelists.

"And that prevented any corners, insides, and funny little bubbles outside, of course. Brooke broke the end of his roll and ate it, but he was at the while at the gracious proportions of the room, that it can't account for everything, but he added for us," he added.

"Almost everything, don't you think?"

"Not the proportions of the rooms. You'd think they would have made a mistake once in a while—built a room too long or its width, or something. They'd have had the same amount of floor space, you know."

"Yet they seldom did. It is remarkable." In her turn Helen examined the room, but her eye rested on the detail of design and decoration rather than on the general effect. "Doesn't it give you a different feeling from the old Puritans?" she said.

"They must have been a hospitable lot in the old days."

Scott, on the other side of Helen, claimed her attention just then; Brooke, a little angry at being interrupted, turned to Patricia, whose partner, a fattish young man from New York, was at that moment absorbed in his soup.

"You'll like it here, Pat," said Brooke.

"Isn't it attractive?" she replied. "A real home."

"The drawing room is big enough to suit even me."

"You like big rooms? It used to be the kitchen."

"That explains the fireplace and the cranes. I suppose you had to make a lot of changes there?"

"The French windows are new, and the porch. Everything else is exactly as we found it. I think Mr. Morris did awfully well with it."

"Morris?"

"The architect." With her head, she indicated the fattish young man. Brooke looked at him; he was pursuing the last crouton around the edge of his dish.

"He certainly has taste," he commented in a low tone.

"That was very easy," responded Patricia, "and not so very good. I've heard you do a lot better."

"*Touche!* But I do like the drawing room, and all the rest of it."

"Mr. Morris has a great reputation for that sort of work."

"I should think he might have," Brooke agreed. "He's certainly been riotously successful here. But then, he had the material to work on."

"Yes. The proportions are excellent." Patricia was very demure. Brooke fell into the trap.

"The Beaux Arts couldn't improve on them," he said. "So hospitable looking. A house like this gives you new ideas about the Puritans."

"Or Helen Strange does." Patricia laughed at him.

"Confound it! You heard?" Brooke sipped his sherry. "Your architect," he said, "has finished his soup, and now wants to talk." He turned to Helen again. "Do you stay at Waterville all summer?" he asked.

"No. We go to Gloucester. And you?"

"I'll be travelling—for the first time."

"Indeed?" She seemed rather surprised that anyone could be travelling for the first time. "England and France, I suppose?"

"No." The negative was a little superior—an adventurer's negative. "Central America and the Caribbean."

"Central America?" The six syllables, as she pronounced them, were rich with surprise, not to say horror.

"That's my port," Brooke replied. "I want to get off the beaten track."

"I know a great many people who've been to the Canal," she said. "Some of them went on cruises. They couldn't endure the other ports the boats stopped at—said they were all hot and dirty and sordid."

"I'm going to the Canal, of course," said Brooke.

THE ANVIL OF CHANCE

"But from all I hear, the Zone is part of the United States. Not at all foreign."

"Then you're going on? Where to?"

"Up or down the coast—Venezuela, the Guianas. Espinosa certainly."

"Those are all names to me," Helen said, reflectively arranging the silver beside her plate. "Nothing but names. Why do you choose such queer places?"

"To escape schoolteachers, partly."

"I fancy you won't meet any. Won't it be horribly hot in summer?"

"Scott says not. He knows those countries well."

Helen turned towards Scott, who was not at that moment on duty with his partner.

"Isn't it horribly hot, Fred?" she asked.

"Central America? Not so hot as you'd think, even on the coast. And the air of the highlands is delightful. Like September here."

"I suppose you're telling the truth," said Helen, "but I can hardly believe you. How are the hotels?"

"Frightful—when there are any." He turned to answer a question his partner had addressed to him. Helen ate a morsel of shad.

"Central America doesn't attract you, then?" queried Brooke.

"It does and it doesn't. I think I'd rather hear about it than see it. The Canal's different; it's rather a distinction not to have been there."

"Quite so."

"They must be interesting, those countries. If I were a man, I think I'd like to go. But the discomfort—" She shrugged one white shoulder and shook her head. "Tell me about them," she said.

"Scott's the man who knows them," Brooke answered. "I've only just made up my mind that they really exist."

"Where do you go first?"

"Colon. That's as far as I know at present. I dare say I can pick up a boat there; it doesn't matter where it's bound." He spoke as if Colon were a port of call for one small steamer every six weeks. His offhandedness escaped being ridiculous because it was perfectly unconscious.

"North, South, East or West?" That does sound attractive. Perhaps you'll get mixed up in a revolution."

"I sincerely hope not. They say they're not so very frequent, though."

"Shall you be travelling all the time?"

"Comparatively little. I'll try to pick up a job—on a railroad or something—and earn enough to pay my way home." It pleased Brooke to pretend that he was sailing very close to the financial wind.

"Can you find work so easily?"

"Can I, Scott?" Brooke asked.

"Get a job? Almost any sober—and most drunken—white men can, down there."

Scott stepped into the conversation with tales of the beaches and the men who tramp the length of them from Punta Arenas to Panama; Brooke seized the opportunity to eat.

"And if you don't get a job, you'll never come back?" said Patricia's voice in his ear. "Never at all? What a happy-go-lucky gentleman of fortune you are!"

"You won't let me have any fun at all!" Brooke complained.

"On the contrary. I'm having as good a time as you are. Don't be selfish. How much money are you taking with you—honestly.

"Six hundred dollars. It's no fair listening that way. Make the architect-man talk, and feed him when Helen is busy."

"You forget that I have two ears—one for the architect man, and one for the little boy who lives down the lane."

"Little pitchers—"

"I haven't!"

"Is he being rude to you?" asked Helen.

"Very," Patricia answered. "He's a horrid little boy."

"In charge of other horrid little boys," added Brooke. "There's an inconsistency somewhere."

"Is Billy a horrid little boy?" asked Helen, for Morris had finished his filet mignon, and had suddenly began to talk about the Boulevard St. Michel. He called it Boul' Miche'.

"An exceptionally horrid little boy," Brooke rejoined.

"We can disclaim all responsibility for him. We used to tell him that he had been adopted from poor but honest parents—wasn't really a member of the family at all."

"That explains him." Brooke said it grandiloquently, because it was a compliment. It was a moment before Helen comprehended it.

"So subtle!" she said then. "Are you cultivating that manner for the benefit of the señoritas?"

"I wonder if they're so very charming. It's one of the things I mean to find out."

"Then you'll have to learn to play the guitar. Fred Scott's been telling me about Central American customs—and I've found out where Espinosa is." She turned over her dinner card, and exhibited a map which Scott had sketched on the back of it.

"Do you like maps too?" asked Brooke.

"Some maps. Road maps, mostly. Do you?"

"It's maps that made me a horizon-hater." Brooke filed the phrase for reference, though he had an uneasy feeling that he had heard it somewhere before.

"Horizon-hater!" Helen repeated. "That's a nice,

musical word. I wonder if you'll still hate horizons when you come home?"

"I shall always hate them. But I imagine I'll like civilization pretty well when I get back. It's good for a change." He could not resist the interpolation of the final sentence.

"Is wandering in your blood? There must be a kind of a fascination about it—though the men who do it in the Caribbean seem to be a queer lot, if all Fred says is true."

"Another reason to go look-see. Queer people are always interesting."

"Aren't they sometimes unpleasant?"

"Not to me." Brooke had known perhaps six conspicuously queer people in his life, and hated them all.

"That's the author's point of view."

"Perhaps. All's fish that comes to my net."

"And you'll find many queer fish down there, I suppose. Fred has made me quite enthusiastic over this irresponsible trip of yours."

"There's no fun in making plans unless you intend to break them."

"Just follow the most interesting route—is that it? You will have a good time. A woman can't do that sort of thing at all."

"It's one advantage of schoolmastering. Pedagogue for nine months, pirate for three." Brooke

had quite forgotten Patricia, and was getting in deeper every moment. "I never make plans for vacations."

"How nice!"

The words, indicating as they did a waning interest, reminded Brooke that he had done nothing but talk about himself since the beginning of the meal. He resolved to change the subject before Helen lost interest entirely.

"You haven't been up to the school for a long time," he said.

"Not for two weeks or more. There's so much to do in the garden in May, and Billy's always contented. I think it's a mistake to see too much of him, don't you?"

"A great mistake," Brooke affirmed. "It throws a boy all out of his stride. Few people realize that. You've no idea what a comic and annoying beast the average parent is."

"I've seen them. They're like tigers with their cubs. Don't they make life miserable for you?"

"They do."

It was strange how, in talk with Helen, all roads led to his ego. He wondered whose fault it was, for he flattered himself that with other men, and with Patricia, he talked about more interesting things. Not that he did not like to talk about himself; he simply disapproved of doing so. And he always en-

joyed himself with Helen. Thinking about her had lately taken up a good deal of his time.

While the salad was being served, he was insulated for a few moments; Helen and Patricia were both busy. He spent the interval thinking about Helen some more, and liked the sensation it gave him.

"So you never make plans for vacations?" said Patricia, when Morris had finished dismembering the Cubists, and had begun to dismember a squab.

"Never," Brooke answered. "Or at least, I never shall again."

"Of course you can't, now. You get the cart before the horse, Bob—that's all."

"How do you mean?"

"You tell what you have done some time before you do it."

Brooke laughed. The analysis was apt. "And only a very terrible woman would know it," he said, "so I'm safe enough. That is, as long as I make good afterwards."

"Fraud!" she accused.

When the ladies had left, Brooke found himself in a group composed of Scott, Major Ward, and the architect. Scott, like most men who occupy places in the country, was always building something, and, like all laymen, was not averse to acquiring professional advice for nothing. He and Morris fell into a duologue almost at once, leaving the Major to Brooke.

"How are Goat Welles and the other Pre-Adamites?" asked the Major.

"Still going strong," Brooke answered, noncommittally. "Are you going up to see the school again, sir?"

"I can't, I'm afraid. I must go back to Washington tomorrow. You must be nearly through the year."

"Four weeks and three days more."

"You have it down fine. I remember we used to check the days off on a calendar, but I'd no idea the teachers did the same. School life and tropical service—they must be very like each other. Not too pleasant while they last, but good fun to look back upon."

"I suppose one always looks forward to vacations, no matter what one's doing."

"Leave? I should say so. What are you going to do with yours, by the way?"

"I'm going to the Caribbean. The Canal first, of course, and after that to any place that happens to appeal to me."

"That's a very interesting part of the world," said the Major. "Especially the West Indies."

"Isn't there someone who says that they'll be the theatre of the next great war?"

"I've read some prophesy of the sort. It'll be a trade war, probably."

"Sugar?" asked Brooke.

"Sugar or fruit. There may be a real war, too. Had you thought of going to the island of St. Thomas?"

"Not particularly."

"Get there if you can. A great many naval men claim it's a German base already."

"I'll try and have a look at it," Brooke said. "I'd thought of the mainland mostly, though. Politically, that's pretty important, isn't it?"

"Vitality so, and getting more so all the time, what with the Mexican mess. Do you know anyone down there—diplomats or fruit men?"

"No one. Scott's promised me a couple of letters."

"Take all the letters you can get. By the way, I'll send you one or two to men I know on the Zone."

"That would be very kind of you."

"Not at all," replied the Major. "Tropical white men like to see new people. They'll pass you along to the other countries, too."

"Thanks enormously. One has so much better fun if one knows people. I don't find it always easy to pick them up as I go along."

"It's easy enough down there. It's not always so easy to meet the right ones—the ones who give you the keys of the country in a gold box. I'll send you the letters within the week."

So it came about that Brooke was inevitably committed to the voyage. He had been thumbing folders and playing with the idea for some six weeks, but in the back of his head there had persisted an undefinable and obstinate reluctance to leave the known for the unknown. It was part lethargy, part cowardice in the face of the unusual, and very largely fear of being uncomfortable. Surreptitiously, he had engaged rooms in a boarding house on the Maine coast, and had rather expected to occupy them when all was said and done. He could not now back out of his Central American jaunt without making himself ridiculous to at least four people. Scott and the Major might be justly put out because their trouble about letters had been to no purpose; Helen Strange would ask him why he had not gone, and he had made it impossible to plead to her the excuse of impecuniosity; Patricia, the diabolical, would never let him hear the last of it. With Helen he would be in the most uncomfortable position, for he would have to fight his way back to the place in her esteem which his recklessness in money matters had earned for him.

On the day after the dinner, he wrote two letters—one to the landlady in Maine, giving up his room, and one to a steamship company, engaging passage. He cursed himself for a loose tongued ass—Babbling Brooke in very sooth—and then wondered just how

big a five thousand ton ship was. Five days later, he told Helen that he was sailing on a ship of fifteen hundred tons registry; she mentally compared that figure with the *Carmania's* twenty thousand, and made up her mind that Brooke's middle name must be Balboa. It seemed to her that he was going to sea in a sieve.

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CHAPTER XII

HAD Brooke followed his inclinations, he would have gone to a sporting goods store, and bought everything which the salesman, whose farthest south might have been the Battery, suggested to him. He could not afford, however, both to buy a complete outfit and to go travelling, and to travelling he was committed; he reluctantly thrust a pair of helmets, sixteen pound snake bite kits, and goggles fearfully pleaded to prevent sunstroke, and contented himself with three pairs of khaki riding breeches and an automatic pistol—this last being his only practical concession to romance.

Behold him, then, on a certain day in July, standing forward on the promenade deck of a well-appointed steamer—a ship not in the least like the slatternly tramp of his prevarications—and watching a sister ship coaling from a barge across the slip. A strip of canvas twenty feet wide hung from her board deck to the water line, inadequately protecting her paint; parallel with this coal buckets dropped and

swung upwards. Deckhands, whose teeth, when they showed them, stood out in startling contrast to their coal-blurred faces, shot the contents of them down into the bunkers, and pitch black devils filled them in the pit of the barge.

"Seems a clumsy way to coal," said a voice at Brooke's elbow. He turned, and faced a slight man of about his own height, with eyes mildly inquisitive behind thick spectacles. He looked like a schoolmaster—at best, like a university professor. "So much waste motion."

"An enormous amount," Brooke answered. "The port of New York is twenty years behind the times. They do this sort of thing better in Hamburg."

"Do they?" asked the other.

"Far better. Their normal time for loading, unloading, and coaling a ship is hours better than the best we have ever done."

"How very remarkable! What's the reason for that, do you suppose?"

"Partly the geographical handicap of having a seaport on an island, but mostly our national conceit." Brooke patted Manhattan on the head, for he did not know whether or not his new acquaintance had been to Hamburg, and was not altogether sure of what he was saying about that city. "We refuse to learn anything from Europe," he concluded.

"That's true, I suppose." The uncertain tone of

the "I suppose," landed Brooke with both feet firm on the ground of the other's ignorance. "They'll leave us behind some day."

"They have already, as far as marine matters are concerned."

The whistle blew for all ashore; the two of them stepped to the pierward side of the ship to see the lines cast off.

"I must go and find my wife. She'd like to see this," said the man with the spectacles, and added, expectantly, "My name is Jenkins."

"Mine is Brooke. See you again."

A man called out an order from the pier; iron wheels rumbled, and the gangway slid into the semi-obscurity of the shed. A dried up, bookkeeper sort of a man thrust himself through the crowd to the stringpiece, and waved his handkerchief energetically. There was an expression on his kindly face which he meant to be cheerful and encouraging, but which, in spite of his best efforts, remained dismal—almost heartbroken.

"Good bye!" he called, in a thin, high voice. "Good bye, Alice! God bless you!"

"Good bye, father!" The answer came from the rail beside Brooke, and ended sharply in a checked sob.

He tried to see the speaker without intruding upon her. Her left hand, half closed, yet somehow tense,

was held against her cheek; with her right she was waving a brave handkerchief at the man on the pier; she did not see Brooke, nor know that he was looking at her. He realized this, and observed more closely. She was tall and brunette, with a mass of hair piled on a well-mod-^{er} head; even the lines of strain which at that moment fretted the corners of her eyes did no more than accentuate their brilliancy and the fine arch of the brows which curved above them.

The ship slid out past the pier; the girl's father disappeared for a moment, appeared at the door nearest the end of the shed, and waved to her again.

"Good bye!" His voice came faintly from the crowd, with which distance was already merging him.

"Good bye!" The girl's voice was a whisper, but her handkerchief was still fluttering, while the tears, undried, pursued one another down her cheeks.

The ship, yielding to the thrust and pull of the tugs, swung out into the river. The engine room telegraph rattled on the bridge above, and the creaking stern hawser slackened off.

"All clear aft."

The telegraph rattled again; little by little, the dock began to lose definition in the haze. The girl had gone below.

When Brooke went down to luncheon, the steward showed him to a seat next to Jenkins and his wife—the latter a pleasant faced, rather stout woman, who

left most of the conversation and all the questions to her husband. Brooke, sensing a quest for information about his business in life, mendaciously answered all queries, furnishing Jenkins with half truths about himself which had all the complexion of falsehood. Their seats were just below the companionway; when he was half through his meal, he looked up and saw the tall brunette standing there, waiting for the second steward to show her to her seat. A shadow from the skylight fell across her face; it may have been that, or the half erased traces of grief, that gave her an air of tragedy. She was conducted to the seat at Brooke's left hand. He shifted his attention from the Jenkinse, and prolonged his meal to the limits of courtesy, seeking for an opening with her, but got no further at that time than passing her the bread and salt.

Jenkins corralled him when he came on deck. Deceived, probably, by the deep tan which Brooke had accumulated on the tennis courts of Chester, he took him for a denizen of the tropics, and was quite prepared to believe anything he was told. In the search for information, he almost immediately divulged his own occupation; he was in truth a schoolmaster. It was very late in the afternoon—almost dinner time—before Brooke let drop a remark which proved to Jenkins that he was a civil engineer.

Mrs. Jenkins, meanwhile, had scraped acquaintance

with the brunette, whose name was Alice Harding. At dinner, she made it easy for Brooke to talk to the girl; hungry for romance as he was, and expectant of it on these seas, she seemed to him the central figure in some elusive drama whose plot was yet hyal-
escent—some tragedy, he thought, for he could not forget the tensivity of her farewell in New York. From the very first, she had aroused his curiosity; consciously or unconsciously, she kept it in a state of pique. For days, the object of her voyage, and even the port where she was to disembark, remained unknown to him, and therefore fascinated him, but presently this surface fascination yielded to the more powerful one of her personality, so that he gave over speculating on her purposes, and speculated only on herself.

"Is there any blue in all the world like that?" she said once, when they were standing together by the rail and looking down upon the long, smooth seas, inlaid here and there with the amber of sargasso weed and the ivory of foam. "Peacock's feathers—ultra-marine—sapphire—not any of those. Blue was only a name to me—till now."

"Yes," Brooke assented, himself lost in the unfathomable color beneath him. "And a name without a meaning."

"Exactly. It will never be so again." She was silent a long while. At last, she shivered a little, and

turned away from the sea. "It's magic. You can see things in it if you look too long."

"Things?"

"Things. The future, perhaps. Hopes and fears." She moved a step from the rail, resolutely, as though breaking a spell by pure force of will. "Shall we walk?" she asked.

She drew the veil thus far at times, and let Brooke glimpse a formless something—something beautiful, or fearful, or both, that lay behind it. The magnet of the unknown, the half guessed, drew him towards her; would have drawn him irresistibly, if the Jenkinses had not been at hand to drag him down to earth again, and restore to him the curse of his perpetual pose.

As the ship slipped into warmer seas, Brooke changed into white linen, and looked more like a civil engineer than ever. Thanks to Jenkins, he felt more like one; it was hardly any effort for him to invent lies wherewith to tittivate the schoolteacher. They were orthodox tropical falsehoods, metallic with the ring of hammers on bridges over jungle rivers, terrible with sudden death, wriggling with snakes. He had started on the game of Jenkins-baiting, and had to go through with it; there were times when he enjoyed it hugely, but more often he wished Jenkins at the bottom of the sea. His pose was always in the back of his mind, and cooled the rising warmth

of his feeling for Alice Harding; he could not play with marked cards and a fair pack at one and the same time. Yet, because it is almost impossible for a young man to think about a pretty woman, however insincerely, for any great length of time without falling in love with her, the time came when Brooke believed that what he felt for Alice Harding was a grand passion, something which he could control as little as he could control the trade winds. Brooke was still orthodox; it is eminently the proper thing for a youth who travels in search of adventure to fall in love with a girl on a steamer. He was even able to forget that her accent and intonation were not all they might have been—not the accent of Patricia, for instance, with which he had at first compared it. Nor was the essence of stephanotis which she affected at all similar to Patricia's constant suggestion of cold roses; of that also he was resolutely oblivious. He schemed for walks on deck with her, and when the chair next hers happened to be vacant, dropped into it frequently. She made him welcome; she did not however, except on rare occasions, permit the conversation to pass beyond the trivialities of social intercourse until after the ship had called at Kingston and swung into the last lap of the trip to Colon. Then, one evening in the dark of the boat deck, with the Dipper falling into the sea behind them, and the Scorpion flaring hot over the bows, her speech was un-

loosed; it became more free than she meant it to, and more crucial, for there is a certain relaxing and releasing influence in the soft airs of those seas which is apt to make even professional revolutionists talk too much.

"You know the tropics?" she asked.

"A very little." He laughed, or rather smiled audibly. "Don't assume that I know them too well because of anything you may have heard me say to Jenkins. It's an irresistible temptation to spin yarns to him."

"Ah!" There was a cadence of disappointment in her voice. "I hoped you knew them well. You've never been to Puerto Espinosa?"

"Never."

"I hoped you had." She raised her arm, and adjusted her scarf, which the wind of the ship's progress had displaced. Her white arm flashed in the moonlight, and dropped again into the obscurity of the rail. Brooke knew that he ought to mark the fact that it was a beautiful arm, and marked it forthwith. "I hoped you knew Puerto Espinosa."

"No," Brooke repeated. His eyes were still fixed on her; he could see in the dusk only the curve of her cheek and the Attic perfection of her head and neck.

"Do you suppose it's anything like Kingston?" she asked.

"Kingston is English," he replied. "Typically English."

"And Puerto Espinosa?"

"Spanish. Central American, rather. Very different."

"I hope so," she said, "for I am going to live there."

"Live there?"

"Yes. I'm going to be married. Didn't Mrs. Jenkins tell you?"

"No. I have wondered—"

He broke off. Her announcement had a genuine element of shock in it. Men in the smoke room had recently been talking of tropical ports—of their heat and malaria and savage license, of the utter, deadly monotony which cursed them all, and made the license excusable to say the least, if not positively inevitable. No one of them all was a fit place for a woman like Alice Harding; no man worthy of the name would ask a woman to live with him in Puerto Espinosa, which, if rumor spoke truly, was the worst of them all. God alone knew what blind romance was calling her, or driving her, or what blind devotion. Whatever it was it was wrong—wrong as all hell—for a man to allow a woman to come to him in a place where, unless all he had heard was exaggerated, men lived foully, died suddenly, and were buried under circumstances of peculiar horror. He looked at her,

standing in the dark beside him, and suddenly, in the fire of his new-born indignation, half the dross was burned out of the emotions which she had aroused in him; his one time curiosity was volatilized, so that his head swirled giddily as in the fumes of ether, and his hands gripped tight about the rail. Yet, because not all the dross was gone, he retained control, and clutched at the drowning man's straw of banalities.

"I congratulate you," he said.

There must have been a new timbre in his voice, for she looked quickly around at him, and moved half a pace away.

"Thank you," she said. In the dark, he could not see the expression of her face.

"Do you know," he asked, speaking thickly, "what sort of a place Puerto Espinosa is?"

"Yes. Edward has told me. There are houses, with carved balconies on them, and glimpses of flowers through the arches of the—the patios, isn't it?"

"Yes. The patios."

"And barred windows on the level with the street, with beautiful señoritas behind them and cloaked lovers in front. And music—guitars, mostly. And moonlight—always moonlight, I think. Like this."

Her arm fluttered out over the still sea; she said

no more. The wind loosened her scarf again; her hand, rising through the moonlight, secured it.

"Whatever Espinosa may be like," said Brooke, moistening his lips. "it's not like that."

"Ah, but it is. Edward has told me."

"Edward—" he pronounced the two syllables very slowly, like a man who is drunk. "Edward lied. It's not like that. I tell you."

"I beg your pardon?"

"It's not like that at all. There's a swamp on one side, and a bay on the other, and there's only one street. A street of huts—corrugated iron huts. Every second one is a saloon. I know, I tell you."

"I thought you said you'd never been there?"

"I haven't. But I know." The tides of what he thought was passion rose over him; he seized her hand. "You mustn't go there," he chattered. "You mustn't."

"Mustn't?" She drew her hand away; he was not well enough up in his part to prevent her from doing so. "Mustn't?"

It was with a distinct effort of will that he lashed himself to further protest.

"Espinosa's no place for a woman like you," he said.

"How do you know?" she asked, and there was nothing but a cool sort of curiosity in her voice,

mingled with a little amusement. "How do you know what I am like?"

"I know enough," he exclaimed. "I know--this."

He threw his arms about her and kissed her on the mouth. By all the laws of romance, by all the principles of "red blooded" fiction, she should have done one of two things—either yielded to his embrace at once, or, just for the moment, pushed against his face with both hands, and yielded afterwards.

Instead, she laughed.

Brooke, sheepish as one of his own schoolboys, freed her; she faced him, patting her hair and still laughing.

"Do you think you're in love with me?" she asked.

Brooke found no answer to that. She moved to the companionway, and paused at the top of it with one hand on the rail.

"Good night, Master Bobby Brooke," she said. "And, next time, act more as if you meant it. Or better still—mean it."

She went below. Brooke, furious because she had treated him like a child, and doubly furious because he perceived that he had acted like one, stumped up and down the deck for some twenty minutes, tripping over rope ends and boat lashings and forgetting to curse them. Then, very suddenly indeed, he also began to laugh; the cynic imp, his saving grace, was with him again. He was able now to see clearly for

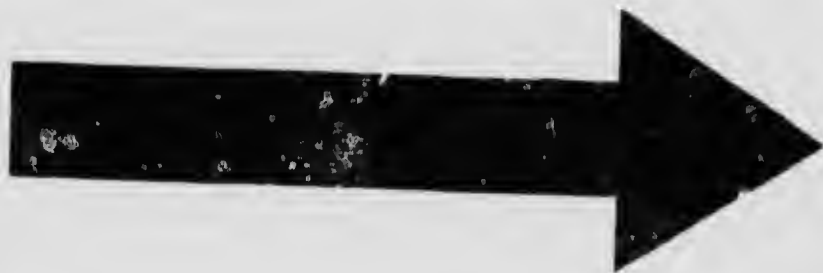
the first time that his feeling for Alice Harding had been false from the beginning; that he had worked himself up to the expression of it, and richly deserved the mockery with which she had treated his advances. Helen Strange, and the recollection of his similar and parcel-gilt sentiment towards her, struck across his mind; the suspicion that he was incapable of any genuine and simple emotion tortured him for a little while, and was rather appalling.

There was enough for him to think about in all conscience. He lit a pipe in the lee of one of the boats, and lay supine on the deck, chuckling at intervals, yet at bottom disgusted with himself and everything else. For a long time he lay there; the half hours, one after another, rang out from the bridge, and the mellow clang of the ship's bell on the forecastle head answered them; occasionally, the soft clash of a slice bar or a shovel on the iron floor of the hold undertoned the wash of the parted seas. Little by little, the excitement which had afflicted him, faded away; the humorous appreciation of his own humiliation faded also under the steady pressure of silence, and the soothing suggestion of space, interstellar in its magnitude, which is the real magic of the sea by night. Little by little, his thoughts slipped back into their accustomed groove. There was a difference, however; the storm, or rather squall of emotion, had not passed over him without leaving

its mark. When the watch changed at two in the morning, he went below.

At dawn, the grav houses and the palm trees of Colon lay under the bow. The steward came into Brooke's room very early to help him with his luggage; had he been the adventurer he wished he was, he would not have disembarked at Colon, but would have gone to Espinosa, and seen the end of the play of which Alice Harding was the heroine. He could not yet so easily alter his schedule; he did not even see her before he went ashore, and deluded himself with the expectation that she had gone out of his life, as the Jenkinases had gone out of it. He went direct to Panama; when he came back, the ship had sailed.

He presented the letters which the Major had given him, and spent nearly a month in the Zone, feeling all the while immeasurably superior to the hordes of tourists which from time to time darkened the sky, and applied almost indecently inappropriate adjectives to Gatun and Culebra. Twice he was mistaken by some of them for one of the Canal employees, and commandeered; if it happens that Penubs, Indiana, as a whole, and certain blind-beamed and narrow-skulled members of congress in particular, have mistaken ideas about the work on the Isthmus, the fact may be directly attributed to Brooke's splendid imagination. The work, more especially the organization



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of it, had its effect on him, as it has on most people who get a little below the surface of it; it seemed to him that the tropics could not possibly be so bad as he had painted them to Alice Harding.

One of his letters was addressed to a doctor in the Colon hospital—a young man, between whom and Brooke there sprang up a mutual fancy. Brooke spent odds and ends of time with him, went up the line with him more than once on accident cases, and in the evenings, sat with him on the screened porch within sound of the surf, while the doctor spoke of the sanitation of tropical towns, of fever and plague and beri-beri, of the strange hermit people of the San Blas, but most often of the difference between the new tropics and the old. A day's sail up or down the coast, he said, would land a man in the conditions of the middle ages. When Brooke, with the Spotless Towns of the Zone before his eyes, doubted him, the doctor took him to the wards, and exhibited the malarial wreck of a man who had drifted to Colon in the hope of cure.

"They don't get as sick as that here," said the Doctor. "It's the usual condition elsewhere."

"Can you cure him?" Brooke asked.

"Yes. That's another thing we've found out on the Zone. If you should see that man in two weeks, you'd hardly recognize him."

Brooke's imagination began to work again, and

he almost convinced himself that he really desired to see some of the fever holes of which the doctor spoke, up or down the coast as the case might be. He even said as much, and presently found himself committed to another voyage, for the doctor gave him letters to a medical man named Mackintosh, who had formerly been connected with the Marine Hospital Service. And presently, on a Norwegian fruiter, bound for Puerto Espinosa of all places in the world, Brooke watched Colon drop into the sea behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE *Asturias* was no tourist steamer. Consequently her passengers were of the unclassifiable class that rocks up and down the coasts of new countries, and especially of Caribbean countries—American and Belgian and English engineers, and Americans and Belgians and Englishmen who were not engineers at all; Jewish traders, fox-faced and predacious, for whom no chance of profit was too small and few too large; German and Dutch salesmen, Teutonically precise and serious-minded; and, of course, certain elaborately mysterious Spanish Americans, who spent their time aloof in a corner of the tiny smoke room, entrenched behind a barrier of cigarette butts. There was also Andrews, lean as a starved greyhound, wise in the intrigue of hot countries, keen of eye, slow of speech, and sharp of tongue. He came into the smoke room from the rain-threshed deck on the night the ship left Colon, looked at the Jews gabbling in one corner, at the nondescripts in another, and at the Central Americans in a third. One of these rose ceremoniously as Andrews passed, and Brooke heard

the patter of Spanish greetings and replies. Followed a flapping of expressive hands towards an empty chair at that table, and an exaggerated flexibility in Andrews' back as he refused it. He came over to where Brooke was sitting alone, and dropped on the lounge beside him.

"I told 'em you were a friend I hadn't seen for years," he drawled. "Do you mind?"

"Delighted," Brooke answered.

Andrews, massaging a cigarette interminably between his emaciated fingers, looked at his saddle-colored acquaintances, whose heads were close together and whose voices were low.

"Trouble brewin' somewhere," he commented. "Most generally is, when Don Ignacio is around. Espinosa, probably."

"Revolutionists?" Brooke queried.

"Yes. Professional ones. They live on it. But we don't say so—not out loud."

Brooke accepted the reproof, blushing a little.

"I'm going to Espinosa," he said.

"*You* won't have any trouble." Andrews' glance would have seemed sleepy if his eyes, behind the half-closed lids, had not caught the light so sharply. "Perhaps you're looking for trouble?" he ventured.

"Well—not particularly," Brooke disclaimed. "I'm just going to look-see."

"Not much to see in Espinosa." Andrews probed

gently but persistently for the information he desired. "A hell of a hole. I wouldn't go there unless I had to."

"It's a live spot, politically, isn't it?"

"Depends on what you mean by politically." Andrews at last lit his cigarette. "Journalistically, it's plenty live," he added.

"So? That's a better word for what I mean—journalistically."

Andrews sat back, the problem of Brooke's business settled in his mind without the use of a single direct question. Direct questions, at least in the first stages of acquaintance, are, even in these days, the worst of bad manners on the Caribbean.

"What line are you in?" he asked.

"Special articles—trade, politics, any old thing. Magazine stuff."

"Ethnological?"

"If nothing better offers." Brooke momentarily wondered at the word, or rather at the source of it.

"There's plenty of stuff in Espinosa, then. The Port is full of Caribs—some of them almost pure bloods."

"It's hard to get anything out of a Carib, I've heard."

"Very. You'll never get below the surface of them if you stay for a thousand years. But they're interesting. And up country, there are the Amarillos."

"They've never been done," said Brooke. "That is, not in a popular way. Native costumes?"

"Sure. They weave their own clothes. Those tubes the girls keep slipping down into all the time at home were designed by an Amarillan dressmaker. Easy to get to their country, too—there's a railroad part way."

"New?"

"Finished three years ago. When I first blew into the country, there were only ten miles of line—you did all the rest on mule back. That was twelve years ago."

The conversation drifted along lazily. Andrews' remarks, and the language in which he couched them, savored of cultivation; he gave out no information about himself at that first interview. Later in the evening, he asked:

"Ever play picquet?"

"A little," Brooke answered. "Would you care to play? I've a pack of cards below."

"Like to. Seldom run across anyone who knows how."

When Brooke returned Andrews took the cards and began to shuffle them with the speed of a conjuror.

"I won't gamble with you," he said in his slow way. "Look." He showed Brooke the twelve cards at the bottom of the pack, and then dealt two picquet hands. "Look at your hand," he said.

Brooke obeyed; his cards were the twelve which Andrews had shown him.

"No," repeated Andrews, "I won't gamble." He shuffled the pack again, and dealt more slowly. "I learned that—and other things—in self defense," he said. "When I was running a club in Juarez. Your talk."

They played every day at that, and, because Brooke was wary in his queries, stories of Andrews' life came little by little to the surface. The cause of all his troubles, Andrews maintained, was the wasting of "a ten thousand dollar education on a ten cent kid." He had dropped out of college at the end of his Sophomore year; he had gone west, and worked as a ticket seller for a one ring circus until, by some means which he did not divulge, he had become owner of the show. He had trained prize fighters, made book on the Grand Circuit, served as purser on ships in nearly every quarter of the world. For a year—Brooke wondered how he had crowded all his experiences into the forty years of his life—he had been an actor in Shakespearian repertory; he knew long passages from the plays by heart, and, since he had both literary sense and imagination, discussed them from a point of view entirely fresh to Brooke. He sought Brooke's company, and seemed to find in it a sort of intellectual interchange for which he was hungry. Other men on the *Asturias*,

some of whom he had known for years between the Equator and the tenth parallel, tried now and then to entice him into a game of poker or pedro; he invariably slipped away from them as soon as he decently could, and resumed the conversational picquet tournament in which they had engaged on the first evening.

"May I ask you a question?" he said, on the fifth and last night of the voyage. "An impertinent one?"

They had finished their game later than usual, and the smoke room was empty. Brooke was adding up the score; Andrews as usual was playing with the cards.

"Two hundred and sixty plus forty-five makes three hundred and five. And a hundred for the sextette—I'm three hundred and five ahead tonight." Brooke laid aside the pencil. "Ask ahead," he said.

"I know you're no journalist," Andrews said slowly, and with a slight barrasment. "What I want to know is—why did you come to the tropics because you wanted to, or because you had to?"

He set the cards aside; there was a shadow of anxiety in his face, as though he was afraid of what Brooke's answer might be.

"Because I wanted to," Brooke replied. "I'm only a tourist, and a schoolmaster at that, when I'm home."

"I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid—. Don't let

the tropics get you, even if you are a tourist. They play hell with a man of imagination." He yawned, and shoved the cards across to Brooke. "There's your deck. Let's turn in."

Land was in sight when Brooke rose in the morning. To port lay a low coast, sentinelled by mangrove keys, with high, wild hills behind it, on the slopes of which not a wisp of smoke nor an angle of roof bespoke habitation. Vivid green were these slopes above the mauve mist that clotted the foreshore; through lush vistas of valley the more distant foothills loomed in tints of purple; behind and above them all towered the peaks of the Cordilleras, a blue promise in the infinite distance. A wide bay, where one white beacon marked a reef, opened out before them; the sea changed, suddenly, from the burning sapphire of the deep waters—the blue which Alice Harding had tried in vain to name—to the turquoise and emerald and chrysophrase of the shallows, and on it floated a Carib dugout, its two lateen sails slack in the calm which follows the dawn. Above the ship, very high indeed, a frigate bird glided downwards in a vast, inverted arc, and rose again with scarcely a motion of his wings; through the lower levels of the air blundered a clumsy, questing pelican. There was no sound in all the world except the thrust of the slow-beating engines, and the steady ripple of the water along the sides of the ship. They rounded a

long point, and veered southwards; the harsh angle of a pier, with a shed at the end of it broke the curve of the shore.

"There's Puerto Espinosa," said Andrews.

Brooke peered more attentively shorewards. A galleried frame building, disreputable and ramshackle even at that distance, reared itself above the bush; beyond it straggled roofs of minaca palm thatch and rusty corrugated iron, scarcely distinguishable from the bush itself.

"So that's all there is to it?" Brooke remarked.

"That's all."

The ship swung a little to starboard, following the channel; the galleried house, and the huts behind it, sprang into clearer focus.

"A woman—a girl—came south on the same steamer with me. She was bound here. Going to be married."

"Married? Who was the man?"

"I never knew his name."

"Whoever he was, God help her."

The ship's whistle shattered the silence; the engines ceased their pulsing, and the chain ripped out through the hawsehole. The rough-edged sounds dissolved the spell of quiet which had lain over the ship since dawn. People began again to talk in ordinary tones, and those who were going ashore went below to see after their baggage. When Brooke returned to the

deck, a launch was at the gangway, from which an officer in a sky blue uniform with pink worsted pipings was just disembarking. Farther out lay another launch, waiting its turn. An American stood up in the stern of it, and hailed the bridge.

"Captain Gunnerson! Captain Gunnerson! Have you got my mosquito netting aboard?"

"No, Dr. Mackintosh. Not this trip."

"Confound those people! Any news of it?"

"None. Next trip, maybe."

"And maybe not," grumbled Mackintosh, as the port officer's launch swung clear of the gangway, and his own came alongside. He climbed to the deck, and went into the saloon, whither the comandante had preceded him. The steward shepherded the passengers after them.

"Don't tell the comandante you're a journalist," grinned Andrews. "Espinosaurs hate the newspapers. They'd make it hard for you to see the country."

He and Brooke went ashore together, stepping into the doctor's launch while the other passengers were bargaining for canoes. Mackintosh was still fuming about his screens.

"That's a month they've been on the way," he said, "and it's likely to be another month before we get them. Six weeks, perhaps. Meantime—" He jerked his head towards the shore. "Look at that swamp. One case of yellow fever, and we're done."

"Probably," Andrews agreed cheerfully. "No screens up country?"

"Not a square yard extra. Savage got his consignment some time ago, and used all he got, and wants more at that. Damn working for a railroad anyhow. They put a man in a hole like this, and tell him to sanitize it, and then bow down and worship their auditors till he has to do it with his two hands."

Still raging, he left them at the wharf.

"We've half an hour to see the town before the train starts," said Andrews. "If you care to?"

Brooke agreed. He found Puerto Espinosa all that the Doctor on the Zone had said it would be, and more—a thin, tattered fringe of a town dabbling its immoral toes in a swamp on one side and in the bay on the other—a town swarming with mangy dogs, and scrofulous, fruit-colored children—vocal, even thus early in the morning, with cheap phonographs, accordions, and fuddled shoutings from the multitudinous cantinas—a cutthroat town, the first that Brooke had ever seen, and one so far outside of his experience that the very strangeness of it seemed to guarantee adventures, though of the most sordid sort. A depressing town also, and, in spite of the glare of the sunlight, or perhaps because of it, full of an undefined foreboding, and heavy with odors as of death.

"Sweet spot, isn't it?" asked Andrews, when they had walked down the one street and back again, and were sitting on the station platform waiting for the train to start.

"Very," Brooke answered. "Fragrant, anyhow." He looked back upon the huts, and upon the slimy green water, which glistened in pools beneath them and around them. "I wonder if Alice Harding lives here—really?" he murmured.

"Alice Harding? Oh, the girl you came down with. Probably not. She'd be in the hotel, if she's anywhere." Andrews looked at his watch. "Better hurry, if you want to look her up."

"Not now. I'll wait till I get back from the interior."

No more than half an hour after its scheduled time, the train jolted out of the port, and hid itself almost at once in a green tunnel pierced through a sweltering jungle, which continued for forty miles or more before it gave place to the cleaner, but equally sweltering, vistas of banana bush. Here there was plenty in the life of the trackside to take up the attention of the most avid observer. It was a busy life—busier even than that on the Zone, where activity is concentrated in certain recognized ganglia. Here, there seemed to be no centers; the work was going on everywhere and all the time. Mules, laden with great bunches of green fruit, and escorted by tatterdemalion

negroes, kept drifting out of the bush at all sorts of unexpected points, and decanting their loads on hard earth platforms beside the rails; white men on horseback appeared at the numberless stops, and talked with other white men through the windows of the train, speaking of building material, new plantings, and labor problems, and dabbling between times in perfervid gossip. Twice the train was sidetracked to let the fruit cars, with the black banana handlers roosting on the tops of them like buzzards, pass on their way to the port; for ten ill-ballasted miles, a weary superintendent on an angry motor trolley followed the train. The whole line was busy as an ant hill, and Brooke remarked on the fact with astonishment.

"What did you expect?" asked Andrews.

"I don't know exactly. Nothing so strenuous as this. I'd like to see more of it."

"That's easy. Why don't you stop off at Figueras and come on to the capital later?"

Brooke rose eagerly to the suggestion. The train stopped at Figueras long enough to allow Andrews to introduce him to Savage, the manager, and, almost before it had pulled out, Brooke found himself accommodated with a bed in the manager's own house, and a share in the services of the stupidest negro in the world.

For a week he made Figueras his headquarters.

He saw new plantings being cut out of the jungle, and, with one of the pioneers, spent a day and a night in the bush, looking for new land, and incidentally shooting his first wild pig. By night and by day, he listened to talk which centered on the fruit and the handling of the fruit, which involved farm-buildings, and hospitals, and railroads, and piers, and which opened his eyes to the exigencies of the tropical frontier, where every man is perforce part doctor, part farmer, and part engineer. He was bewildered by the size of the propositions these men handled in the course of the day's work; it seemed to him epic, and dwarfed every other occupation which he had ever seen. He said as much to Savage.

"Maybe it does," Savage said sceptically. "What's that amount to? We're cut off from everything that makes life worth living, and pay a high price for all we get. No amusements—no anything. Nothing to do when we have time to waste except to tear another man's character to pieces. Your job's better."

Brooke had not the imagination to believe that.

The men at Figueras one and all spoke disparagingly of the port. Anything might happen there, they said, and that meant that anything might happen in the country as a whole. An epidemic would sweep it clean, and what was worse, might check the exportation of fruit. But Mackintosh was a good man,

and so was his assistant, Dr. Garcia. The two might prevent trouble—would, if it could be prevented.

“Glad to have met you,” they said, when Brooke at length pried himself loose from the absorbing interest of their labors, and took train for the capital. “Be sure to stop off on the way down.”

Brooke swore that he would do so, and meant it at the time, not knowing the greater and very different attraction of the highlands. The train took him through the now familiar alleys of the bananas, and then, all of a sudden, rolled out on a wide cactus desert, where ochre hills stretched away for miles and miles in all directions. This was the sort of country that Scott considered the most beautiful in the world, and Brooke was inclined to agree with him. Here the current of life ran more slowly, in channels worn deep by time. No one was busy here, or wanted to be; the piratical looking mule drivers who met the train at every station seemed enormously relieved when they failed to get employment from the dismounting passengers. So, observing, and observing, and yet again observing, and detached from all he saw, Brooke came at length to the capital city of Magdalena.

Here, his letters stood him in good stead, for Andrews had gone back to the port, and would not return till the end of the month. The men to whom he bore introductions greeted him with the enthusiasm

of exiles—dined him, wined him, and almost at once began to plan trips for him. He must ride, they said—there was no other way of getting about the country. No road and no city was off the beaten track, for the good and sufficient reason that there was no beaten track. One Wagstaff, Secretary of the American legation, volunteered to accompany him to the City of La Mancha, which was, he said, worth while seeing, but which must be seen first, because it would be an anti-climax after the more remote towns. Brooke, when he reached La Mancha, doubted that; it seemed to him that there could not be a more ancient or picturesque place, nor Indians more distinctly Indian.

“Wait till you see Tenango,” said Wagstaff, and Brooke waited accordingly, making a mental reservation in favor of the lofty volcano which overshadowed La Mancha.

He did not, however, at once start for Tenango, for there was much to entertain him in the city. There was, for instance, a tennis party at the British legation, where he met a number of diplomats, and was surprised to find that they were remarkably simple and agreeable people, who, perhaps because of their foreign training, did not seem to consider a schoolmaster as a man apart. He took things as they came, and found life at Magdalena not so very different from life at home; there was monotony, and

petty jealousy, and gossip there as well as in the banana country or in Chester School. He could not get used to that; the consciousness that it was so bemused him, and prevented him from drawing conclusions from the facts. When at length he did go to Tenango, he went alone, except for a native guide; he reached the old city on the day of a fiesta, and saw two men killed in a bullfight, and was not made sick at the sight—only tremendously excited.

"You get that way very soon here," said Wagstaff, when Brooke commented to him on the phenomenon. "Human life doesn't amount to a hill of beans. It's more so in that pest hole of a port. Some day, they'll have an epidemic there which will wipe out the whole kit and boodle—and we'll be lucky if it doesn't come up the line and kill us here. The Government does the best it can though; Garcia's a good man."

"What kind of an epidemic?" Brooke asked. "Everyone seems to expect it."

"Any kind," Wagstaff answered. "Bubonic, small-pox, yellow—take your choice. One's as bad as another."

"Well, I'm going down tomorrow morning. Perhaps I'll get out of the country in time to escape it."

"Oh, there's no danger just now. This isn't the sickly season. But there's no boat day after tomorrow, is there?"

"Not that I know of. I'll stay at Figueras till one comes."

He took the train to the lowlands the next day. His trip to the south was nearly over. On the long journey to the coast, he began to take stock of the knowledge and experience he had acquired. It seemed to him that he had learned a great deal by looking on at these men who were engaged in work so very different from, and so much more strenuous and alive than his own. He flattered himself that his horizon was vastly larger than it had been; perhaps it was, but on the other hand, it was no less misty than before. He had but seen things in Central America; he had experienced nothing new. It would have been a far more profitable trip if he had followed the plan he had outlined to Helen Strange, and tried to get work as a section hand on a railroad, or as a checker or a timekeeper on a banana farm, for then he would have ceased, for a time at least, to think about himself. The most valuable thing which had come under his observation was the very thing of which he thought the least—to wit, the everlasting prevalence of monotony and gossip. He was still in need of the jolt which his best friends had long wished for him; it was coming to him, and in no mild form.

The train was very late; it did not pass Figueras till midnight, and Brooke did not leave it there. He

decided that he would go on to the port and come back the next day. It was three in the morning before he climbed sleepily out into the sticky, palpable darkness. He was aware of a vague sense of oppression, which he attributed to the sudden change of altitude. Then it struck him that there was an amazing amount of activity on the platform, considering the time of night. He asked several natives what the trouble was, but none of them gave him an intelligible answer; they all seemed intent on entering the train, and this was strange, also. Finally, shouldering through the dense crowd, came Andrews; Brooke called to him.

"What's all the excitement?"

"You?" said Andrews. "Why didn't you leave by the Pacific coast? Hasn't the Government given out the news at the capital?"

"What news?"

"Yellow fever—began three days ago. And no ship due for three weeks, and no screens. You're in for it, I'm afraid."

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU'RE in for it, I'm afraid." The words had hit Brooke like a blow on a nerve; they numbed him, so that, just at first, he did not know that he was afraid.

"H'm!" he cleared his throat. "Yellow fever, you say? No ship due? I shall be late for school."

Andrews, standing beside him on the raised freight platform, did not answer. Brooke looked down upon the open space that surrounded the station, dim now under a clouded sky. It seemed alive—fouly alive, like old cheese; it was paved with heads which heaved and swayed from side to side, indistinct, undefined, and terrible, as though they were moving under a velvet pall. It seemed to him that all the population of the town had gathered there since the arrival of the train. A close, fetid, reek of packed and sweating humanity rose about the platform, stupefying the senses, and suddenly, at the distant edges of the mob, began a miserable murmur—a murmur of men without hope, and therefore without fear. Andrews jumped at the sound of it.

"They'll rush the train in a minute," he said. "If they get away from here, they'll carry the disease to Figueras, and beyond. Come—give me a hand on the engine."

He ran towards the forward end of the train; Brooke followed, and found him fumbling at the coupling and the air connections.

"Here!" he said, thrusting the end of a crank into Brooke's hand. "Pull up on this."

He swung into the cab. Brooke turned the lever, and pulled the pin out of the coupling. He bent to solve the problem of the air pipe; presently, as he worked at it, it whistled under his hand and came apart. From the crowd behind him rose a grumble that swelled to a roar; over his shoulder, Brooke saw vague figures fighting for entrance at the car platforms, struggling into the windows—panic-stricken, inhuman.

"Quick!" whispered Andrews.

"All clear," Brooke answered.

The engine, headed toward the end of the pier, jerked free of the train and gathered speed; Andrews dropped from the cab. There was a moment's rumbling, a splintering of timbers at the end of the wharf. A geyser of live coals splashed into the darkness as the engine turned tender over stack at the pier head; a muffled explosion followed.

"This way!" exclaimed Andrews. "Quick!"

He felt for a door in the end of the shed, found it, and followed Brooke inside, just as the vanguard of the crowd, yelling now like lunatics, rushed past them toward the harbor.

"Poor devils!" said Andrews grimly. "They're here for good now. Tomorrow's train won't come through. No use in infecting the whole country, though—if it can be helped."

It was pitch dark in the shed; outside, the last of the mob was stumbling past. Andrews stepped to the window to watch them, and stood there, silhouetted in black against black.

"If I had only known you were coming down," he said, "I could have warned you. You could have got away easily by the Pacific."

"It's—it's all in a lifetime," Brooke answered, his voice quavering a little.

"Yes. Of course." Andrews was no more than a sound in the dark. "But you might have avoided it. Even yesterday, if you had come then—there were some Caribs and canoes here. And the launches. Now—" His voice faded into silence. "There may be someone," he resumed.

"To take me away?" Brooke's voice was a little less uncertain. "I guess I can stand it here, if you can. Why didn't you go yesterday, yourself?"

"Mackintosh and the other men—and Mrs. Belknap—were staying. 'Couldn't leave them alone."

"Why do you think I can?" demanded Brooke.
"Why do you think I can go, if you can't?"

Andrews' silhouette stirred at the window and was still again. The rumor of the crowd had ceased; bare feet scuffled through the dust outside, and scattered bits of speech, curiously shrill, came from the small groups as they straggled back to the town. The mob had lost its communal voice; despoiled of anything to vent its rage upon, it had become again no more than a crowd, and was dissolving, though very slowly. It was still dangerous; the premature appearance of the two white men would be enough to weld it again into one hostile conglomerate. Brooke stumbled against a packing case, and sat down upon it; with his hands clenched together, and all his muscles set as though in the anticipation of pain, he fought for control. The leaden minutes dragged by, one after another; time and the passage of time lost all meaning to his tortured mind.

"Almost safe now," said Andrews, at the end of an eternity.

Brooke, drowned, suffocated in the pressing darkness, did not answer—could not. The feet that whispered through the dust outside, the words that came to him, hollow and meaningless, struck no deeper than the outermost levels of his consciousness.

"Nearly all past," said Andrews suddenly, in a

natural tone. He moved from the window, and was at once absorbed from view.

A step, hesitant and dragging, scraped along the concrete platform that flanked the shed. It ceased outside of the window; a heavy groan shuddered into the room.

"*Madre de Dios!*" a voice rasped. "*Madre de Dios!*" Another groan, that crescendoed into a thin-drawn wail which pierced the night like a flame and died away. "*Jesus mio! Jesus mio!*" The step, uncertain and shuffling, passed on.

Brooke flung himself at the door.

"Let's get out of this!"

Andrews' hand fell heavily on his arm as the door flew wide.

"Steady!" he said. "Steady!"

Brooke stopped as though he had been shot. In a moment, the tremor which had shaken him ever since they had entered the shed, passed, leaving him weak as a kitten. Andrews eased him to the ground, and stood beside him.

"Pretty bad, eh?" he asked, and his words were pliant with understanding of Brooke's plight.

"Awful." Brooke leaned against the wall, his hands falling limp on the ground at his sides. "It was like—like a trap, in there. This is better." He looked up at the serene curve of the sky, spattered now with great stars, for the clouds had cleared away. "Sorry I made such an ass of myself."

"That happens sometimes," Andrews replied. "Very often, to your kind—and mine."

"It won't happen again." Brooke took out his handkerchief and mopped his face. "Got a cigarette?"

Tobacco soothed him, and restored tone to his nerves.

"Kismet!" he said presently, in a voice that was almost normal. He flicked the ash from his half-burned cigarette, and rose. "Did you say there was a white woman in the town?"

"Mrs. Belknap. The bravest woman in the world."

"Her husband?"

"A skunk." Andrews spat the epithet out of his mouth. "They were married less than three months ago. Day before yesterday, Belknap ran away. In the launches, with some Caribs."

"And left her here?"

"And left her here."

The dawn grew suddenly white over the sea; Andrews' face was gray in the light of it. The pier-head, a welter of splintered timbers where the engine had gone over, leapt suddenly out of the belly of the night, and it was day.

"Married three months since, you say?" Brooke asked.

"Less. In July. Here."

"She is Alice Harding, then."

"Her first name is Alice."

Brooke rose, and snapped his cigarette into the dust, pitted with a thousand prints of bare feet.

"Who's in charge of the port?" he asked.

"Dr. Mackintosh. He'll be at the hotel."

In the barroom of the hotel, which, because it was the largest and most accessible room in the village, had been converted into a dispensary, they found Mackintosh, just finishing his morning coffee. His eyes were sunk deep in his head, and a stubble of three days' growth covered his chin.

"Sorry you let yourself in for this," he said, when he had heard Brooke's account of himself, "but we need every man we can get. Know anything about fever?"

"Nothing at all."

"You'll know a lot before you get through—if you get through. Sit down and have some coffee." He shoved the pot and the can of condensed milk across the table. "Four houses to burn this morning, Andrews," he went on. "Attend to that—take Brooke with you. Afterwards, break every bottle in that Fernandez cantina. It's the last place left, and we've left it too long. Then relieve Mrs. Belknap in the ward—"

"Is she on duty today?" asked Andrews in surprise.

"Insisted on being. I tried to persuade her to lie off, but she said she'd have too much time to think

in. Report to me when Andrews is through with you," he said to Brooke.

"Very well."

"Whatever happens, eat regularly and get as much sleep as you can. It won't be too much. We must hold this in check till a steamer comes. If we had three hundred yards of wire screen, we could stop it in eight days."

"Have you tried Figueras, Mac?" asked Andrews.

"They haven't an extra yard—and they've got troubles of their own. Four cases. Telephoned 'em this morning. By the way, Brooke, wear gloves. Got a pair?"

"Yes."

"Wear 'em to keep the mosquitoes off. If you can kill every *Stegomya* before she bites you, you may pull through. So long."

Mackintosh hurried off on his rounds.

"Got a weapon?" asked Andrews.

"In my bag."

"Get it. The natives are apt to get nasty when you burn their shacks, and there's the cantina to be attended to this morning."

There was no trouble at the cantina, although at first it looked as though there might be, for a crowd was gathered about the door of it. As Andrews and Brooke came near, someone inside burst into a bar or two of song, stopped, laughed with an indescribable

suggestion of cunning, and then babbled into speech—absurdly caressing speech at first, in which the name “Anita” occurred again and again. Then it crackled into profane anger against another woman—Maria—and a man—Felipe—threatening them both with death. The two white men stepped across the threshold; the voice stopped short, cut off in the middle of an imprecation. Slowly, and with painful effort, a flushed and sensual face, crowned with dank black hair, and with eyes glaring through pupils hideously distended, heaved itself over the bar until the chin rested on the wood, among the glasses of the last night’s drinking. There seemed to be no body below it; it was as though someone had cut off the head, and, in ghoulish jest, had placed it there among the dreg-stained glasses. All at once, the mouth widened in a gap-toothed grin; the eyes winked rapidly at Brooke and Andrews; there followed a gurgling laugh like the laugh of a child a year old, and the voice, liquid as an infant’s, dribbled into a nonsensical Espinosan nursery rhyme:

*“ Erre, con erre cigarro,
Erre, con erre barril,
Rapido . . . ”*

“Fernandez!” Andrews shouted.

The rhyme ceased. The face, still without a body, changed swiftly—became ingratiating, oleaginous, ser-

vile. A hand, as bodiless as the head itself, wavered from below to the top of the counter, and grasped the neck of a rum bottle.

"*Si señor,*" said the face. "*Que quiere?* What do you wish?"

A spasm contorted the mouth; the hand quivered into rigidity, then relaxed suddenly and fell, sending the bottle crashing to the floor. The eyes turned upwards, and the eyelids fluttered like the wings of a moth caught in a candle flame. Then, in half a breath, all lines vanished from the face as though they had been wiped off with a damp cloth; the head slipped from the bar, and thudded on the floor behind it.

Andrews vaulted the counter, and bent down.

"Dead!" he said. "Lock the door."

Brooke, physically sick with horror, turned to obey. In the doorway stood a clean-cut young Espinosan in khaki, a medicine case in his hand.

"Mr. Brooke?" he queried. "Dr. Mackintosh told me of you. I am Dr. Garcia."

Conventional phrases of greeting, absurdly out of place, rose to Brooke's lips; Garcia intercepted them.

"Fernandez is sick?" he asked.

"Dead," Brooke answered. "Just now."

Garcia swung around, and faced the semicircle of the crowd.

"Fernandez is dead." He waited for the announce-

ment to sink in. "*Que se vayan! Pronto!* (Go! At once!)" he commanded.

At the outer edge of the semicircle, someone screamed and began to run. The contagion of speed caught them all; they melted away like ice in the sun. One emaciated child, borne down by the first rush, struggled to its feet, plucked up the single garment that covered it, and pattered after the rest.

Garcia entered the cantina, passed behind the bar, and examined Fernandez.

"Quite dead," he said in a matter of fact voice. He looked around the squalid room. "We will burn at once," he said. "There is wood enough here. It is a better way."

So they burned the cantina without removing the body, and watched it till nothing but the charred foundation posts remained, smoking in the sunlight.

"A nice way to begin the day," commented Andrews. "Come along, Brooke. There's a lot more to do. Coming, Garcia?"

"I must return to the ward. Mrs. Belknap must sleep."

"How is she this morning?"

"Well, in the body. But in the heart—" He shrugged his shoulders and cast up his eyes.

All that morning, Brooke and Andrews patrolled the filthy street of Puerto Espinosa, inspecting one hovel after another; endeavoring to soothe some native

whom the fear of the pestilence that walketh at noon-day had reduced to a state of almost imbecile terror, and threatening where panic had rendered milder methods futile; ordering suspects to the doctors; superintending those who were draining such pools as could be drained, and seeing to it that the settlement's scanty stock of oil was spread over the nearer stretches of the swamp. Nor was the death of Fernandez the only death that day, though it remained the most terrible; towards noon they discovered the body of a woman who had crawled between the gigantic roots of a ceiba tree at the end of the village, and died there. She had been dead twenty-four hours; they impressed a gang of shovel men, and buried her where she lay. In the shallow grave, the swamp water stood six inches deep.

Even in the seven hours of that first morning, such matters became almost commonplace to Brooke. When noon came, he had the heart to be hungry; on the way back to the hotel, his eagerness to see Alice Harding again—for he was morally certain that she and Mrs. Belknap were one and the same—rose in him, and dwarfed all other emotions.

She was sitting at the rickety dining table when he entered the quondam bar.

"Why, it's Master Bobby Brooke!" she said, with a brave and pitiful attempt at cheerfulness.

"Miss Harding!" he exclaimed, and was at once

furious with himself because her maiden name had slipped out.

Her forced lightness of tone vanished at the sound of it. She made a little gesture with her hand, as though she was throwing something away, and her mouth twisted wryly.

"Mrs. Belknap now, Mr. Brooke," she said.

"Oh! I am sorry."

A black boy clattered dishes on the table to show that luncheon was ready; Mackintosh, walking with nervous speed, entered, followed by Garcia, Andrews, and Hunter, the wireless operator—the entire white population of the port. Andrews introduced Brooke to Hunter; men who have known formality cling to it almost pathetically at times. It was a silent and gloomy meal; the desperate and hectic gaiety, which such of them as lived achieved later, had not yet begun to manifest itself.

After luncheon, it chanced that Alice Belknap and Brooke were left alone for a few minutes.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am," she said, "that you came down from the hills at just this time."

"Sorry? For me?" Brooke was unendurably disturbed by her words—the more so because his sympathy for her was so difficult to express. "If there was only some way for *you* to escape!" he said.

"There is none—now. Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. There must be some way. The launches which met the ships?" He could have bitten his tongue out as soon as he had said the words.

"They—they were taken away." Abruptly, she turned her back on him and looked out of the unshuttered window. Then she faced him again. "You knew Puerto Espinosa better than I did," she said.

"Don't! I—"

"But you did." She shuddered, and sank into one of the chairs at the table. Her handkerchief was crushed in her hand, as it had been when they stood side by side on the ship in New York Harbor, and her left hand was against her cheek, as it had been then. But now, there were no tears in her wide eyes. Presently, she relaxed. "There's no use in pretending now," she said. "We may any of us—all of us—die tonight."

"I wish to God I had known you long ago!" Brooke burst out.

She shook her head.

"Would that have mattered?" she said wearily. "One meets and parts, and what must be, will be. If—if we had known each other, nothing would have been different."

"Everything would have been different."

"Nothing. Nothing at all." He moved protestingly; a bar of sunlight flashed across his face.

"You have changed," she said.

"Perhaps." He ignored her speech—hardly heard it. "We—you and I—could have changed all things. Sweetened them." He paused. She sat motionless before the table. "Is it too late?" he demanded.

"Much too late, Bob. Much too late." A smile, unforced and sad, swept over her face. "Hundreds of years too late. I wish—I wish we had never met."

He strode towards her, as he had done once before on shipboard; this time, she did not give back before his advance. He checked, and with a sudden impulse to do homage to her—an impulse that seemed to him at the time a sort of a memory from a past life—took her hand gently in his and kissed it. The scent of stephanotis rose about her, but now it was cold and faint—more like cold roses.

"Brooke! Oh, Brooke!" called Mackintosh from beyond the landing of the stairway.

"Yes?"

"Come up here and help me disinfect these rooms. Three deaths in them last night," he said, when Brooke had joined him. "Little enough use in burning sulphur. Five screened rooms—one screened room, even—would be worth all the germicides in the world."

That was the dreadful side of the business—the remedy was so heartbreakingly simple, and so heartbreakingly inaccessible. Mackintosh and the white men, aided by the few negroes who had kept their

heads sufficiently to be able to obey orders, burned hut after hut, and disinfected room after room, more to keep their minds busy than for any other purpose, for all the while they knew that ordinary methods of sanitation were futile. Some dozen or twenty mosquito bars there were in the town, but not one of them was mosquito proof or could be made so; darn and rip and repair as they would, the female stegomyia found her way to infected blood, and came out more deadly than the serpent. Mackintosh had telegraphed to Colon, to New Orleans, to Belize, for copper gauze netting, but it would be ten days and more before the first of it could arrive. News of it came to them over the wireless; news tantalizing to the point of torture, but which, nevertheless, gave them something to hang their hopes on, and kept their spirits from flagging utterly. Every morning, Hunter, the operator, spent some hours with his coils, expanding the radius of his apparatus to its uttermost limits, seeking a word of hope from the air itself.

"Any news?" they asked him constantly, when one of them happened upon him either at the grisly trenches dug for the dead of a night, or in the hotel, or beside the slimy puddles that gathered in the street in spite of all they could do to drain them.

"Nothing," he had to answer, day after day, or, if he had been more fortunate than usual, "I got Colon this morning. No news."

He insisted on doing his share of the work in the town; would report for duty even after he had spent a whole night at the wires. There came a morning when he did not report; they went looking for him at once, and found him in the wireless hut, with his head sunk upon the table amid a clutter of apparatus. He roused a little as they carried him to the hotel.

"No news," he said.

They let the town take care of itself for awhile, till Garcia and Mackintosh had put him to bed and examined him.

"He's got it," said Mackintosh. "There's no doubt. And we're almost out of quinine."

"They've plenty of it at Figueras," said Andrews. "Sold it to 'em myself, and saw it delivered."

"Figueras?" echoed Garcia. "But there is a cordon of soldiers five miles up the track—the quarantine of the government. One may not pass."

Mackintosh stepped to the telephone; they still had that much connection with the world outside, though it had lately become no more than an aggravation of their plight, and they had not used it.

"Savage will bring it down to within a mile of the cordon," he said, when he returned to the others. He seated himself at the table, and drummed reflectively upon it with his fingers.

"I will take your motor trolley," said Garcia, after

a moment. "We can pass—perhaps. There should be one other man."

"I will go." Brooke and Andrews spoke at the same second. Mackintosh, his chin on his hand, stared at them both.

"You go, Brooke," he said at last. "I need Andrews here. He has more control over the natives. They may shoot at you," he added. "You understand that?"

"Perfectly."

At midnight, when the town had quieted down for the night, Brooke and Garcia chugged away up the track. At dawn, they returned, carrying with them a large bottle of the indispensable drug. A handkerchief, stiff with blood, was bound around Brooke's head.

"They did shoot," he said, as Mackintosh was sponging the wound with bichloride, "but we got the quinine. Doesn't amount to much—this—does it?"

"No barely broke the skin. They always shoot too high."

"I'd hate to count on their doing so—always. How is Hunter?"

Mackintosh threw away the soaked wad of cotton, and loosened the end of the bandage.

"Gone," he said.

"Gone?"

"Two hours after you left." He wound the bandage with meticulous care around the wound. "He the first—the first that counts," he added. "So far we've been lucky."

"So far—yes." Brooke took a seat by the table where coffee was waiting for him. "It will get some more of us, or all of us, 'efore we're through."

"Undoubtedly."

Andrews came in just then; his face was red and hot, and his speech was thickened with fever. Mackintosh watched him anxiously as he fumbled for the coffee pot, and spilled half its contents, then seized his wrist and counted his pulse.

"You go to bed," he said.

"Me? I'm all right." Andrews looked up at him obstinately.

"You go to bed—at once," repeated Mackintosh.

"I'm all right, I tell you."

"You're not all right."

They had to carry him upstairs at last, and give him over into the charge of Mrs. Belknap. In the room next door to his, negroes were nailing down the lid of Hunter's coffin. Andrews was tenacious of life, and there were times in the next four days when the four remaining white people had hopes that he would pull through, but his twelve years in the tropics had rotted his constitution to the core. On the fifth day of his illness, which was the tenth of the plague,

they followed his body to the hill behind the town where they had staked out the cemetery at the beginning of things.

"If we only had screens!" Mackintosh kept murmuring all the way to the cemetery and all the way back. "If we only had screens!"

The wish sang in their heads like a refrain, and the ghastly irony of their labors took the hearts out of Mackintosh and Garcia and Brooke—or would have done so if Mrs. Belknap had not been there to cheer them. After Andrews' death, they gave up all pretense of regular meals; there was more work than the three of them could do, and they ate and slept when they were forced to. She was always ready when they staggered into the hotel, half dead with weariness; it seemed as if she must have kept hot coffee and eggs perpetually on the stove. More than that, she herself was always there to greet them, to give them some assurance of a hope which she herself did not feel.

"The ships will come tomorrow," she kept maintaining.

In spite of her, they gave up hope of the ships—forgot them quite, or remembered them only in the nightmares which pervaded their twitching sleep. Not that there was much sleep for any of them. The plague grew on their hands; their average mounted to fifteen and twenty deaths a night, and, as their

shovel men one after another refused to work, the trenches in which they buried the corpses became shallower and more shallow. To make matters worse, the negroes, of whom there were a considerable number, took to Voodoo; there were rumors of human sacrifice at the edge of the bush, and of ritual cannibalism. All night long and every night, the savagery of the Voodoo drums rose and fell through the pestilential air like the beat of blood in a fevered ear; fires gleamed at a great distance among the trees, and sometimes the cadence of wild chanting rose and fell about them as they worked at the edges of the town. Night and day were the same to Brooke, as to the others. He went about his duties mechanically, burning and burying, till the ache of his overdriven nerves became dulled and numb. Like the rest, he leaned on Alice Belknap for ghostly comfort; to him also, in the utter exhaustion of his spirit, she lost individuality, became as the incarnation of all good women from the beginning of time; she was the source of their strength, the surcease of their unbearable weariness. It seemed to them that she must be immortal, that nothing of the earth could touch her finer clay. And then, on the fourteenth day of the epidemic, she took to her bed, and on the sixteenth, died in Brooke's arms. Garcia and Mackintosh and Brooke carried her body—pitifully light—to the highest point of the hill, and stood bareheaded while Mackintosh

read the Committal over her from her own prayer book. The last "Amen" was lost in the hoot of a ship's siren; it had no power to stir them now. They watched the clods shoveled into the grave; then lagged down to the pier, passed through the lane that the gathering villagers made for them, and sat dull-eyed on the stringpiece, watching a cutter slip from the gray side of an American cruiser and come towards them.

Nobody, least of all Brooke, had any very clear idea of what happened after that; Mackintosh knew more than any of the rest, for he spent a couple of hours giving the doctor of the Marine Hospital Service the details of the epidemic, which he had daily posted in his journal. Brooke, dull past all possibility of feeling, dull in body and soul and mind, showed an ensign the most pestilential part of the village, and the ensign gave his orders to the score or so of jackies in his squad. They burned right and left, and set up tents for the evicted residents. They finished with that business in five or six hours; other squads had long since rounded up the remaining inhabitants of the port, some three hundred and fifty in all, and shepherded them to the hotel for inspection. When Brooke, leaden-footed and aching with sleep, stumbled over the threshold of the hotel, not more than twenty remained to be examined. The marine doctor was doing the work; Mackintosh,

beside him at the table, was fast asleep with his head on his arms. In one corner, guarded by three or four sailors, was a little group of suspects. The pestilence was no longer in the hands of those who had been fighting it so long and so hopelessly; it would be conquered now, and conquered easily. Brooke sat heavily down in a cane chair near the doctor, seeing as through a haze the clean-cut, alert faces of the men from the ship, their white uniforms, and the order that was beginning to displace confusion. Suddenly he dropped his head in his hands, and began to weep like a child. He did not know why; he did not care. He could sob, or laugh, or shout—there was no power of restraint left in him, and no shame. He did not see the doctor rise and come towards him; he surrendered his slack wrist to the firm professional fingers, and continued to weep and laugh alternately. He hardly felt the prick of the hypodermic in his forearm; he did hear the doctor's voice, as from a world's width of distance, saying to someone:

"No—no fever to speak of. Nothing rest can't cure. What a time they've had! And not one ran away; there must have been some way out. Down the beach, if nothing else."

"Belknap ran away," said Brooke. He was sinking a thousand miles into profundity—sinking slowly, to the strains of sweet music, surrounded by the odor of cold roses.

He slept twenty-four hours, almost without moving. When he woke, he was lying on a canvas cot in a big wall tent, the flaps and sides of which were rolled up to let in the air. The whole inside of it was lined with cheesecloth to keep out the mosquitoes. Mackintosh, still sleeping, lay on a cot opposite to him. There was no sound except the rustle of a light sea breeze. For a little while, Brooke lay quiet, expectant of something—some sound which had rolled about him almost continuously for the last week—but no sound came. The sobbing of the Voodoo drums had ceased, and was one with the other nightmare horrors of the fight. Brooke stretched luxuriously. Presently he got out of bed, and, stepping softly over the clay floor so as not to awaken Mackintosh, looked out of the tent door.

To the right and left lay other tents; they were pitched on the high promontory that sheltered the bay. The cruiser and two other ships lay in the roadstead; help had come at last, all at once and too late. Below and to the left lay what was left of Puerto Espinosa, with the gaunt three stories of the hotel rising above the shacks and the ashes of shacks. Beyond this again, just visible, was the hillside cemetery.

So it was all over. Plague and pestilence, the recurrent horror of the dead buried at dawn, the ghastly ceremonies of *obeah*, guessed at though never witnessed, the cold fear of sudden death, which had

never once left him—more especially the throbbing reality, the grandeur of the fight, sensed now for the first time—were over and done with. Over there on the hill lay Hunter and Andrews; over there lay also Alice Harding, free now from the cruelty and disillusion which had been her lot. Never again, in all human probability, would Brooke toil as he had toiled in Puerto Espinosa; never again would the steel bonds of labor and suffering and despair so chain his heart to the hearts of other men and other women. Tomorrow, or the next day, or a week in the future—it did not matter—he would board one of those ships in the harbor, and sail northwards to a land which God had not forgotten. In times to come, the vision of these days would rise before him, the outlines perhaps a little blurred by kindly memory, but none the less poignant for that, and none the less alive. Even more poignant, more alive, he thought; the perspective of time might soften, but it could never distort. He had seen real sorrow and real suffering—had experienced them, knew what wounds they inflicted. He had seen big things done, and had done big things himself. He had seen life lived magnificently, and laid down with magnificence. That knowledge was his peculiar treasure, which nothing in life could take away from him. Standing there at the tent door, he looked down upon the village, and his thoughts were not all unkind. Just one

verse, the *Nunc Dimittis* of a humbler man than he,
and a simpler, welled up in his soul:

“ And last it come to me—not pride
Nor yet conceit, but on the whole—
If such a term may be applied—
The makin’s of a bloomin’ soul.”

CHAPTER XV

THE *Asturias* had brought Brooke to Espinosa; the *Asturias* took him away. He was her only passenger. Dan, the Irish steward, had a royal memory for names, and greeted him with open arms. "I thought I'd be havin' th' ship to mesilf," he said. "Company's betther. Lave me take your bags below, sorr—I'll put thim in th' bridal suite."

Mackintosh and Garcia came to see him off. The three stood by the rail, trying, with more or less success, to fill the deadly interval of a postponed farewell. Mackintosh broke his Caledonian silence with occasional irrelevancies; Garcia smoked cigarette after cigarette, patted Brooke's shoulder at frequent intervals, and spoke of coming north some day, inventing improbable errands which might take him there.

"And then, *amiguito*, you will show me your cities, and there will be no yellow fever to molest us. Paris I know, and Vienna, but New York I have never seen."

"Be sure and come, Garcia. You have my address."

"Yess. Chestaire School." Garcia tapped the bulge

of the memorandum book in his breast pocket. "I shall not forget."

"Chester School!" ruminated Mackintosh. "Seems funny to think of you in a school. I can't quite make the picture, after that." He waved his hand towards the shore. "I'm coming up in the spring," he added. "On my way home."

"Bring Garcia with you."

"I shall come, *amiguito*. I shall come. There is much between us—much."

Again this slim, dark hand fluttered about Brooke's shoulder and rested there a moment. Mackintosh shifted his feet, awkwardly and consciously, growing suddenly dour under the pressure of emotion unexpressed and to him unexpressible.

"Launch coming from the *Hartford*," he said.

They watched it; Mackintosh and Brooke at least were glad of something to distract their attention. It lost way handily by the gangway, and Edwards, the ensign whom Brooke had come to know best of all the crew, came aboard, followed by a bluejacket with a basket.

"A little champagne from the wardroom," he said. "You need it on a Norwegian boat—and the navy isn't dry yet, thank God."

The windlass ceased the racket which it had begun two minutes before, and the propeller gave an experimental turn or so.

"Hove short," said Mackintosh. "We'd better shove off. So long, Brooke."

"So long." They shook hands. Mackintosh walked abruptly to the gangway.

"See you again, sometime," said Edwards. "Good luck, anyway."

Garcia was the last; he came very near an embrace.

"*Adios, amiguito. Go with God.*"

"Not *adios*, Garcia," Brooke answered. "*Hasta luego*—for a little time. Remain with God," he added in Spanish.

The chain clanked in over the drum, and the bow of the *Asturias* swung towards the harbor entrance.

"*Hasta luego*," called Garcia from the dugout where he sat with Mackintosh. Swiftly, launch and canoe fell astern; hut by hut, Puerto Espinosa slipped behind the promontory. The galleried hotel was the last house visible. There remained the dazzle of the six white hospital tents on the top of the bluff, and these glittered for a long time, losing outline gradually, and merging into one point of high light.

Brooke was not sorry to be alone. In solitude, the cicatrix would more easily close over his wounds. For he had wounds, and deeper ones than the faint scar on his head which remained to keep fresh the recollection of his night ride through the lines after quinine. He had been afraid in the epidemic—terribly afraid from the beginning of it to the end—

afraid with the fear that endures and makes wise. On the anvil of chance his iron had been beaten into steel.

"What's the date, Dan?" he asked the steward that first evening of his voyage home.

"The twinty-fifth."

"Of September?"

"Sure. Did ye think it was June? But ye've lived a long year in the last month, Mr. Brooke."

Indeed, the epidemic had suddenly become incredibly remote; the poignancy of it was gone. On the *Asturias* he recalled it but seldom, and then momentarily; his thoughts, enlarged from the prison of their necessity, struck almost gaily forward, focusing not on the last thing, but on the next—on Chester School, and on the men and boys there among whom his lot had fallen. The ground seemed to him a fair ground after all, and the men a proper company of gentlemen. One by one, they straggled in review past the eye of his mind—Motley and Welles and Marshall and Hood—each one of them emphatically individualized, and therefore heavily conditioned; no man of them more mean or more blind than those among whom he had risked his life that summer. He was eager to see them again, almost as eager as he had been in June to forget them.

Eagerness grew to a commanding impatience when the ship anchored off Quarantine, and sent him pac-

ing restlessly while she steamed up the harbor to her berth. He made haste across town, and caught the first train out; this in spite of the fact that it was Saturday, and he had meant to stop and see Winthrop.

As the train neared Waterville, he opened his window and craned his neck for a first sight of the school buildings. They were still some miles ahead but, over a shorn tobacco field beside the track galloped a crowd of people on horseback; he recognized Scott and Helen and Patricia among them. At least he thought he recognized Scott and Helen; about Patricia he was sure.

"Watervi! Waterville!"

Scott was the first man on the platform. He left his bag there, and went to the livery stable after a rig. A shout rose from across the street, and half a dozen small boys ran over and surrounded him, all talking at once.

"Gee, but you're late getting back!"

"Mr. Marshall said you were coming today."

"Why in thunder did you come back Saturday, Mr. Brooke?"

"Yes; why didn't you wait till Monday? Who'd come back Saturday?"

"You'll catch it, Mr. Brooke. Short bounds for the rest of the term."

This last was Billy Strange's contribution. Brooke,

very much pleased indeed, shook hands all around, and, still besieged by boys and deafened by questions, made his way towards the stable.

"They've got a motor now," volunteered Billy.

"Good. I'll hire it, and give you all a ride up."

He could do nothing for himself; they bargained for the motor, robbed him of his baggage checks, and helped the chauffeur strap his trunk on the running board.

Welles was in the entrance hall of the school building when they arrived; the rush of baggage-bearing infants annoyed him, and he was about to object to it when he caught sight of Brooke.

"Well, well, well! Here's our adventurer returned! *Amicus redivivus*, eh?" He shook hands impressively, and for a long time—pompously, of course. "We'd about given you up, and hired a substitute," he said playfully, and added, not playfully, "—if we could have found an adequate one. That is not so easy, Mr. Brooke." He cleared his throat. "You have—ah—made a place for yourself in the—ah—hearts of these little boys."

"Didn't know they had any, sir," Brooke countered quickly.

"Ha! Well, we all doubt that at times. You were in Central America all summer?"

"Yes. A place called Puerto Espinosa."

A place called Puerto Espinosa! White tents above

a jewel tinted sea, rough graves beneath banana plantations and smoke wreaths rising from a burning town! The place called Puerto Espinosa, forsooth—and to Wells as to all men whom he should meet, it was no more than a name. For the first time since he had heard of it, it flashed clear before him, like a picture on a screen.

"One of those hot, tin towns, I presume," Wells was saying. "Who is it that calls them that?"

"Davis?"

"Perhaps. I have often meant to go South in the summer, but I have the habit of Europe. Not a good habit for a schoolmaster; less of a change from our ordinary round. You enjoyed it?"

"I found it interesting."

"It must be. But I suppose you must go and say how-d'ye-do to Marshall—you've not seen him yet?"

"Not yet—and I want to catch him before supper. May I come and smoke a cigar with you some time?"

"Do—do. And tell me all about your summer."

Marshall was in his study, confronted by his usual desk load of papers, quite as if the ordered life of the school had been going on without a break since June. Brooke had expected that things would somehow be different—his own attitude towards them had so greatly altered.

"You look as though you'd never been away," he said to Marshall.

"I have, though. A fine summer. You too, I hope?"

"A very interesting one."

"Interesting," repeated Marshall, with a falling inflection. "Not altogether a pleasant one, then?" he speculated.

"Not altogether." Brooke shook himself and straightened. "Seems as if everything was going well," he said. "A good crowd of new boys."

"A very promising looking lot. They seem better prepared than usual. Have you seen Hood yet?"

"No. Only Mr. Welles."

"Hood's been asking after you every day—bothering the life out of me to know when you were coming back. Motley, too."

"Motley?"

"Yes. You seem to have done pretty well last year, young man. People got into the habit of seeing you about."

"Thanks."

"There's the supper bell. Coming?" On the stairs, he asked, "Are you glad to get back?"

"No end glad," Brooke answered.

Boys were on the stairs, and crowded in the hall below; they clustered around him, welcomed him, while the newcomers, lingering in the background,

regarded him askance and with calculation. Brooke warmed suddenly to the lot of them; without effort, he wiped clean the slate of each one in his own mind. This one had made a nuisance of himself throughout the previous year; a second had slandered him; a third had lied to him more than once. He had thought that he would be unable to forget their records; quite suddenly, it was borne in on him that their records were as unimportant as his own. A new year, a new start; the past should be an illuminant, and not a shadow. For the first time, and for no reason at all—rather inappropriately, in fact—he felt keenly the subtle, pervading pathos of youth—that quality of it which sooner or later overshadows the spirits of men who deal with youth, rendering them strangely soft, like Welles, or strangely hard, like Motley, or sometimes soft and hard at once, as Hood was; branding them, in any event, with the trademark of their profession, and exaggerating in them those contradictions of character which the lives of most men tend increasingly to conceal—keeping them childlike, in short, and not infrequently childish, so that, little by little, the young and the immature become their only sympathetic associates. Withal, the exceeding impermanence of his relations with individual boys, whom he should know long enough to grow fond of, and then, suddenly, know not at all forever, struck in upon Brooke as they beset him at

the entrance to the dining room, and engendered in him a faint melancholy. For the first time, he approximated understanding of Welles and Motley, seeing in their peculiarities the threat of the tombstone—"As I am, so shalt thou soon be." And, seeing now the price which he must pay, he began to love his work at last.

His melancholy vanished as Hood thrust himself through the boys and shook his hand.

"Glad to see you back," he said. "Come in tonight. Seville and Espinosa ought to have something to say to one another."

"A lot. I'll be in, sure."

"Right. There'll be no one else." Hood nodded, and went to his own table.

"What kept you?" said Motley's voice at his ear. "I'm glad to see you back."

"Hello, Motley! Quarantine regulations."

"That's a new one. Don't let the boys hear it, or they'll work it to the limit."

"Heaven forbid. How's Mrs. Motley?"

"Very well—away on a visit—be back by the end of the week. Come and see us soon and often."

"Indeed I will."

He looked no deeper than the surface of Motley's welcome; they were not sympathetic, and could never become so. But that was no reason why they should not be superficially pleasant to each other. Friction

with one's colleagues was in the highest degree undesirable, and he could avoid it, and still retain the right to choose his own friends.

The same principle held with the boys. Justice was all that any of them had the right to demand from him, and all that the majority of them wanted. Some desired more, just as from some of them Brooke desired more than the low usury of fair dealing, and in his relations with these few, the general had neither part nor lot. Notable among these last was Billy Strange; he now permitted himself to see as much of the boy as he wished. To his surprise, nobody objected; had he cared to probe public opinion, he would have discovered that his friendship, as evidently warm as it was evidently discriminating, had suddenly become worth deserving.

Absurdity cannot stand the light, nor can mushiness persist in any normal intimacy. There had been much of both in Brooke's feeling for Billy, and both had formerly been aggravated by Brooke's continual and self-conscious fear of favoritism and its consequences. That bogie laid, the friendship began to take on worth, and presently became to both Brooke and Billy a possession hard and enduring and fine. No longer did Brooke sit in feminine perplexity when Billy broke the laws or made an ass of himself, as he not infrequently did. He went for the boy hammer and tongs, and struck sparks out of him, forcing

him to bear the consequences of his own acts instead of wasting time and energy in sparing him; he received therefore a meed of tough affection which was worth something, instead of the sappy admiration which the boy had accorded him the year before. A greater equality was established between them, as well as between Brooke and the other boys. Discipline ceased to be in any sort a problem to him, for breaches of it became rare in his jurisdiction.

Yet, although the school absorbed more of his energy than it had done, it did not come so near monopolizing his mind. Later, when he should become used to his schedule, there would be the paper chases, all of which he was resolved to attend. There were also the people of the Valley; Scott and Helen were frequently in the back of his mind. Fairly constantly, Patricia was very near the front of it.

CHAPTER XVI

MORRIS, the architect, had slightly overbid his hand; even Patricia, whose hospitality was more than a mere Sunday religion, sometimes thanked the gods who made Monday the eighth day of the week. Yet she was sorry to see Morris leave for the city, and sorry enough to rise at six and have breakfast with him. Nor was he out of mind as soon as he was out of sight.

That afternoon she rode alone, leaving the villa and across the tobacco fields that crept in upon it from all sides. Peter, her highly sympathetic hunter, made a little of a gate or two which barred his way; at the very first jump, it seemed to her that Morris slipped into the notch where he belonged, for the round little architect took no pleasure in the strength of a horse. Coincidentally, she recalled Brooke, who had given Peter his name, and wondered why his return to school had been two weeks postponed. In the third field—a pasture ravelled by the chestnut and scrub oak of the ridge—she left thoughts of both Morris and Brooke behind her, and went whole-hearted.

exploring in the hardwoods under the cool flame of October.

For out of the Valley cometh always some new thing. Ten thousand wood paths fling their aimless net through thickets of maple and beech, here and there fading out in the strong light of upland clearings, where correct cedars rise blue above lichened boulders and the dry purple of autumn grass. Up and down and cross-wise, wholly irresponsible and altogether charming, twist these little byways, sometimes meeting a rogue's end under the crabbed branches of a big red-oak, sometimes achieving no end at all, but simply creeping under forgotten gates into a limbo of underbrush. Patricia knew them as well as anyone, and whether they lured her through snow, or arbutus, or laurel, or golden rod, she liked them well. But in October, that cream of the year's cream, she loved them. So did Peter. By preference, he walked in the ruts, where the leaves lay fetlock-deep, and, when a path ran out into bush, he simply stopped, and made an epicure's selection of small sprouts till Patricia decided what to do next. Sometimes she made up her mind quickly, and guided him through the tangle to another road; more often, if a patch of sumach was very bright or a gray squirrel very busy, she did not make it up at all, but allowed Peter to move on when he pleased and whither he would. Little by little, the personality of

Morris became intrusive again; resentment at its siege of her thoughts was not heavy enough artillery to rout it. She saw the woods and the life of the woods with only half an eye; inwardly, she was framing tentative terms of capitulation, and this in spite of the fact that unconditional surrender was the only kind she could contemplate with equanimity—the only kind that was consistent with her native uncompromising sincerity.

Peter, stretching his neck for a juicy *hors-d'oeuvre* suddenly desisted and cocked his ears; she felt his muscles tauten under her.

"What is it?" she asked, stroking his neck. "One of your usual hallucinations?"

Peter, without answering, turned at right angles and picked his way over a stony bit of ground and through a thicket of scrub oak. He blew gently through his nose.

"Still fooling yourself?" commented Patricia. "Peter, you're an old idiot."

She bent low under a projecting branch. A horse whinnied from beyond the copse, and, peering ahead she discerned a felt hat and the brown shoulder of a man's coat. Peter, bacchic and jaunty with a tendril of wild grape caught in his forehead strap, thrust himself into a little clearing; the man turned towards the noise.

"Why, Bob!" Patricia exclaimed.

"Pat!" Brooke swung his horse alongside hers, and swept off his hat. Instantly, she wondered why she had never before noticed the peculiar clarity of his eyes. "I knew this path was worth exploring," he said.

"That—from you! You must have met a señorita after all. But why haven't you been to see us? I didn't know you were back till you telephoned the other day."

"I was two weeks late."

"Then you've been at Chester two weeks—and you never let us know!"

"There was so much to get in order—and to listen to your voice over the telephone would have been tantalizing."

"Surely—surely a señorita!"

"Many of them. But it would have been tantalizing. I haven't been off the place since I got back. Thought I'd wait till the prospect of seeing you wasn't so remote. I was just on my way to your house."

"By this road?" Patricia laughed. No excuses had ever been necessary between them. Morris, for the moment, had slipped out of her mind.

"By this road. It's the longest way round, and it's not teatime yet by an hour or so. I knew you'd be out riding, a day like this. How have you been—and your mother?"

"Well, both of us. We stayed here most of the summer—couldn't tear ourselves away from the house. And you? Was your filibustering a success?"

"Yes—if you call it that."

"Call it a success, or filibustering."

"Both, or either."

"You're enigmatic, Bob." She found him so, and was not sure whether she liked it or not. She hung in stays a moment, and then filled away on another tack. "Were there jobs down there, as you expected? Even for schoolmasters?"

"Jobs in plenty." He put on his hat again; the brim threw a slant of deep shadow across his face, making it more grave than she had been used to see in him—more assured, also. "But I took money enough to last me, after all." He smiled, and his eyes glinted at her out of the shadow.

"What a disreputable hat!" she said.

He took it off again, and spun it on his finger, cocking his head at it.

"A very old hat, but not in the least disreputable," he replied. "An honorable age, though premature." He replaced it on his head. "The tropics don't improve felt. Or anything, for that matter."

"Not even—men?"

"The fittest survive."

The horses, tired of standing, fell in side by side, and began to walk down the trail. It dipped steeply

into a hollow; both Patricia and Brooke gathered in their reins and bent forward, examining the footing. She was rather glad of the excuse to concentrate her attention.

"Are you glad to get back?" she asked, when they had reached the bottom of the descent.

"Very glad indeed."

"What an extraordinary state of mind—for you! I thought you hated schoolteaching."

"I thought I did too. And I suppose I did, if I thought I did. But—" He broke off.

"But you find you don't?"

"Why, there are lots of things about it I don't like. But that's so in everything. I suppose—being an angel, or being a schoolmaster, or being a devil. Anything."

"Of course. But you didn't think that way last year. Narrowing, was the word you used."

"Yes. That's the catchword. I've been asking myself lately just what I meant by it—'narrowing.' I don't think it means anything at all."

Patricia, who had felt the contagion of that particular catchword, was silent. A horse-fly lit on Peter's neck; she tried to kill it with her crop, missed it, and waited for it to light again.

"A job," Brooke blurted out, "any job, is as big as the man who holds it. As big as he makes it."

Patricia, forgetting the horse-fly, stared at him.

Quietly, his eyes graver than she had ever seen them, he returned the gaze.

"Then all jobs are big jobs?" she said.

"All jobs are big jobs," Brooke agreed. It was some time before he added, "Everything is a miracle."

"Yes. There's nothing so true as that, of course."

A long, straight stretch of leaf-sprinkled grass, splotted with shadow under an arch of somewhat larger trees, opened out before them.

"Let's gallop," said Patricia.

She had need to put a stop of conversation for a time; she had lost control of it, something that had never happened to her before in Brooke's company. The gallop mercifully prolonged itself from half a mile to a mile and a half; she forgot to scan the ground over Peter's shoulder—another thing that had never happened to her before. It seemed as though she were pursuing the quarry of her own thoughts, and getting no nearer to it withal. Suddenly the road hardened and grew rough with boulders.

"Bad going!" counselled Brooke. "Better pull up."

Patricia, a little out of breath, slackened her reins as the horses dropped to a walk, and adjusted her hat, first with one hand and then with both. The tight sleeves of a riding habit are kind to a fine arm.

"I got your letter," she said, "written on a

steamer. What an amusing crowd you must have had aboard!"

"They were. Very."

"And such a queer stamp—mauve and green, or something like that."

"Pink and purple, more likely."

"Perhaps. It was mailed from a place—a place called Puerto Espinosa."

Brooke was silent; she wondered if he had heard her.

"Wasn't that the name?"

"Yes. Puerto Espinosa." He spoke slowly.

She did not stare at him this time, but regarded him a thought covertly.

"Did something happen to you there?" she asked.

"After I landed, I went up-country. There was yellow fever in the port when I came down, and they held me there. Fifteen or twenty deaths a day."

"How horrible!"

"It was, rather."

The road, which had been sloping downwards for some time, debouched at the edge of the intervale, amber now in the level light. Farm wagons creaked into sight, met them, and passed them by; crows quarrelled in the elms; vagrant voices, the dull clank of a cowbell, the beat of an axe—the hundred friendly sounds of a friendly countryside—drifted to them over the fields.

"You left with a rather unpleasant impression of the tropics, then," Patricia remarked. "pity."

"Is it? I'm not so sure." Brooke swung sideways in his saddle and surveyed the big, brown meadow. "I never appreciated this before. It's the place of all others to live in!"

She too turned sideways, the handle of her broom at her lips.

"That's why one travels, of course," she said. "One reason, anyway. Does it keep its charm, even for a pedagogue?"

"Especially for a pedagogue."

"And then there are the long vacations!" Patricia reached for a crimson twig, and broke it off. "Six months ago, you'd have been the one to say that," she added.

"Perhaps. And I'll say it two months hence, and six months hence. But—there are a great many worse ways to earn one's living."

"How about the people you work with?" Patricia could not resist that.

"What's the matter with them?"

"I had an idea you found a good deal the matter with them. That they bored you."

Brooke grinned.

"They did, of course. Most people—the more you or exasperate you about a third of the time—especially

if you live in the same house with them. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps." It seemed to Patricia that she was making concession after concession—and her retreat had no strategic value. At the moment, Brooke was boring her a little and exasperating her a good deal.

"Scott's here, isn't he?" Brooke asked suddenly.

"Yes. Been here all summer. He's behaved remarkably well."

"It ought to be taken care of. And yet, some people prefer Wall Street."

"Not many really prefer it, do you think?"

"Well, yes—some do, anyhow." Brooke settled himself more easily in the saddle. "Ooh! I'll be stiff in the morning," he said.

"Didn't you ride in Espirito?"

"Not in the last month or so. And then there were twelve days on the boat—just enough to soften me up. There's a little road I don't know—let's

try it. I'll guide Peter into it, between an elm and a bush. The going was of the best, and both horses came to an easy stop."

"It's one of the prettiest," she said, "and it leads straight home. Not more than a mile. You'll stay for tea, of course?"

Brooke looked at his watch. "I can't," he said.

"It's half past five now. What a nuisance time is!"

"And the less there is of it, the greater the nuisance. But that's your old excuse, Bob."

"No—it's a brand new excuse, because it's true. And I've never made excuses to you—couldn't get by with them."

"Can't you stop at the house just a minute, and see mother?"

"Of course."

They cantered on. The road slanted into the street of pillared white houses, and the surface hardened into macadam.

"Here we are," said Patricia, and turned in at her own gate. Brooke swung to the ground and helped her dismount; Mrs. Vaughan came out on the verandah.

"Why, Bob!" she said. "This is delightful!"

"I'm awful glad to see you again," said Brooke.

"Did you have a good summer?"

"Splendid—but it's good to be back."

"Lots of adventures?"

"More than you will care to hear about. May I come to dinner. and bore you with them all?"

"Any time," answered Mrs. Vaughan, "as always. But you'll stay and have tea now?"

"I can't. I'll be late to school as it is. May I come Saturday, after the paper chase?"

"By all means. And no one's coming up, so we'll have you all to ourselves."

"That's fine." Brooke gathered up his reins, swung into the saddle, and was off at a canter. Patricia, poised on the top step, looked after him till after he had passed the entrance gate. Then she pinched a scarlet leaf from the Virginia creeper, and crumpled it in reflective fingers.

"What's come over him?" she said.

Mrs. Vaughan collected her knitting from the wicker table.

"It's quite marked," she said.

"The change? You noticed it—in that short time?"

"How could one help it?" Mrs. Vaughan set a chair straight, and repeated, "It's very marked."

Patricia, her back to her mother, gazed out through the ivy at the chrysanthemum beds and the long shadows on the lawn. A whiff of burning leaves put an edge on the air for a moment; she drew a long breath, and exhaled it in something very like a sigh.

"Probably," surmised Mrs. Vaughan, "he's fallen in love." She paused at the doorway. "Tea?" she queried.

Patricia followed her into the hall, and lingered there for a moment, removing the pins from her hat.

"Bob has grown up," continued Mrs. Vaughan,

as Patricia entered the living room. "Found him self."

"That's your explanation of almost everything," Patricia rejoined. "Isn't this a little sudden?"

"It's *the* explanation of almost everything," Mr. Vaughan answered. "And it's not a bit sudden really. A great many men are like that."

"Like what?"

"Like Bob. Boys on Monday morning, and me on Tuesday afternoon. In Bob's case, I've been waiting for it a long time. Doctors would call it acute maturity, I suppose."

"And I suppose," suggested Patricia, "they would look for some exciting cause."

"There's always a cause, Paddy—more exciting or less so. Generally the old one—*cherchez la femme.*"

"With Bob? How absurd!"

Mrs. Vaughan shrugged her shoulders.

"*Cherchez la femme,*" she repeated. "Even with Bob. More especially with him, perhaps—he's not as immune as he looks." Mrs. Vaughan reached for her knitting, and settled the bulk of it in her lap. She did not apply herself to it at once, but dallied with the unloaded needle, slipping the length of it through her fingers and back again. "Just what made you think him changed?" she asked.

"I don't know. A little something in his face—"

about the mouth and eyes. But mostly, other things."

"Manner?"

"Yes. More ease—as if he wasn't wondering so much what other people were thinking about him. More zest, too. You know how deadly serious he used to be sometimes?"

"Yes. Inopportunistly so. A lighter touch?"

"Oh, much lighter."

The needles began their subdued castanet music again. Patricia laid down her cup, and went to pick flowers. Mrs. Vaughan's needles fairly flew, complicating the border of a baby's afghan; she had been long busy on it, and was eager to finish. Knitting was to her what tobacco was to Brooke—an aid to cogitation—and the transit of untroubled reflection threw its evanescent shades across her face—like the shadows of clear flames, or wind on the water. She bound off the last stitch as Patricia, her arms full of yellow chrysanthemums and red asters, returned, and held the afghan out at arm's length, shaking it.

"Pretty shade of blue, isn't it?" she asked, folding it carefully. "I hope it'll be a boy." She placed it in her satchel, and began to gather up left-over odds and ends of worsted. "Bobby was late for the opening of school, wasn't he?"

"Two weeks." Patricia, with her back to her mother, was sorting the flowers.

"Did he say why?"

"There was some sort of an epidemic in the horrible place he went to."

"An epidemic?"

"Yes. Yellow fever. They wouldn't let him sail."

"Is that usual—down there?"

"I asked him that." Patricia twisted at the superfluous length of half a dozen stems. "He said—it happened—frequently." The stems broke at the last word. The flowers, trimmed and assorted, lay in a mass of gold and crimson on the table; Patricia left them there, and went about collecting vases.

"It feels like frost tonight," she said.

"Yes," Mrs. Vaughan agreed.

Patricia, humming a tune, left to fetch water for the vases. Mrs. Vaughan laid aside her work-bag and stepped to a window that faced the painted west.

"*Cherchez la femme,*" she murmured. "I wonder."

CHAPTER XVII

"TAKE a walk. Mr. Brooke?" asked Billy one Sunday morning.

"Sure," Brooke answered. "Where'll we go?"

"Dunno. How about the old copper mine?"

"Anywhere you say. Anyone else coming?"

"Don't let's ask anyone else," Billy answered. "Unless you want to?"

"No. We'd better start right after dinner. It's a long way."

"Not too long. We can run down all the hills. I'll come to your room as soon as I'm ready."

They did run down all the hills—that was the school fashion in pedestrianism, and the walk to the copper mine was a favorite because it was down hill most of the way, both going and coming. There are roads like that. Consequently, they had no breath to waste in talk till they had climbed the ridge and reached the summit of the ore pile which marked the mouth of the abandoned mine.

"Quarter of three," announced Brooke.

"That's some walking—seven miles an hour."

"Come off! It's not more than five and a half. Six at the most."

"Some walking, even then. But it feels like seven." Billy stretched out on his stomach and rested his chin in his hands. "What a peach of a day!" he said.

"It's all that. I don't think I ever saw such color."

"Color?" Aesthetic details are unimportant when one is physically comfortable.

"Yes. On the trees. Are you blind?" Brooke stretched out his leg and kicked the boy gently in the ribs. Billy caught his foot, and untied the lacing of his shoe.

"Now look at what you've been and gone and done!" said Brooke. "All that work to do over again."

"Serves you right." Billy yawned and resumed his position. "It is pretty," he admitted. "Why, don't you light a pipe? It smells so good."

"Give me time. Haven't got my breath yet."

"Gee! You must be getting old."

"I am." Brooke produced his pouch, filled slowly, and in spite of the brisk breeze, lit his pipe with one match.

"Irishman!" commented Billy.

"Sure."

Billy rolled over, and stared at the cloudless sky;

Brooke, with his back against a rock, puffed placidly.

"Lots of chestnuts around this year," drawled Billy. "But the farmers are snotty as the deuce. One of 'em went for Bruce with a shotgun last Sunday."

"I heard about that. Didn't shoot, did he?"

"No. But maybe he will, next time. D'you think he would?"

"Probably," Brooke answered. "Chestnuts are a valuable crop."

"No reason to get murderous about it. Bruce wasn't doing any harm."

"You kids trespass too much, anyhow. And shooting doesn't mean killing." Brooke picked up a piece of shale, and crumbled the edges of it in his fingers before throwing it away. "Perhaps the gun was loaded with salt," he suggested.

"Salt!" Billy chuckled. "How that would itch! Bruce wouldn't be able to sit down for a week. Gee! I hope he tries it on again, and gets his."

"What have you got against Bruce?"

"Nothing. But salt! Oh, you Brucie!" Billy shied a pebble in the general direction of the mine shaft. "Lyle was with him," he remarked. "I wouldn't mind if they filled Lyle full of salt. Pickled him."

"Vicious, aren't you?"

"Hm-m!" Billy assented sleepily. Sunny rocks on

a cool day are soporific. Brooke yielded to the drowsy influence in so far that he ceased to think—became for the moment, contented and vacuous as a cat in a window. His pipe gurgled and went out; he roused himself and emptied it.

"Bruce and Lyle see a good deal of each other, don't they?" he queried.

"Went to the same place last summer," Billy answered. "Hyannisport. I was down there a while. Too many girls."

"Visiting Bruce?"

"No. With the family."

Billy, still lying on his back, crossed his legs and squinted at his toe. Brooke caressed his pipe bowl.

"You don't see very much of Bruce these days," he remarked. "Not as much as last year."

"As much as I did the last part of last year. After—" He broke off, and frowned.

"After the whiskey business?"

"Yes."

"I've always thought," said Brooke slowly, "that I did you dirt that time."

"You? Why?"

"Well—your telling me about it reacted on you. Had considerable of a kick."

Billy did not answer.

"Didn't it?" Brooke pursued.

"Yes. But that wasn't your fault." There was a

certain obstinate loyalty about Billy. "Most people have forgotten all about it now," he added.

"I haven't. Has Lyle?"

"No." Billy sat up suddenly. "But I'll be darned if I try to make good with him."

"He wants you to?"

"Look at Bruce. Lyle wants everyone to make good with him. Likes to have people suck around. I won't do it."

"The trouble with you," said Brooke coolly, "is that you think you're right and everyone else is wrong. Get over it."

"I don't see just what you mean."

"Well, how do you know that Bruce is sucking around Lyle, for instance? Maybe they like each other."

"Humph! Maybe. I don't think so."

"There you go again. You make things too hard for yourself. Even if you're right, that sort of thing is none of your business. All you've got to do is to make good with yourself."

"Huh?" Billy did not understand. Brooke had not expected that he would. The thing needed to be said—that was all.

"What time is it?" asked Billy abruptly.

"Three thirty."

"Let's start back, and stop at the house for tea. Mr. Hood said he'd be there this afternoon."

"All right. We've just about got time."

They ran down the hill, and took a branch road to Waterville. As they turned into the village, Billy broke a long silence, saying:

"So you think it's worth while trying to make good with Lyle?"

Brooke caught him up sharply. "So you were thinking of trying? That's why you were so sore at Bruce?"

"Well—er—" He walked along without speaking for a hundred yards. "I suppose it is," he admitted.

"That sort of thing doesn't work, Billy," said Brooke, slowly. "I know, for I've tried it myself."

"Tried what?"

"To get on the right side of other people. It doesn't work—no matter who the other person is. Make good with yourself—that's the important thing."

Evidently, the boy did not understand completely, even yet. Quite as evidently, Brooke's words had given him something to think about. Billy's case was a parallel to his own, or threatened to become one. Almost bitterly, but with his characteristic just humor, he reflected on the time he himself had wasted in seeking the favor of the Lyles of his world.

It was nearly five when they reached the Strange's. Helen and Scott and Hood were sitting in the dusk about the living room fire; except for the ride with Patricia, it was the first time that fall that Brooke had been out of the atmosphere of the school.

"I hoped Billy would bring you," said Helen. "You've been such a hermit since you got back—as usual.

"Against my will," Brooke answered.

"That's what you always say."

"It's always true. I'm a slave of conscience."

"Is that true. Hood?" asked Scott.

"Couldn't tell you, I'm sure. Inertia, most likely—like the rest of us. There's no real difference."

"Between what?" Helen asked.

"Between conscience and inertia."

"That's a nice remark to make before Billy," Helen said.

"What is?" Billy spoke from the level of the floor, where he was exploring the lowest shelf of the cake-stand.

"Never you mind." Helen peered around the kettle at her brother. "Are you going to eat all that jam?" she asked.

"M. I. K.," Billy grinned, which was family code for "More in Kitchen."

"Go and tell Maggie to bring it in, then. And don't be a little pig."

Billy departed obediently.

"Funny how 'little' takes the sting out of 'pig,'" said Hood.

"Billy's a cannibal about strawberry jam," Helen rejoined. "No self control at all." She poured a cup for Brooke and handed it to him. "A regular jam drunkard. Is that right?"

"Just right," Brooke answered, sitting in a chair beside her. "How many more paper chases are there?" he asked.

"Five, I think. Aren't there five, Fred?" she asked, addressing Scott, who was deep in conversation with Hood on the couch, which flanked the other side of the fireplace.

"Five what?"

"Paper chases."

"At least that. Six if we have luck. Maybe seven."

"They must be good fun," Hood interjected.

"Have you never ridden in one, Mr. Hood?" asked Helen.

"Never. Never ridden at all, in fact."

"Won't you try this fall?" Helen urged. "I'm sure you'd enjoy them."

"I'd rather look on. 'Feel safer on two legs than four."

"Come and look on, then. The breakfast and tea are both here next Saturday—and you can follow with

Mrs. Vaughan in our motor. She'd love to have you, I know."

"I'd be delighted to."

"Will you be riding, Brooke?" asked Scott.

"Yes, indeed—if you can mount me. I shan't miss any of the rest of them."

"Fraud!" laughed Helen. "Not one?"

"Not one—really!" Brooke answered. "That is, if I can always get a horse."

"I can mount you as often as you come." volunteered Scott. "By the way, you didn't happen to ride to Davis's hounds in Espinosa, did you?"

"Hounds in Espinosa!" Helen exclaimed.

"I did once," Brooke said, "and haven't a notion how I lived through it."

"Do they have foxes that far south?" asked Hood.

"I never saw one," Brooke replied. "Davis chases deer—and the funniest looking field you ever dreamed of."

"I know," agreed Scott. "Three white men—four niggers—six vaqueros—and every man yook armed with a shot gun."

"And machetes—don't forget them. And the spurs strapped on bare feet."

"Spurs on bare feet?" queried Billy. "Is it too hot to wear shoes down there?"

"White men don't find it so," Scott explained. "It's the niggers and the natives."

"Machetes—shotguns—. Sounds like a war party," commented Hood. "Was this in the lowlands?"

"Yes. Just above the banana district."

"You must have had a wonderful summer," put in Helen. "Patricia showed me a letter you wrote to her from down there somewhere."

"It was about the only one I wrote all summer. Mailed it from Puerto Espinosa."

"Sweet town, that," said Scott. "It always amazes me to find that you can mail letters from there— : receive them, for that matter. Or has it changed?"

"I doubt if it has changed—much." Brooke stirred his tea slowly, and looked into the fire.

"What's it like?" Helen inquired.

Scott told her, in detail. Brooke nodded assent to his more picturesque bits of description. Hood, interested, sat forward on the lounge; he himself knew such places otherwise than by hearsay.

"You never saw a place like it," Scott concluded. "It's a wonder anyone lives a week. An epidemic, now, would wipe it out."

"It was an epidemic that held you up, wasn't it?" Hood asked, turning to Brooke.

"Yes."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Scott. It was a moment or so before he added, "Bubonic, or yellow?"

"Yellow."

Once more the horror had thrust up its horned head,

ripping to shreds the flimsy stuff of common speech, compelling Brooke to silence, and at the same time, strangely warming his heart. By now, most of the bitterness had left his recollection; it was something to have come through alive.

"Well?" queried Helen. "We're waiting."

"For what?" Brooke started—shivering a little. "I beg your pardon. There was an epidemic."

"And you were in it?" Hood's voice, seemingly deeper than usual, reverberated through the shadows. Scott's face, a blur of white on the couch, moved, and was still again.

"Yes." Brooke rose, and moved a birch log into the flame with his toe. "I was there—couldn't get away." The white bark caught, and flared up. "It was interesting," he said.

"Just—interesting?" Hood queried.

"Perhaps a little more than that. It will make a good story, some day. May I have a cigarette?"

"On the mantle—beside you," said Helen. "Billy, turn on the lights."

The switch clicked; the universal mood vanished with the darkness.

"Are you writing anything now?" asked Scott.

"Of course he is," Helen answered for him. "Haven't you seen the November *Pacific*?" I liked that story," she added to Brooke. "It's the one you told me about last spring, isn't it?"

"Must be. It's the only one there is—yet. I'm glad you liked it."

"I read it, too," said Hood. "Yesterday."

"Did you? I didn't know you ever read the magazines."

"I don't, usually. There was an article about Seville in this one."

"Did you like it?" asked Brooke.

"The story? Yes." Hood looked at his watch. "Heavens!" he said. "It's six o'clock. We must be moving." He rose, as did Brooke.

"Can't you stay to supper?" asked Helen.

"I'm afraid not."

"You live by the clock at school—too much so."

"I agree," said Hood heartily. "But—we must."

"Come again soon." To Brooke she said, "Write the epidemic story quick. I liked the last one so much."

The two schoolmasters were half way to the school before Brooke asked:

"How did you like the story—really?"

"Do you want to know—really?" Hood replied.

"That's why I asked."

"A little remote from life, wasn't it?"

"A little?" Brooke laughed. "Why, it had absolutely nothing to do with life. That's why the ferociously respectable *Pacific* took it."

CHAPTER XVIII

WINTHROP, pursuing a moribund bond market to the wilds of the Massachusetts Newtons, where he hoped to bring it to bay, stopped off at Chester to see Brooke.

"You're a nice one," he said as he stepped from the train. "Why don't you let a fellow know when you go through the city?"

"Because I went through it in a taxicab," Brooke answered. "How've you been?"

"Well—but the market's dead as Moses. Did you have an interesting summer?"

"Very."

Winthrop seated himself in the motor; the magazine in his overcoat pocket discommoded him, and he removed it.

"Hello!" Brooke said. "The November *Pacific*! Are you trying to acquire culture all of a sudden?"

"Far from it. Like most people caught with the *Pacific* in their hands, Winthrop felt called upon to explain. "Been trying to read your story."

"Did you succeed?"

"Oh, yes. It's a long and tiresome ride on the train from town."

"So you thought you might as well make it seem longer and more tiresome?"

"Not quite as bad as all that. It's an amusing tale, though it hasn't got much to do with things as they are. Are you doing anything now?"

"No. I've been trying to for the last week or so, but it's hard starting after you've let the machine run down."

"I should think it would be," Hastings agreed. "The engine gets chilled, eh?"

"Frozen. I'll get her going before long, though. I've got several ideas that may work out."

"Central American stuff?"

"No. School stuff."

The motor drew up at the school; Brooke, with Winthrop's suit case, led the way to his room.

"I'll find you a room later," he said. "There are two or three empty beds in the building. Smoke?"

"Thanks." Winthrop lit a cigarette. "Same old chair," he said, indicating the one he meant by dropping into it. "It's immortal—you had it all through college. Do you remember the time I tried to steal it?"

Brooke grinned.

"I just caught you in time," he said, "and I don't think I ever thanked you for having it crated."

"You never did. You never paid me for my trouble, either." Winthrop felt for the mechanism that lowered the back to a more comfortable angle, and found it. "It's the only one in captivity," he said. "I'll get away with it yet. Aren't school stories rather a new departure for you?" he added.

"Yes. But there are plenty of them to be written, if you know where to look for them."

"That's what I always thought. Last year, you didn't agree with me."

"When we talked about writing? Easter time, wasn't it?" Brooke subsided on his couch and cocked his feet up on the end of it. "No, I didn't see any possibilities in it then. You see I was new at the business—and besides, I wasn't really looking for stories in it."

"You certainly were not," Winthrop agreed. "You were eaten up with the idea of travelling and writing up the tropical tramp. Did you meet any of the breed, by the way?"

"Several," Brooke answered. He thought of Andrews. "Several. They're not tramps, as we use the word. They keep moving, but they keep working too."

"Work till they get money enough to move, I suppose?"

"Yes." Brooke clasped his hands behind his head and looked at the ceiling. "They're very interesting,

and there are a lot of stories in their lives, of course. But you can't get to know them well enough in one summer to do anything worth while with them. You'd have to know the Caribbean as well as they know it, in the first place, and that means you'd have to be one of them."

"That's a new theory for you," commented Winthrop.

"What is?"

"That you have to know all about a phase of life before you can write about it. You claimed last year that a man wrote best about the things he knew least well. Perspective—aloofness—were what you advocated."

"I remember," Brooke answered slowly. "And I meant what I said—then."

"But you don't now?"

"I guess I've changed my point of view," said Brooke. "There's nothing alive about being aloof. It's too damn cold-blooded. You've got to be in things, and keen about them, before you can tell anything about them that's worth while. At least, you must have been in them, once. Otherwise, you spin the yarn from the outside in, instead of from the inside out. You've got to know how people feel in given circumstances, not only look at them and see how they act. Actions—what they do—are the least important things." He jerked himself up from the

couch, and stood by the table, cleaning out a pipe. "That means," he went on, "that you've got to feel, and write about how you feel." He removed the top of the tobacco jar, and filled the pipe. "It's not easy. But it's the only way. Anything else is—tommyrot. Essentially untrue."

Winthrop, seeking causes as always, twice opened his mouth to ask a question, and twice thought better of it.

"If you don't look out, Bob," was all he said, "you'll do something worth while."

"Some day—perhaps." Brooke rejoined. "It depends—" He broke off.

"On what?"

"On getting rid of my Puritan ancestors. Dropping reserve, in the first place—anyone who's trying to write can't afford to keep anything back. And then, on seeing things simply. Especially that. They are simple, you know, if they're worth talking about."

"I thought," said Winthrop slowly, "that you were going to say it depended on a girl."

"That's part of it, of course." He added, a little too hastily, "When it does, I'll let you know."

"Will you?" said Winthrop.

Brooke threw a thesaurus at him.

The flying thesaurus to the contrary notwithstanding, Patricia had not yet taken entire possession of

Brooke's mind and heart. There were still other things in life, and chief among them, was, of course, writing. He had told Winthrop that his next tale would deal with school life; he had had a plot in mind when he spoke, but his new and lively appreciation of his profession turned out to be as much a hindrance as a help to composition. The work he was paid to do became increasingly the cannibal of his leisure; it was so infinitely more important to live than to write stories about living, that he did well if he finished a paragraph a week. Accident helped him out to some extent; he woke one morning at six, thought it was seven, and was dressed before he had discovered his mistake. It took him ten minutes to recover his temper; that left him a full three quarters of an hour before breakfast. Thereafter, he frequently rose immorally early, and wrote till he was interrupted by the jangling of the harmful and necessary bell. It was the only time of day at which he was secure from intrusion, but the employment of it shut him off from one great department of fiction. He was absolutely unable to write love scenes before breakfast; what man has ever proposed to a girl on an empty stomach at dawn, and lived to tell the tale. Until he had had his first cup of coffee, Brooke could be satirical, indignant, even humorous, but he could not be tender.

It was not only the work of the curriculum tha

made hash of his normal day; his association with the boys used up all his afternoons and most of his evenings. There was his football team, in which he began to take an absurdly vital interest, and which monopolized most of the time between dinner and afternoon recitations. After supper, he was either on duty or might as well have been, for the boys, having found out that he could write, kept coming to him for help with stories for the school paper—fearful and wonderful fiction, in comparison with which his own seemed brilliant and even masterly. Once a week, a debate occurred; he became an authority on such matters as the Merchant Marine and the crisis in Europe, or at least achieved the reputation for being one. These were, however, organized activities, and to some extent could be provided for and kept in a subordinate position where they belonged. His purely social relation with the boys, which he valued most of all, could not be regulated without being destroyed. Even the Sixth Form came to heel in time, and forgot that they had been at the school longer than Brooke had; and among these was Lyle. In Lyle's case, Brooke was especially glad that the bars had been let down, for he could not but regard his clumsy handling of the boy in the previous year as one of the greatest of his lost opportunities. Now, there was a faint chance that he might recover some lost ground.

"Drinking much these days?" he asked Lyle on one occasion.

"Huh?" The question had detonated from a clear sky.

"Are you drinking much these days?" Brooke repeated. "Or have you sworn off, as most cheap sports do once in a while?"

"I've sworn off," Lyle answered sulkily. But he made no move to leave the room.

"H'm." Brooke looked at him long and curiously. "It's somewhat ridiculous that a kid of your age should feel called upon to swear off," he went on. "Were you afraid that the Demon Rum would get you?"

"No. I—I just went on that wagon."

"Ah, yes. Went on the wagon—that's what I should have said, of course. I forgot. The phrase implies experience."

"But lots of fellows my age drink."

"Sure. And talk about it. And lots of twelve-year-olds smoke, and talk about it. For the same reason. However, if you like that kind of thing, that's the kind of thing you like."

"How do you mean?"

"If you don't see what I mean, there's no earthly use in trying to explain. How about women?"

"I've cut them out entirely."

A smile started at Brooke's eyes, retched his mouth,

and blossomed into a noiseless laugh. Lyle flushed and fidgeted; presently he arose, and stood looking at an etching on the wall. Then he turned and faced Brooke.

"Look here, Mr. Brooke," he said. "I have cut those things out—here and everywhere else. Never mind why. Er—ah—you had something to do with it."

"I?" The wind suddenly spilled out of Brooke's sails.

"A lot. Last year—when I brought the whiskey to school. That kid—Strange—I didn't treat him right. Then you—er—" Lyle broke off, and Brooke, more embarrassed than he had ever been, was glad that he did.

"That's not what I came to see you about." Lyle went on, resolutely altering the tone of his voice. "There's the Sixth Form picnic—day after tomorrow. Can you chaperone us?"

"Be delighted to." Brooke accepted on the spot, in spite of the fact that the day was Saturday, and he had promised Helen Strange that he would ride in the paper chase. He would have accepted even if he had promised Patricia.

"When do you start?" he asked.

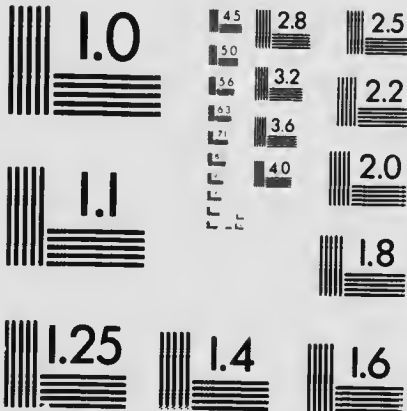
"About ten o'clock. All the stuff's arranged for, and I guess we've got all the buggies in town. Where'd be a good place to go?"

"How about Duncan Pond?"



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"Fine, if we can get down to it. Isn't the land all private?"

"Not all of it, I think. There's a point that belongs to the State, and there's a picnic ground there. We must find out; it wouldn't do to trespass."

"No. Mr. Marshall spoke about that. He says the neighbors don't like us any too well as it is."

"They don't. They lose half their chestnut crop every year. But we can find a place all right."

"Glad you can come." Lyle rose, and hesitated for a moment with his hand on the door knob.

"Good night, Mr. Brooke," he said, so abruptly that he gave his sentence the semblance of a beheaded confidence.

"Good night, Jack."

And Brooke sat down to wonder what it was that had brought Lyle to his senses—more particularly, what he himself had had to do with it.

Saturday was fair. One surrey and six buggies held the party; they came by noon within sight of Duncan Pond, and, under Brooke's leadership, proceeded to the edge of it in spite of a sign with "No Trespassing" writ upon it in large letters. In common with all the rest of mankind, he could not believe that such rude prohibitions applied to him. They were placed there to keep roughs and rowdies from making themselves objectionable to the people who owned the land.

"What shall we do for firewood?" asked Lyle, balancing an axe in his hand and looking about for a tree to use it on.

"Look for some driftwood," Brooke replied. "'Mustn't do any damage—cut down any trees or anything of that sort."

"Side logs?" queried Lyle, casting a jealous eye at the top of a promising young poplar.

"We'll have to use stones, or something. They're just as good. You collect some driftwood, and I'll see what I can find that will do."

He took up his own axe, and with two of the boys, went into the woods. Stones were scarce, and all the windfalls were either wet or rotten or dry and rotten—capital fuel, some of them, but worthless as a support for pails and pans. Followed by his henchmen, he cruised for fifteen minutes or so, and found nothing that would do at all. Then, very suddenly, the value of poplar trees decreased in his estimation, as did the sanctity of property; he began, as Lyle had done, to look up instead of down—always a tempting proceeding when one has an axe in one's hand.

It was too tempting for Brooke. He tapped tentatively with the back of his axe against a green tree trunk. It was smooth and straight and round—a perfect side log.

"Poplar," he ruminated aloud, "has no market

value. And there are a lot of young pines here that ought to have a chance to grow."

"Going to cut it down?" asked one Watkins.

"Why—it won't do any harm." Brooke sliced off a twig of ground birch that impeded his swing. "Stand clear," he said. "She's going to fall your way."

She did, and just as she hit the ground, a man with a shotgun appeared from nowhere in particular.

"What the hell do you think this is?" said the man with the shotgun, who was not original in his conversational openings.

The boys gasped and were silent; Brooke stifled a gasp and began to speak.

"Is this your property, sir?" he said.

"It ain't yours, is it? Didn't ye see that sign on the fence?"

"The 'No Trespassing' sign?"

"There's only one sign, and it don't read 'Welcome.' Didn't ye see it? What do ye think this is? Didn't ye see it?"

"Why, yes," Brooke answered. "We saw it."

"And then ye come in and cut down a man's trees! Come right in and destroy property!"

"I don't know what possessed me to do it," Brooke answered, with penitence exuding from every pore. "I don't wonder you're mad. It was perfectly outrageous of us, and I know it."

The man looked at Brooke, suspecting impudence; there was nothing, however, in Brooke's face or voice to give ground for doubt—only contrition, writ large upon the one, and vocal on the other. And all the words of censure had been said by the culprit.

"I just cleared this place out last summer," went on the plaintiff, "and built that shack, and was getting it into shape to come down and hunt from Sundays, and fish from, and then a lot of ye come and ruin all I've done. What sort of acting do ye call that?"

"I call it rotten," Brooke answered heartily. "I'd be as mad as the devil if a man did it on my land. I *am* sorry."

"Ye'd oughter be. Sorrow don't make trees grow."

"And just as you'd got it all fixed up, too."

A pause ensued. The man polished the toe of his shoe with the muzzle of his shotgun, and permitted his eyes to stray from the repentant criminal to the reedy shores of the lake. Brooke's gaze followed his.

"Many bass here?" asked Brooke, when the suspense of the pause became intolerable.

"Some. Mostly pickerel." The answer was the entirely involuntary reaction of the fisherman.

"Many partridge?"

"Quite a few, this year. Plenty of snow last winter. Duck, too."

Lyle had come in from the clearing, and joined the other two boys behind Brook. They were whispering; the owner of the land looked at them over Brooke's shoulder.

"Well, now," Brooke began, "we've done the harm, and, as you say, being sorry for it won't make the tree grow. But we want to do what's right. Can't we pay for the damage?"

"Well—" Venator brightened up considerably.

"Would five dollars be about right?" The offer was an earnest of simple faith in Providence; Brooke was in old clothes, as were all the boys, and it was unlikely that there was a five dollar bill in the crowd.

"Five dollars would fix it—as much as it could be fixed." The assent was shrouded in preternatural gloom, and Brooke was angrily certain that he could have gotten off for two and a half.

"Of course, I know we never can pay for the damage, really," he said, fighting for time.

"Well," answered the other, "ye can try."

"And you'll want us to move on, of course—get out of here?"

"No use o' doing that—if ye pay."

There was something sinister in the condition. But the entrails were favorable; Brooke's hands were behind him, and suddenly a crumpled bill was thrust into one of them. Brooke wondered if his relief showed in his face.

"We'll pay," he said. "And we won't do any more damage."

He unfolded the bill, and handed it over. The man took it and went away at once.

"Well," commented Lyle, "I know who's got my vote for President in 1916. I've got to hand it to you for getting out of a hole. We might all have been arrested."

Brooke laughed, a little nervously. That possibility had occurred to him more than once in the last five minutes.

"It was your five that did it." He turned to cut the side logs from the fallen trunk. "How the dickens did you happen to have money in your old clothes?"

"Pure luck," Lyle answered.

The incident, however, was not yet closed. Before the party had left the ground, another man, and a more genial one, turned up.

"Hello, boys!" he said. "What ye doin' here?"

"It's all right," Brooke answered, virtuously. "I paid the man who owns the land."

"Which? Was he a young feller with a shotgun?"

"Yes."

"Haw, haw! He don't own this land. He never owned an acre in his life. He buncoed ye, boy. This is my land, and ye're welcome for all of me."

So the business broke in laughter, and because

Brooke laughed first and longest, it did his prestige more good than harm.

As he was going to bed that evening, he began to perceive that the incident had possibilities. He finished undressing; then went to his desk and looked at the yellow sheets on which he had lately been trying to set down the story of Billy Strange. These he slowly and deliberately tore up. As deliberately, he took a fresh sheet, and wrote "NO TRESPASSING" at the top of it. Till the small hours that night, and for several days after, he hammered away at the bare facts of the story, shaping them gradually, and with enormous patience, until they began to bear the stamp of truth—for there is a vast difference between telling a true story, and telling a story which shall seem true. Before he finished with this one, there was a smile in every sentence. He typed it, and sent it off with a proud head; within the inevitable ten days it was accepted. The editor even asked him for more of the same kind.

But shortly after he had cashed the check, and before he had found opportunity to go out and get arrested for the benefit of the editor and his pocket book, the magazines, and even the school itself, sank into the background of his mind and became unimportant.

CHAPTER XIX

"OF course you can come," said Patricia. "I won't hear of any excuses."

"If you put it that way," Brooke answered, "I suppose I'll have to come whether I want to or not."

"Precisely." Patricia met him fair in the lists. Nevertheless, she took his answer more literally than he meant it, and far more literally than she wanted to. With him, her facility in badinage had lately fallen into abeyance.

"However," he went on, "I never meant to do anything else, even though I can't stay the whole time."

"How long can you stay—busy man?" Her irritation was working up near the surface, and was the more buoyant because she was conscious that it was ridiculous. He had often before made the same excuse, but she had never before minded it.

"Over Thanksgiving Day," he answered. "Wednesday night till Friday morning. I'll leave my toothbrush here when I go away Friday, and come back late Saturday afternoon, if I may."

"If you may?" She could not resist the temptation to roll her silly pique up in a ball and throw it at him. She shrugged her shoulders. "What can I say?"

"I'll come back," he answered, "no matter what you say."

"Children!" Mrs. Vaughan spoke from the far end of the room, where she was knitting. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. That's just the way you used to talk fifteen years ago."

They both laughed and both felt absurd. There is a fellowship in absurdity.

"Who's coming?" Brooke asked.

"Fred Scott and Helen, from here." Patricia's voice drawled a little on the name "Helen." "And half a dozen people from New York. Ed Winthrop among them."

"Good!"

"And another friend of yours. Mr. Morris."

"Morris? Oh, yes—the architect person. Hasn't he been up here once or twice this Fall?"

"Four times."

"What a head for figures you have! He's the little round man that makes salad dressing, isn't he?"

"He does make salad dressing. But he's a very successful architect. He's coming up to the next paper chase," she added.

"Saturday? That's the last one, isn't it?"

"Yes. Are you riding?"

"I am." If Morris was, he—that was certain. He had not meant to come; the final football game of the year came on the same day, and the boys would expect him to attend it.

About lamp-lighting time, he left Patricia guessing, and walked back towards Chester under the dull November sky. It was cold, and there was a smell of snow in the air—even a flake or two of it, so that the sound of a single horse's hoofs was dully resonant in the roadway, like an echo cut off.

"That you, Scott?" called Brooke, stepping out from the path.

"Yes." The horse stopped. "Who's that? Oh, hello, Brooke. Jump in, and I'll take you up to the school."

"Thanks." Brooke climbed in and tucked the robe about his legs. "Just the man I wanted to see," he said. "Can you mount me on Saturday?"

"Expected to. Saving a horse for you in fact."

"Which one?"

"Pegasus," Scott replied. "I was going to give you Virginia, but Patricia's got a friend coming—Morris, the architect—and she asked me to give him a nice, quiet horse."

"Pegasus," ruminated Brooke, "is a nice, quiet horse, if you understand him."

"Well?" Scott touched the horse lightly with his whip and cocked his head at Brooke.

"I was thinking. Pegasus is Gothic, and Morris is distinctly Romanesque. Round arches, and that sort of thing. The two styles blend beautifully. Did you promise to give Virginia to Morris?"

"No. But you don't want him killed, do you?"

"Not unless it's necessary. Pegasus wouldn't kill him. I want him annoyed."

Scott flicked the horse again, and then laughed.

"Sets the wind in that quarter?" he said. "Well, I'll give him Pegasus. And God defend the right. But I don't see what you're at—exactly."

"You don't have to. You give him Pegasus, and leave the details of the crime to me." They had reached the school; Brooke dropped from the cart.

"Good night," he said.

"See you Saturday," Scott answered, and drove away.

On Saturday, Brooke was almost the last of Scott's guests to arrive. People wondered why he was so abstracted; even Helen Strange found him so, and noticed that he did not say one word about her brother. He was almost rude. He edged his way through the crowd, eating a bite here and a bite there from the loaded tables, and eventually came to anchor beside Patricia and Morris.

"So you did come after all?" said Patricia.

"Yes—after all," Brooke answered. "How do, Morris? Riding today?"

"Until the horse throws me."

"Maybe he won't throw you." Brooke's voice was consolatory, not to say apprehensive and reassuring.

"Oh, he won't throw you," Patricia joined in. "Not if you get on to the saddle, like some people. Isn't that so, Bob?"

"Quite so." He addressed Morris. "Get your right hand wedged between the pommel and the beast's withers. That's what I did before I learned to ride."

Morris fell into the pit which Brooke had dugged for him.

"I'm a little better than that," he said.

"Oh, beg pardon. Then you'll be all right."

He stepped to the table near which they were standing, and cut himself a slice of cold ham.

"'Been building any more houses in this part of the country?" he asked, returning.

"Not since Patricia's house." The remark made an accidental bullseye. Brooke had never heard Morris call Patricia by her first name.

"You were successful with that," he said, recovering quickly.

"Couldn't help being. There was so much to start with. By the way, Patricia, I reproduced that fanlight of yours on Long Island. Hope you don't mind?"

"Not in the least. One can't monopolize beautiful things."

"But one always wants to," Morris rejoined, dripping fatuousness.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Brooke with thorough insincerity.

The talk jarred to a standstill, as he had meant it should. Morris reddened over his eminently proper stock; even Patricia flushed a little—almost blushed. Brooke ate ham.

"Interesting business, architecture," he commented.

"Very." Morris was non-committal.

"Would you mind putting this down for me?" Patricia asked, extending her plate to Brooke.

"Certainly." He relieved her of it, and thrust it into the hands of Morris, whose fingers closed on it involuntarily. Half a second later, he could have thrown the plate across the room and kicked himself after it. He sulked with it over to the table—there was nothing else for him to do—and a swirl of the crowd cut him off.

"Well, of all the—" Patricia was furious.

"Isn't it?" Brooke answered, sweetly and irrelevantly. "There goes the bugle. Come this way." He opened a French window just behind her; she reacted to the suggestion, and found herself on the piazza.

"How could you?" she demanded, facing him.

Something in Brooke's sudden expression—a shadow which she knew not, the wraith of a memory in which she had no part—cut off her words. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing." He shook himself. "The horses are over here." They were half way down the piazza before he said, "You've changed your perfume."

"You noticed it?" She saw a possible opening. "Mr. Morris brought it to me. It's stephanotis. Do you like it?"

"No." Abruptly—rudely, even—he left her to Morris, who just then erupted from the house.

Stephanotis! Alice Harding's perfume—and where were cold roses now? Stephanotis—the heavy scent of it was to him one with the fetor of a town which no sun could make clean, and rendered vivid the spirit of a woman who had died there. And now—Patricia. Would the grimness and the splendor of Espinosa be with him always, he wondered? And suddenly, there came a glamor over his senses, and through the glamor rose a new Patricia.

"Your horse, sir," said someone. He had reached the edge of the driveway.

"Thanks." He took Virginia from the groom, and looked beyond her into the mild eye of Pegasus. "Mr. Morris gets Pegasus," he said. "The gentleman with Miss Vaughan."

"I know, sir. Shall I hold Virginia?"

"No. Find Mr. Morris,"

The man went away, leaving Brooke with Virginia's reins bunched in his hand. A motor near by, roared into action; Virginia threw up her head.

"Quiet, you!" Brooke jerked her mouth, and swung into the saddle. She fought for her head; Brooke suddenly realized that he was holding her on the curb. And Morris was helping Patricia to mount.

The hares were away; Brooke was the last of the field to follow them. Just in front of him, Morris was bouncing about on Pegasus; for a mile or so Brooke dogged his trail, watching him with amusement. He was game—that much was evident. He hung on tooth and nail, but he hung on, and never voiced a whimper. When the field was at fault on the first blind trail, Brooke drew up beside him, and whispered a Satanic suggestion in his ear.

"Slip out of the crowd," he said, "and come with me through that belt of woods. The hares have *got* to go down the woodroad on the other side."

"All right." Morris was only too delighted at the prospect of inducing Pegasus to walk, as he would be forced to do in thick bush. "But is it all right? Quite fair, I mean?"

"All's fair in love and—paper chasing. This way, before anyone sees us."

He led the way into the woods and through them. Half a mile away, they came on a lane where the

paper lay thick. It was the course of the previous week's run, as Brooke was aware; there had been no rain and but little wind, so that the trail was as fresh as ever.

"Here it is!" called Brooke. "This way, Morris!"

It was at this point, or shortly after it, that Morris began to lose track of events. Pegasus thundered rocketing in pursuit of Brooke's pony, through woodland where twigs whipped against Morris's face and blinded him; over low-lying meadows where fences were innumerable; and once across a river by a so-called ford where the water came up to the horses' bellies. It was half an hour before Brooke pulled Virginia down to a trot and then to a walk; finally he stopped altogether and lit a cigarette.

"Must have missed it somewhere," he said. "There's no trail."

"Thank God!" breathed Morris, prayerfully. Some moments later he added, "What'll we do now?"

"Give the beasts a rest and walk them home," Brooke answered. "We're hopelessly behind the field."

"Behind it?" echoed Morris.

"Away from it then. Sorry I misled you."

"Good Lord!"

Morris eased himself against the pommel, slackened his reins, and let Pegasus crop the grass.

Be it understood, there is nothing in all the world

so sleep inducing as a rapid ride through a November wind, followed by a rest taken astride your horse because you are afraid to dismount, and topped off by a six mile jog through the dusk. These things bring the glue to the eyelids of even the lean and the trained; they are morphine and bromide to the lymphatic and the sedentary. Brooke had hoped for nothing more than a temporary eclipse of Morris' considerable powers of making himself entertaining to women, and a consequent clear field to himself. The bounteous fates played into his iniquitous hands and gave him far more than that. About half an hour after they had reached Scott's place, just as Brooke had finished explaining elaborately how he had happened to miss the trail, Scott came into the dining room, where the men were gathered.

"What did you do to Morris?" he asked.

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Brooke.

"Come and see."

The dining room emptied. On a settee in a dark corner of the hall lay Morris, sound asleep and gently snoring. He was on his back, and his mouth was open; he was not a pretty sight. The men were amused—audibly so.

"What are you laughing at?" asked a woman's voice.

It was Patricia; the men opened a lane for her, and the focal end of that lane was Morris.

"Oh—is he hurt?" she asked, taking a step forward.

"Ah—oh—hello!" exclaimed Morris, waking up suddenly and rubbing his eyes. "What's the matter?" Then he saw Patricia, and clambered to his feet, very stiffly for his legs and his back were little more than an ache incarnate. "Why!" he said, and his evil genius punished him with a yawn, "I must have fallen asleep!"

The laugh broke over his head like a wave. Patricia had vanished.

She was very, very angry. She blamed Brooke for making Morris ridiculous, though she was as yet quite ignorant of the extent of his part in the crime. Moreover, the incident, combined with what had happened at luncheon, had subtly affected her feeling for Morris; a woman instinctively favors the under dog, but always with the tacit understanding that he be heroic and not ridiculous. For some months she had been on the verge of taking Morris seriously—almost as seriously as he took himself—and to realize that other people did not take him seriously at all was something of a shock. Perforce, she had to receive the whole weight of it herself, for in Brooke's conduct there had been nothing whatever that she could take hold of, nothing for which she could openly blame him. And it was quite impossible to ask him not to come to her Thanksgiving party. It, short, for the

first time in his life or hers, Brooke had reduced her to the verge of tears.

It might almost be said that she bundled Morris into the motor when it was time to go home. Brooke came to the door to see them off and to tuck in the laprobes. She said good night to him very sweetly indeed, inwardly promising herself ample revenge on him at Thanksgiving.

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CHAPTER XX

HELEN STRANGE, who came in the afternoon of the day before Thanksgiving, was the first of the Vaughans' guests to arrive.

"Real Thanksgiving weather," she said, breezing into the library, where Patricia was sitting alone. "Fine and clear and just cold enough. No one come yet?"

"No one but you." Patricia answered. "Most of the New Yorkers arrive on the four-forty-five. They're due here now." She glanced at the clock.

"Mr. Morris?" Helen queried with wicked intent.

"Yes. He and Major Ward, and a Mr. Winthrop. He was here once before."

"A friend of Bob Brooke's, isn't he? Is Bob coming—as well as Mr. Morris?"

If she had expected a sign from Patricia at the coupling of the two names, she was disappointed. There was not so much as a quiver of an eyelid.

"Yes," Patricia replied evenly. "Bob will be here too. Fred Scott is driving him down." She looked up at Helen. "Have you seen much of Fred this fall?"

Helen, always unprepared for Patricia's quick cross counters, blushed and began to talk very rapidly about nothing at all. A motor rasped to a stop at the door; the arrival of the New York delegation gave her breathing space. They were all glad to be there—Morris especially—and glad to see Patricia—Morris especially. Mrs. Vaughan came downstairs; tea progressed.

Brooke and Scott reached the Vaughans' later, arriving at the children's hour—the interim before dinner when the females have gone upstairs to talk about the males, while the males remain below to talk stocks—or stock, in a farming community. Major Ward came also, and greeted Brooke cordially.

"Haven't seen you since Pinehurst," he said. "But I've been hearing about you. Remember Ensign Edwards?"

"Of the *Hartford*? I'm not likely to forget him. I met him last summer in Puerto Espinosa."

"So he told me. You must have had a tough time of it before the *Hartford* arrived."

"Rather ghastly."

"Horrible business, an epidemic in the tropics. I've seen several. But you did have a doctor?"

"Yes. One of the best."

"Edwards said so. And he spoke very highly of you."

Brooke laughed. "All he did was to put me to bed

in one of the *Hartford's* tents. I left the place soon after I woke up."

"Edwards stayed. The doctor told him about you."

"Dr. Mackintosh? One of the best men in the world."

"So Edwards said."

Morris's voice rose from the other side of the room.

"It's getting late," he said. "I'm going up to dress."

Brooke was relieved, thinking that he had heard the last of Espinosa for the present.

Patricia, desiring as ardently as she had at the last paper chase to put Brooke where he belonged, had placed him near her at dinner. She hoped for an opening; he gave her none, and she was too taken up with the care of her other guests to make one for herself. The meal was a gay one; with the entrance of the salad, however, there came one of those sudden silences when the voice of one person, talking in a natural tone, is thrown into startling prominence.

"Not always," Major Ward was saying to Mrs. Vaughan. "Sometimes it's the most hardened men who lose their heads. Run away even. And vice versa."

"Inexperienced men stand their ground, you mean?" asked Mrs. Vaughan.

"Just that. A case in point—" He paused, realizing for the first time that no one else was talking, and that the whole table was his audience. He was not a Dixieland raconteur, and was therefore chary of monopolizing the conversation.

"Do go on," Patricia urged. "We're all listening."

"On your head be it," responded the Major. "It happened—this particular thing—last summer, in a place called Puerto Espinosa."

"Don't you think," Brooke put in quickly, "that sometimes the inexperienced man would run if he knew enough?"

"Stays out of ignorance of what's coming? That might apply to anything sudden, like taking a battery. Not to disease."

"Bobby, you're a nuisance," Mrs. Vaughan reproved. "Let the Major tell his story."

Brooke gave up; there was no chance of ditching the Major's train. The Major went on, suppressing the more cruel details of the epidemic, but leaving enough of them to start the gooseflesh. Some of the women shuddered; all were interested to the end. They leaned towards the Major across the cloth. Brooke, perspiring gently, hoped that the Major would continue as he had begun and mention no names. But Mrs. Vaughan was too keen on the trail to let that happen.

"And who was the man?" she asked, when the Major had finished. "The one who didn't have to stay?"

"His name was Brooke. Robert Brooke. Yes—the same one."

Two lines of faces veered towards Brooke; he was assaulted with questions. He could do no more than grin sheepishly in answer to them; he had never felt so like a fool in his life. At length, he did succeed in making the statement that he had stayed through the epidemic for the good and sufficient reason that there had been no possible way of getting out of the town. No one believed him; the Major's contention that he could have escaped was more spectacular, more melodramatic, and therefore more popular. The unwritten law which forbids conversation to rest on one subject for more than a very limited time rescued Brooke from the horrors of feminine inquisition, the men, collectively at least, asked him no more about the matter. Not so avid of detail as the women, facts as the Major had given them were enough. Later in the evening, Winthrop spoke again of Brooke's experience.

"So you did run into an adventure after all," he said. "I never thought you would."

"I could have done without that—adventure," Brooke responded grimly.

"I should think so." Most of the guests were

dancing; Winthrop watched them for awhile. "Look at Morris," he chuckled. "But he dances better than he rides. Don't you find schoolteaching rather dull after it?"

"After Morris's dancing?"

"Don't be an ass. After Espinosa."

"Dull?" Morris, dancing with Patricia, was guiding her through a doorway; they disappeared into a room beyond. "Not dull in the least," Brooke went on. "Quite the contrary."

"That's odd," commented Winthrop.

Patricia and Morris swung into sight again, and circled once around the drawing room. Brooke's eyes followed them.

"What did you say?" he asked, presently.

Winthrop grinned covertly at him.

"I said that was odd—that you didn't find teaching dull."

"I suppose," Brooke said, answering with indirection, "that one either acts or reacts after an experience like—Espinosa. It was pretty severe, while it lasted, and I had my fill of it. Now—well, the unessential doesn't get in my way as it used to do. Not quite so much, anyway. The Theory of the Three Pedestrians is exploded. And," he added, as the phonograph rasped on the end of a tune and the couples separated, "there are other things in this country."

"So I see," said Winthrop. But Brooke had gone to ask Patricia for the next dance.

After an hour or so, dancing proved too mature an amusement for the house party, which had progressed rapidly into the innocence of second childhood. The maxixe gave place to games of the kindergarten variety, and Morris, in his element at last, usurped the throne of Miss . . . Some men shine on that bad eminence—al- . . . architects do. Other men can but follow the . . . lead a little sulkily, and when there are in a party two of them who have lived together and played into each other's hands for some years, the post of Lord of the Revels may be anything but an enviable one. Brooke and Winthrop followed Morris's lead for a little while, and Winthrop, who had no interest in the abolition of the architect, would have been peaceable for the entire evening, if Brooke had allowed him to be. But Brooke grew weary, and whispered into the ear of Winthrop; thereafter, all of Morris's games turned into boomerangs. He was the bandaged one in blind man's bluff, and suddenly became aware that he was the only person in the room, though he did not know that Patricia had left it last of all the party. He inaugurated charades, and found himself playing the clown in them, to the subtle hurt of his own prestige. Then Hide and Seek with the lights out appealed to him, and was acclaimed as a brilliant suggestion; he could

not quite understand how it happened that he was allowed to sit alone in a dark and stuffy corner for half an hour or so, and Brooke's explanation that they had found everybody else and forgotten him for a time did not greatly soothe him, though he realized that it was kindly meant. Without reason—and that was the maddening part—he suspected Brooke and Winthrop of being responsible for his discomfiture; he was not altogether reassured when, after the girls had gone to bed, they sat one on each side of him and lured him into telling them tales of the Quarter and the Boulevard St. Michel—or the Quartier and the Boul' Miche as they both insisted on calling these localities. He was glad when the time came to retire.

He would not have been so glad if he could have heard Winthrop's last remark to Brooke before they separated for the night.

"The decks are cleared," said Winthrop. "Go in and win."

It was, however, not until Thanksgiving evening that Brooke had any time alone with Patricia. Immediately after dinner, he finessed Morris into a game of auction in which he himself had refused to take part, cut Patricia out of the herd, and corralled her in a corner of the library. She was not unwilling to come; she had her own idea as to who had instigated the revolution of the night before, and told

herself that a tête-a-tête with Brooke would give her a chance to use the rod which she had so long had in pickle for him.

"So you were more pirate than pedagogue last summer?" she began.

"Pirate?" Brooke was on his guard.

"That's the word, more or less. You seem to have done so much that you didn't tell about that I'm prepared to believe almost anything. Even that you went down with empty pockets and lived on the country."

"You don't have to believe that," said Brooke. "I didn't do it."

"Didn't you?"

"Far from it." His tone was quiet. "You know that."

"Yes," she said. "I knew it. But did Helen Strange?"

"She knows it now. I told her."

"Oh—you told her?" She withdrew her forces, and attacked him at another point. "You've no idea," she said, "how last summer changed you."

"It would be strange," he said, "if it hadn't."

He stopped there. Patricia, remembering certain passages in the Major's story, was for the moment inactive. Even in self defense—and something in Brooke's manner warned her that she was now indeed on the defensive—she could not force herself

to gird at something which must have been admirable.

"The effect of circumstance—all that," Brooke went on. "It alters one, of course. Such a contrast to teaching, and teaching's so good by contrast. But there's nothing to be gained by analyzing results."

His words, and the gravity that underlay them, gave her pause for a moment. This was not the Brooke she had known all her life.

"Other things are better worth talking about," he continued.

"Other things?" she queried, and then, seeing what was coming, could have bitten her tongue off for having given him the opening.

"One other thing at least." He rose and stood in front of her, looking down at her with eyes intent, almost fierce. It was coming—the assault she had schemed to avoid, and she felt weak before it.

"Patricia—" he began.

"Ah! Here you are!" exclaimed Morris, parting the curtains at the doorway. "I've been looking—" Brooke wheeled on him.

"Get out!" he said.

"What?" Morris gaped at him.

"Get out. Go and take a nap. I'm busy."

Morris evaporated—was gone before Patricia could recover her breath, though not before she had risen from her chair.

"By what right," she demanded, with difficulty making her hot rage cold, "do you give my guests orders?"

"Right?" he repeated, stepping towards her. She stood her ground, immovable. "Right? It isn't a question of right."

"What then?"

"This." He was very close to her now. Her old faint aroma of cold roses—the same fresh suggestion of an odor which had been fragrant in his memory on more than one occasion in the past year—was drifting about him. He kissed her. She tore herself out of his arms, and stood with hands trying to clench at her sides. She said nothing.

"I'm not sorry," said Brooke. "There is no other way between us, Patricia."

"Go," she said then. "Go at once."

"I think you will send for me," he said. "There is no other way—no other possible way—between us."

"Why don't you go?"

"I am going."

He paused at the door; Patricia was standing where he had left her, the light of the lamp shining on her dress, her face in the shadow.

"For God's sake," he said, "send for me soon!"

CHAPTER XXI

SOME men, ardent through the period of their courtship, cool alarmingly after they have avowed their love. Others, hardly aware of the fire which is in them until they have given it vent, become lovers for the first time after they have staked their happiness on a woman's answer. With the words "For God's sake, send for me soon," Brooke's self possession had tumbled about his ears; he had become the creature of Kismet, the plaything of his great moment. In the fortnight of silence which followed Thanksgiving, he sometimes hoped; more often he feared, with a fear which dropped him into depths such as he had never plumbed before.

Routine was his life preserver. He wandered from one engagement to another with a mind asleep, assigning his lessons and correcting his exercises, neither knowing nor caring whether his work was good or bad. It was bad, therefore; the boys noticed it, and wondered what was the matter with him. Some of them tried to take advantage of him; they never tried again, nor did they soon forget the merciless

tongue lashing which punished the attempt. They left him alone after that, as his colleagues left him alone. He was not fit for human companionship.

At last, in a mid-morning mail towards the end of the term, the letter for which he had sometimes dared to hope, reached him. It contained but one word, and was signed "Patricia." Brooke at once telephoned for an automobile, stole the first overcoat that came handy, and paced about in a foot of snow till the machine arrived. His haste affected the chauffeur; they slipped and skidded down the drive, leaving behind them four consecutive classes without a teacher. Brooke had had time enough to arrange for them before the motor came; he had forgotten them, as he had forgotten everything except what was waiting for him in Waterville. All the way there, oblivious of the intense cold, he sat on the extreme edge of the seat next to the chauffeur, urging him to greater speed on the level stretches, and audibly hating the brakes when they rasped at grade crossings and curves.

"Can't you get a little more out of her?" he kept asking.

"D'ye want to get to hell or Waterville?" whined the exasperated chauffeur at the twentieth repetition of the demand. "I'm doing the best I can."

"Do more, then," ordered Brooke.

They arrived at last; Brooke was ringing the door-

bell before the machine had come to a standstill. Miss Vaughan was in the library, said the maid; she would announce—

Brooke brushed past her. Patricia had heard his voice in the hall, and was standing just inside the portieres.

“But you *have* changed, Bob,” she said a little later. “You know you have.”

“Let’s thank God for it, then. Does it matter now, one way or the other? Does anything matter?”

She laughed, a thought indulgently. Even now, when he had conquered her, her old attitude toward him prevailed—or else she refused to confess that it did not.

“Bob,” she said, “you’ve tried to be extraordinary all your life. And you’re a perfectly ordinary person after all.”

In that, she did him rather less than justice. Therefore, they lived happily ever after.

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